

LONDON INDEPENDENT PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP IS GROWING



Virginia Khuri and John Holmwood photographed at the Barbican Library by Arch Photographer and raconteur David Malarkey

members to express their individuality rather than to blindly accept given ideas and concepts.

I believe we should all work together and co-ordinate our activities as much as possible in order that our voice is heard by such institutions as the Arts Council and regional funding groups whose funds seem to go to increasingly specific areas of photographic practice.

Not long ago LIP members used to meet at Virginia Khuri's delightful studio, where we all sat around a table hugging our glass of wine, talking about photography and looking at images we had all brought along. Gradually, almost surreptitiously, the numbers have grown, and a few weeks ago I entered a room crammed full - standing room only. This is now unfair to Virginia who has for so long provided such generous and almost limitless hospitality. We now have to find another meeting place and because this place will not be provided free, we have to consider some ways of financing such a move. Your suggestions would be most welcome.

Since the last issue, we have shown our work at the Barbican. I felt very proud that my prints were exhibited amongst so many excellent images. In this open show, much to my surprise, I can actually see a kind of

theme running through it. Perhaps it could be described as a certain leaning towards the poetic.

Our medium has over the last century seen many fine artists producing work of great originality and lasting worth, yet in spite of all that, it is still possible to be surprised and delighted to note that photography is still capable of renewing its appeal to succeeding generations and still creating new, interesting, and memorable images.

It is also encouraging to note the increase in the number of journals and newsletters dealing with photography such as *Inscape* and the *Newsletter of the Contemporary group*, this latter group has some 400 RPS members who are beginning to question some of the myths that have held so much sway in the past. Photographers are being attracted to such groups as Hereford, Oxford, Independent Photography in the South East, and many others who encourage their

CRITICAL THEORY

TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT?

BY

ROGER ESTOP

Eddie Bowman's casual brush-off of conceptual art, the avant garde and critical theory in the last LIP Service is a bad advertisement for independent photography: print quality is not the be-all and end-all of photography. I believe he actually misrepresents himself - his own photography is full of ideas and thought. However, it is clear that he has a problem with the worlds of

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At the recent 'Writing on Photography' symposium at The Photographers' gallery, Eamonn McCabe, Julian Rodriguez and William, Bishop offered insights into the theory and practice of writing on photography. Among the many issues discussed were the complexities inherent in the exhibition reviewer's role. These primarily revolve around the problem of choice: Should the pictures be contextualised, or assessed without relation to wider issues? Is juxtaposition to be drawn attention to? Do the panels display the intention of the photographer? Are the associated texts a reflection of the exhibited work? What structure should be imposed on the writing? (I particularly liked Julian's concept of 'free falling'.)

Much of the discussion is in useful contrast to Roger Scruton's views on Criticism in relationship to principles of aesthetic understanding: Criticism as response, Criticism as decoding, and criticism as Meta - language. It was with these and similar topics in mind that, shortly afterwards, I visited Photofusion Gallery's new exhibition. This show by ten photographers of the Otaku Photographic group (five women and five men) is adapted, innovatively, from the ' Chinese Whispers' parlour game, and bears the same title.

The exhibition comprises four separate sets of photographs. Each set or series begins with an image created by one Otaku member. The photograph is passed in confidence to a second photographer who creates an image in response to the perceived message of the first. The procedure is repeated until all ten participants in this conceptual 'game' have contributed to the sequence.

The process has been repeated four times - a fresh image beginning each sequence - resulting in forty final images in the show.

ries were not seen by the collaborating photographers until the day of the Private View.

The powerful level of interaction imposed by this chosen structure result in pictures that have a certain resonance.

The exhibition unusually explores not only the interrelationships of pictures but that of the photographers themselves. It is the first photographer in each series who bears the responsibility for setting the tone of the ensuing sequence by creating an

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image open enough to provoke an intellectual or visceral response from the succeeding photographer.

The viewer is also hooked into the psychology of this progression of ideas. The sequences begin, but do not then construct the expected normal narrative. There is no easy way through for the viewers, who must then through their own experience and understanding invest the given text, (or in some cases the silent connections), with additional meaning suggested by the visual discontinuities. It is the discontinuities themselves that suggest a different form of narrative.

Although the photographs in series cannot be viewed with a story line, the sequences travel forward on

shifting perceptions, and it is the existence of the little stated but assumed connections that holds the viewer.

