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A COMPARISON OF APPROACHES TO DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY OF 1930S AMERICA AND CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICA.

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Fine Arts.

Johannesburg 1992

DECLARATION

This dissertation is the unaided work of the candidate. No part of this dissertation has been or is to be submitted for a degree in any other university.

Sally Gaule

SALLY ANN GAULE

Johannesburg 1992

DEDICATION

To all the people who permitted me to photograph them, and for making me feel possible. I thank you.

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I wish to acknowledge the guidance and advice received from my supervisor, Mr Willem Strydom, both before and throughout the period of this research.

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ABSTRACT.

The research for this degree comprises a theoretical dissertation and a practical component of photographs. The theoretical research investigates the practice of documentary photography in America and South Africa. The photographs of Walker Evans, Robert Frank, David Goldblatt and Bob Gosani are examined against the background of two organisations, the Farm Security Administration and Drum. These organisations influenced the documentary genre in their respective countries because of their socio-political concerns: their choice and presentation of subject matter for publication influenced both the photographer and the viewer.

Documentary photographs appear, because of their seemingly candid and unmediated nature, to present historically factual images. Examples from the work of the four photographers reveal their distinction from, and continuity with the confines of the documentary genre. Their respective approaches reveal the role of perception as it manifests itself in their work. Subjugation, attitudes towards subject matter, and the pictorial construction of images are analysed in relation to each photographer's work.

The relationship of image and text in documentary photography is seen as an element of intervention by the photographer.

The selection of these photographers was motivated for their pertinence to the subject matter and to the pictorial considerations of the candidate. These issues are therefore examined in relation to the candidate's approach to photography.

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INTRODUCTION.

This research attempts to reveal the role of perception as it manifests itself in the work of selected photographers. The work of four photographers is considered in the study. The photographers are: Walker Evans, Robert Frank, David Goldblatt and Bob Gosani.

The work of these photographers is considered to be part of the documentary genre because of the subject matter selected, their concentration on the socio-economic concerns of certain groups and their existence as an historical record. However, all four photographers insist on their independence from the genre. Absolute objectivity cannot exist; as the personal perception, attitude and style of each photographer plays an important part in the mediation of the photograph.

The historical circumstances of 1930s America and the government organisation the Farm Security Administration, henceforth referred to as the FSA, was a most important factor giving major impetus to the documentary genre. The photography of Walker Evans and Robert Frank has to be considered against this background.

Photographers were employed by the FSA to create a comprehensive and objective record of the Depression years. Its aims and objectives were to document the reform processes, instituted by government legislation, to alleviate the effects of the Depression. The influence exerted by the FSA must be examined in order to establish the precedent it created in determining the approaches adopted by these photographers. A parallel is then drawn between the FSA and Drum magazine, indicating certain contextualising features of the documentary genre in America and South Africa.

It is acknowledged that the social documentary movement of the 1930s held to a national purpose, whereas Drum magazine's images were limited by editorial

policy. Despite differing motivations, each significantly altered the perception of Americanness and Africanness in each country. In America the FSA served to identify American themes and values. In South Africa, Drum created a forum for black writing and aspirations serving to undermine the sense of inferiority experienced by generations of black people.

The independence of Robert Frank and David Goldblatt to such organisations is considered a determining factor in their work, and displaces common perceptions of what constitutes documentary photography. Their autonomy is demonstrated by a more critical attitude in the construction of images and the selection of subject matter.

The photographers were selected because their approach to documentary photography is linked to the FSA, and because the comment they inflect in their images reveals differing attitudes towards their subject matter, serving to indicate the diversity of what constitutes documentary photography. In addition, their prominence as exponents of the documentary genre, and subsequently their pertinence to the considerations dominating the photographs by the candidate, which forms the practical component of this submission, also determined the rationale for their selection in this dissertation.

The argument is based on the way in which each photographer utilizes a specific approach in the construction of their images, in order to make explicit comment in the construction of their photographs. To substantiate this, equal currency is give to that which the photograph represents, and to the pictorial conditions essential to the organisation or formation of the image, through which the photographer's perceptions and intentions are communicated.

Chapter 1 