This 'connective tissue' of inter relationships offers confrontation and challenge, and the occasional touch of humour.

However, this is not to say that the individual photographs cannot be looked at and enjoyed as separate entities, for the images themselves carry visual and emotional overtones and reflect diverse skills of the Otaku photographers in fields of portraiture, fashion, architecture, reportage, and still life.

Another approach to this exhibition would be to consider each series as a unified montage, perhaps in the nature of Eisenstein's "montage of attractions", in which what precedes each image should attract what follows it, and vice versa. The exhibition opens up discourse on so many levels, and it would be a pleasure to comment on strengths and weaknesses of this unusually cohesive show, but an analysis of each of the ten photographers' work would divert attention from the major element in the exhibition's strength, which is its intent. However, on a subjective level, I was much drawn to the ideas of Antonio Mattesini, J. Oppong-Wiafe, and Carey Young. (One is reminded here of Szarkowski, who said, 'Some photographs are better than others for reasons which we do not understand.')

A concerned photographer visiting this show rapidly sheds the role of observer and becomes involved through empathy and imaginative attention with the decoding of other photographers' images.

The participating photographers are: Susana Fernandes, Richard Glover, Niall O'Leary, Antonio Mattesini, Tom Moran, Jonathan Oppong-Wiafe, Margherita Scassa, Jenni Thompson, Emma Waters and Carey Young.

M.P.P.



Extracts

Peter Conrad. "Where I fell To Earth" Chatto & Windus.

' On my walls in Oxford I have a collection of photographs of New York. They are a double contradiction - of Oxford certainly, but also of New York itself. They confound the local atmosphere of church bells, wan sunlight, footsteps on flagstones, and wheezing organ pipes heard through closed doors; instead they show gutters choked with garbage, streets roofed over by the shaky trellis of the El tracks, tenements ablaze. The photographs are my small acts of dissociation. Their ugliness is alluring, simply because it is somewhere else.

Yet they are just as removed from the substance of New York as they are from Oxford. They are images summonsed from the air. The Empire State building shimmers into view along my wall like an exhalation. First it is an idea in the mind of Lewis Hine's steel workers, who cling to girders a quarter of a mile above the streets and seem to be unfolding the structure from the clouds rather than founding it on the bedrock. Next, now complete, Man Ray sees it glistening in the narrow darkness of Fifth Avenue. For him it is not a building either but a ready made, a found object, a specimen of useless beauty. Beside this, Andre Kertesz turns the Empire State upside down, plunges it into a puddle, and drives the mark of a car tyre through the reflection. Then Harry Callahan - introducing colour into this lunar city of silver- lines up the bluish shaft of the Empire State, a cream wedge of apartment building, a tumulus of brown brick and the side of an old lodging house painted fire engine red: the skyscraper now shares the neutral sky with its incongruous neighbours in the bland, permissive visual democracy of Pop.

By changing the building, the photographers make their own. They treat it as lovingly and disrespectfully as a toy. To go up the Empire State itself is to appreciate the plucky conceit of this. From on top, the city dwindles to a graveyard of slabs, the citizens to a

flurry of transitory dust. What audacity for one of those particles down there to set itself into competition with the pinnacle of steel; to look up at it and, rather than feeling terrified or merely exhausted, to translate it from object to subject - to remake it as a facsimile of itself.

By changing the building, the photographers make their own. They treat it as lovingly and disrespectfully as a toy.

I even found my own building in one of these photographs, and was amazed at my sense of gratification. The building had had its name in the paper when a crime was committed once on the premises, and had featured as well on the late - night television news when a gas explosion across the street caused us all to be evacuated. But these incidents did not validate the building. On the contrary they suggested its flimsiness. Why was I so elated and comforted to find that it had sneaked into the background of a photograph by Gary Winogrand? The photographer himself had surely not even noticed it. He was compulsively snap happy, and if he had lived long enough would have photographed every corner of the city, country, world. But what interested him in this case was a girl on a bicycle, with free range breasts and fluid hair, glowing in the sun as she pedalled downtown, a sprite rejoicing in the hedonistic city of the 1960's. No caption identified the setting, but when I peered at the grainy murk out of which she was riding I recognised the intersection of Christopher and Hudson Streets: on one side a shoddy deli, on the other a shop exhibiting swishily ornate antique furniture. And there, so far back in the network of dots on the paper that it registered only as a shadowy

lump not even honed into form, was what must be the place where I would one day live.

Currently, if I want to persuade myself that the building exists when I am not there, I don't ring the telephone number from England and listen to the non- committal tone at the other end; instead I look at the photograph. And yet all it will attest to is that the building once was there, at the instant two decades ago when Winogrand's camera eye, attracted by something else, briefly opened. Do I want to be reassured that things are real, or to confer unreality on them? Before the world can be lived in, it must be described. But no one can inhabit a description.

This extract from a book was submitted by Roger Estop. If you have an extract from a book you have enjoyed reading, please send it in and share it with our members.

Another Note about Theory.

Many of the French philosophers who wrote about photography were marxist. They believed "Clarity" to be a bourgeois concept, oppressive and patronising. They also held that it was not possible to understand the intentions of the author when a work was produced and therefore all meaning must be gleaned from within the author's text itself. (Photographs are also texts). They also held the written word to be less direct and therefore less clear than the author's spoken word. As a consequence our French philosophers wrote their own essays, not to make the subject they were writing about clear, but rather to give the reader a 'sense' of the work, and then allow the reader to bring his or her own personal meanings to the text - a kind of prose poetry which must have been immensely satisfying for the philosophers, but landing the reader with problems. - Ed.

Time for a change?

by Peter Marshall.

For reasons probably of convenience I was some time ago co-opted onto the LIP committee. Most of us on it have been around in LIP since it started. We all know and appreciate the hard work that some - notably Janet and Ginny - have put in over the years, and I mean it as no criticism when I say that it may be time for a change. Only about one tenth of the membership attended the recent AGM and there were no nominations or volunteers for the committee (most of those present were on it previously). New ideas were notable by their absence. Surely some of the other 100 plus members have ideas about what LIP should be doing? I for one will quite happily step down if anyone volunteers to take my place!

Monthly meetings

One problem we have discussed at length at committee and AGM is the numbers attending monthly evening meetings are too great to fit in our current location. What worries me more is that the nature of the events have changed from a place where one could bring current work, especially work in progress, and expect serious and constructive comment, to pleasant social occasions. They are more and more just another camera club.

If more people want to come to a meeting the solution is simply a larger room - but if we want to get back to the kind of meetings we used to have we need a different solution. We could, for example, schedule two meetings each month and ask members to choose to attend only one (holding both in different places on the same night could ensure this). The two might differ on the type of work they dealt with, or simply by location - for example we might have enough members for a North London meeting and perhaps one with a house large enough for 10 people to meet. (Or south of the river if that exists?) If these meetings began to get too large

we could have yet more.

We would of course still see work from everyone at BluTaks - except that if we really got a whole number of groups like this going there would soon get to be too much work for BluTaks.

Why write?

Edward Weston has a lot to answer for. Having read his Daybooks (you have, haven't you? - if not go out and do so at once!) every budding photographer starts his or her own journal. I once kept one for several years - the normal scurrilous comments on every matter photographic which entered my sights. It has some good points; it stops you brooding to get it down on paper, often you actually start to realise some of your own contradictions and sloppiness. And it does tend to help you to sort out your own priorities.

I've even earned a little from it (possibly enough to pay for the type-write ribbon). Most of it is now done strictly for fun, or as an offshoot of my teaching activities (for example the article I hope you all read in Inscape about Umbrellas came directly from discussing two of the pictures involved with students and trying to explain to them what I thought the work was about.)

If you can talk; you can write. It's not some special skill (writing well is, but I wouldn't know.) It will help your thinking about photography - which will help your photography. If you don't know what to write about, try to review a show you have seen. There is little point in simply saying you don't (or even do) like it. Try to understand what the photographer(s) involved was trying to do: if you can't understand or see anything in it, the best response is probably silence - write about something else! If you think you understand; try to explain it as simply as you can. Criticism needn't always

be appreciative, but it should attempt to be positive and constructive (or at least funny). Most negative comments simply parade the ignorance of the critic.

Some people find it useful to talk into a tape recorder; I use a word processor, scattering my thoughts onto the page, then go back and edit and move them around and fill in the gaps until they almost make sense. It would be great to see an article from you (rather than me!) in the next LIPservice.

The Photographic Process

This has very little to do with sloshing chemicals around in trays. Using cameras is only a small part of it. Most of it is concerned with researching the subject, with deciding what you are trying to do, with putting this in its context (including critical and historical studies), with evaluating your work.

Obviously craft skills are important (if nothing else they save money - getting good prints made costs!) but not essential. There have been plenty of great photographers who have never mastered them. Equally, there are plenty of would-be photographers who have all the craft skills but have never quite managed to make a picture that was worth a second glance.

Of course there are plenty of people who are deficient in both aspects. They judge camera club competitions!

There are two groups operating and co-operating in the London area to produce interesting and varied programmes and workshops, namely The Contemporary Group and LIP. I cannot think of any two people who have contributed more to the success of these organizations than Janet Hall and Virginia Khuri. If they were to step down, I believe both these organizations would fold within 24 hrs. Ed



BY THE WAY,

Some members of LIP are also members of the Royal Photographic Society which is about to have elections for Officers of the Society and members of Council.

please use your vote.

Looking at magazines

by Peter Marshall.

Why do we need photographic magazines? They keep us informed of what is going on in the world of photography - current trends, current shows, new books, new products; they explore and question our own photographic practices and those of others. They entertain and provoke. A far wider range of work gets published in magazines than in books - a magazine editor can afford to take risks, while the book publisher is normally bound to the safe and saleable.

Surprisingly few publications aim at the serious photographer - look in the Photography section at WH Smiths and you will be lucky to find anything. Of course even hobbyist publications like AP and Practical Photography occasionally stray into something of interest: April's PP had a surprisingly good and well-illustrated interview with Martin Parr. To see a wider range, browse the magazine stands at the Photographers Gallery and/or Zwemmers. These include a number of foreign titles, but these are generally either in English or bi-lingual, so don't let a lack of languages put you off.

Starting in the UK we of course have the weekly **BRITISH JOURNAL** - eclectic to excess, but still essential reading for any photographer in this country (read it in a library if you can't offset the £50 a year against tax). This week's issue (April 7) stars a page by LIP's Sam Tanner in St Helier Hospital; Peter Hamilton gets Willy Ronis to talk through a contact sheet from 1959 Paris; a short article reminds us of the continuing utility of the classic Mamiya C330; three pages look at the Spanish shows currently at the Photog-

raphers' Gallery and Special Photographers' Company. There is a double page about publishing activities by Dewi Lewis, David Tack and Eddie Ephraums, and Geoffrey Crawley discusses Agfa's Multi-contrast Classic. A typical if richer than usual mix, with all the usual news and listings.

CREATIVE CAMERA - now perhaps in its dotage - has a UK circulation in the hundreds. Since I cannot imagine anyone with a serious interest in photography in this country not being a subscriber (except for the considerable number of photographers on social security) this perhaps reflects the level of serious interest in photography in this country! Often infuriating, it remains the best we have. The latest issue gives news about the sale of part of the Raymond Moore archive, various other events and appointments, and listings for the UK and erratically selected galleries world-wide. The bulk of the magazine is an illustrated interview with Sunil Gupta on 'A New Internationalism' and four portfolios by artists who all reuse images in some way, either through a physical representation, or by combining them with their own work or as a basis for producing new photographs. (Joachim Schmid, Verdi Yhooda, Sheila Lawson, and SR.) The magazine ends with short notes on some current books, an article on Brazilian photographer Mario Cravo Neto, and six extensive exhibition reviews. 50 pages with copious black and white and some colour illustration for £4. Usually about half of it

is worth reading and reading carefully.

INSCAPE is a relative newcomer and a bargain at £10 for 5 issues. I have an interest to declare as Bill Bishop's print room assistant and occasional contributor. Its densely packed A5 sides are almost always full of interest. No photographer should miss a copy at this price! (Inscape, 22a Gladwell Rd, London N8 9AA).

REPORTAGE is a newish title in an awkward larger than A4 format - only really suitable for a throwaway as it won't fit in any shelf. Obviously it features photo-journalism, of which there is plenty of good stuff around with nowhere much to go. So far I'm disappointed; too few pictures with too many printed too large. Reportage also shows - by its absence - the synergy good text creates in the best of the genre. Too many of the pictures here are wrenched from their history.

Other UK titles have included **PORTFOLIO** from Scotland (I've not seen it for a while but it seemed to be curiously reluctant to publish pictures), **TEN-8**, last seen around 18 months ago (It specialised in turgid Burginspeak, but it was often worth the effort of rewriting the articles into English!) and various small circulation sheets published by galleries and associations for their members - such as **LIPSERVICE**. Lip Service had an excellent editor for some years in Roger Estop, and I hope will thrive under its current ed Ed. It is one of the most important thing that LIP has done - and it enhances the status of the group and we should all be fighting to get their work in it and distributing it as widely as possible



APERTURE is the premier photographic magazine - founded by Minor White and others way back and still going strong. Many individual quarterly issues are also sold as books. It is possibly the most approachable of all the major photographic magazines, and is produced to an extremely high standard. This doesn't come cheap - but subscribing cuts costs considerably (no problems with credit cards). The volume on my desk has articles about Annie Leibowitz, Lorna Simpson, Susan Meiselas, Cindy Sherman, Adam Fuss, Joel-Peter Witkin and John Goodman, and photographer Danny Lyon reviews 'Unreasonable Behaviour' and interviews Don McCullin. Almost every issue is packed with excellent photographs and clear writing.

PERSPEKTIEF from Rotterdam is having problems as the foundation which produced it has been dissolved as a consequence of the creation of a Netherlands Institute of Photography. It is attempting to continue, and as the most consistently interesting and readable of the European magazines it would be a shame to lose it. The latest issue I have contains a closely argued discussion of the status of Cindy Sherman's work, a well illustrated article on Russian photographer Boris Michailov (including 8 panoramics), another on the portraits of Romy Finke, and three further features on photographers and projects. Books and selected exhibitions are seriously reviewed, and the writing is almost always excellent and clear.

EUROPEAN PHOTOGRAPHY, published quarterly in Germany, is 'the international magazine for contemporary photography and new media'. Regular contributors include A D Coleman, my favourite photography critic. The Winter 1993 issue included a short portfolio by Frederick Sommer, a rather dull work 're-animating' 'rather pedestrian, even ordinary' pictures taken during enforced military

exercises in Russian occupied East Europe in the '50's, and a curiously powerful portfolio by Noritoshi Hirakawa who persuaded women he met in Tokyo to crouch in the streets facing the camera with 'a pure and honest look'. Suddenly the viewer realises that they are clearly not wearing knickers. (Incidentally the first occasion I have ever had to use that word in an article), and as it says, 'The situation changes abruptly'. Other features and the usual news and reviews make a lively and varied publication, including a charming picture of LIP show selector from last year, Mari Mahr, taken in 1946! At £9 a single copy it is not cheap - a subscription at 48 DM (I use GIRO) is more reasonable.

Other titles of interest - which space stops me from looking at include **CAMERA AUSTRIA**, **AFTERIMAGE** (US), **CONTRETYPE** (Belgium),
Peter Marshall 4/94

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

As a subscriber to several photography publications, I have noticed the growing volume of hostile criticism in letters and articles which are dismissive of movements and styles AND individual photographers' works within the field of photography, written by those who are convinced that their outlook defines what is best and acceptable in the field.

In the hope that LIP Newsletter is not going to follow suit, I write to disagree with Edward Bowman's contention that 'rip roaring difference of opinion' makes for an exciting Journal.

Though not working in the conceptual or political areas so sweepingly dismissed in the February newsletter, my reaction is that such comment possesses neither entertainment nor enlightenment.

I believe that an exchange of ideas between photographers is vital, but I am concerned by the manner in which it is increasingly taking place. My reaction is that Editors should exert substantial control over the tone though not the content of what is published, if only to prevent the loss of member-subscribers! Discourse does not take the place within an

atmosphere of condemnation and diatribe, and writings in this manner make for distressing and poor quality reading. (And in this vein of arrogance also have ugly associations throughout history.)

As E.B. invites comment and even disagreement, might I say that the dismissive labelling and deriding of areas of photographic practice 'not approved of' is counter-productive in ANY publication. Being neither fair nor informed appraisal, it may result in the silencing of members who already feel uncomfortable within LIP and who are unlikely to articulate the feelings and origins behind their own photographic vision, if fearing a response of ridicule or contempt. Sustained dictatorial comment in the future would only result in the alienation of existing and potential members.

I am sure ALL LIP members have a seriousness of purpose behind their image making and would prefer reactions of sympathetic interest and enquiry (or, at least, the absence of hostility).

In the LIP Service pages, might debate without tension or venom not be preferable, as both are extremely depleting to the unfortunate captive reader.

As a teacher of photography, I find the work of ALL photographers deepens my perception, including works and approaches I have less direct response to. In the teaching of the history of photography it is a constant struggle to bear witness to ALL forms of photography, in the face of a strange loathing that the majority of adult students have towards all forms of visual expression they do not 'like' or culturally 'understand'. The immense power of the image has, on occasions, had those around me reaching for their guns!

In photography, as in all forms of art, one man's 'rubbish' is another man's daily breath. Please let us breathe freely when the Newsletter hits our doorstep!

MOYRA PATERSON PERALTA



OUT AND ABOUT WITH JOHN BENTON-HARRIS.

A report of a workshop by

LEN SALEM

The first Sunday in May. Brilliant sunshine. Just under twenty photographic enthusiasts enticed into spending part of their Bank Holiday weekend at an unusual workshop organised by London Independent Photography, the RPS Contemporary group and The Photographers' Gallery at the Gallery's premises near Leicester Square. Those attending were a cross section of all three groups united in a common interest. We wanted to learn more about what is called "street photography". We were to listen to John Benton-Harris, a long time and successful practitioner of the difficult art of photographing people "out and about" and then, in his company or by ourselves, take our cameras to the surrounding streets and parks, shoot one or two rolls of film, have them one-hour processed at a nearby chemist and then take them back to The Photographers' gallery for his scrutiny and pertinent comments. This surely was a rapid results workshop which I for one had never previously experienced and which all present agreed was really challenging.

Here are some of John Benton-Harris's aphorisms which I thought worth recording:

- The edges are as vital to the image as the centre
- Take photographs that express an opinion about what you are photographing
- Use photography to tell people about people
- Good photographers never felt that they have arrived - they are always setting out.
- Photojournalism is pictures that

speak, not words with picture.

How, we asked, did John deal with all the inherent difficulties in confronting people with a camera? Lots of ways, was the answer. Be quick, get in close, take your photo and move on before the subject really has time to react. Or mingle. Dress to blend. Talk to your subject as a simple, interested bystander who just happens to have a camera and then "Hey, that's really interesting, do you mind if I take a photo? Well sure, just go ahead". Be confident. Learn non threatening body language. Don't behave as if you are ashamed of what you are doing or people will assume you have no right to be doing it.

And how did we get on? Well as always, listening is easier than doing and most of us were disappointed at the results of our efforts that day. But John was encouraging. Don't expect too much too soon, he said. Work at it. Find something to photograph that you care about and let that care show.

Finally, the day came to an end. Not enough time to talk enough, not enough time to see through enough of John's outstanding work, but enough time to get tired enough to want to go home. As John said, quoting Robert Frank, "If a photographer wants to be an artist, his thoughts cannot be developed overnight at a corner drug store"

Len Salem.

LIP ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Reported by the Secretary

Virginia Khuri

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

6.30 p.m., April 7th 1994 at The Drill Hall Chenies Street WC1.

1. Committee members: Janet Hall Chair; Len Salem, Treasurer; Virginia Khuri, Secretary; Yoke Matze, Exhibitions; Edward Bowman, Newsletter; David Malarkey, Peter Marshall and Roger Estop, ideas: Moyra Peralta will volunteer her services next year.

2. Len Salem presented the financial statement for 1993. It was decided to raise the subscription rate by £2 to £12 and £7 concessions.

3. Discussion of events held in conjunction with The Photographers' gallery. Benefits explained, but it was felt that given the success of the programmes, the Photographers Gallery should share in the administration costs if not the profits. Also the publicity... LIP must always be credited for its programmes.

4. Venues for meetings and exhibitions: We seem to have outgrown the current space for monthly meetings. Alternatives suggested were: Hampstead Parish Church (deemed too far), the Royal College of Music on Marylebone Road (Michael Goldhill will check cost and availability), NOTE: since then Nicky Akenhurst has offered space for monthly meetings at the Akenhurst Gallery Notting Hill. We will try in out in June. As for exhibitions: The Barbican Library has been reserved for the Spring of 1996. Bill Bishop reported that the Swiss Cottage Library has space for the month of May 1995 at £110 per week. Janet will reserve it if it seems that enough people are prepared to pay for exhibitions there. It was suggested an entrance fee of £5 -£10 per portfolio of up to ten prints or per "work" and then a hanging fee of something between £2 and £5 per selected print. If sponsorship can be found, the fees will be lower. A



questionnaire will be sent out to all members to assess interest.

5. Exhibitions: It was suggested that shows be alternated each year; one year a broad more encompassing show having as many members as possible, the next year fewer participants, but more pictures per person. It should be stipulated that the work must have been completed within the last 3 years. Suggested selectors: Eamon McCabe, Mark Haworth - Booth, Michael Collins. Suggested titles: Instances in Time, Time observed, Vertical Readings(a la Roland Barthes). Passages in Time (old tunnels? Ed) Personal Visions.

6. Newsletter: May 1st Deadline. Some discussion of the format of the Newsletter - a proper magazine or a newsheet will depend on the amount of material accumulated. Suggested that Edward ask readers why they don't attend events. Articles should be about MEMBER activities... Consensus to keep LIPservice as it is for this issue - as for finances, be flexible in format (perhaps a simple newsheet in November... ask for new members opinions and suggestions. Meeting adjourned at 8.40. p.m.

BLACKPOOL AND THE FYDE COLLEGE

FIRST TOURING EXHIBITION at

'The Gallery

74 South Audley Street London

W.1. 27th June - 1st July 1994.

B.A. Students show work of depth and visual maturity, displaying the individuality of each photographer.

DON'T FORGET. SUNDAY JUNE 12TH.

WHO CONTROLS PHOTOGRAPHY WITHIN THE ARTS?

Speakers: Paul Hill, Stevie Bezencet and Richard Ehrlich discuss this problem.

To book, Phone Photographers' Gallery on:

071-831-1772 NOW

CRITICAL THEORY TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT?

BY

ROGER ESTOP

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE.

fine art and cultural academia which he, and many others, feel are claiming photography for their own arcane agenda.

It is too late to rubbish all these new - fangled ideas and practices; French philosophy is practically mainstream. Barthe's Mythologies was first published in 1958, issues of representation of marginalised groups originated in the late 1960's: use of photography by artists was pioneered by Rauschenberg, Hamilton and Whorhol. Cultural theory is affecting all fields of the arts and humanities, not just photography.

If you are a photographer, here are two perfectly reasonable ways of dealing with critical theory:

take it seriously or ignore it.

Ignoring is safest, theory never produced good art, critics don't make good photographers. Critical theory does not dictate practice, it describes and explains work produced in a particular cultural context. If we are thoughtful about our work and slightly aware of the wider world, the work will address aesthetic and cultural issues on our own terms. Work comes first, criticism comes second. On the other hand, critical theory can offer useful insights into our work. It is helpful in understanding historic and contemporary influences; the philosophies it derives from offer views of the world which can sharpen our awareness and sensibilities. Most importantly, theory allows us to compare our intentions as image makers with the viewers understanding of the image. People who look at photographs tend to be informed, media literate, critical people and everyone has his or her personal experience against which they interpret an image.

Whether we like it or not, a photograph is no longer reliable as a representation of a subject, and it is not even a reliable representation of your own creativity, or authorship. Theory offers explanations for this if we want it. Whether we realise it or not, cultural conditions influence the way we look at photographs. For example, critical doubt about objec-

tivity has led to photography which is minimal, neutral, anti - composed. Awareness of the limits and fallibility of photography have led to works which refers to its own production, which is ironic, self destructive or throw - away. Insecurity over the meaning of picture content has led to a concern with craft - old processes, hand made material, elaborate framing - all to maintain a sense of rootedness. The criticism of documentary photography and its problems of representation has led to mis - represented groups documenting their own specific experience for a specific audience. The essential subjectivity of the photographer has led to photographers using photographic images as expressions of their personal or spiritual life which transforms the real - worldliness of the image.

Discontent with photography providing a complete view of a subject has led to work which deliberately produces a partial, incomplete, provisional view. And so on....

These trends are all consequences of problems encountered through an understanding of the world and art as we know them now. But the important thing is that the approaches mentioned above are all, first and foremost, to do with photography. Critical theory has influenced photographic practice, but has not damaged it and has taken nothing away from the fundamental possibilities, paradoxes and power of the photographic image, nor the wondrous qualities of a fine print.

The real problem with critical theory is that, as lay people, it is difficult to obtain good, clear explanations of basic concepts such as text, sign, the other, the author, deconstruction etc. We are hindered by bad writers and pretentiousness. Theory doesn't offer a formula for producing work, but can enlighten us and help us understand our work. Photography does not serve theory, theory can serve us. Photography remains as interesting, challenging, surprising and adaptable as ever, it can handle critical theory. Don't worry about it. R.E.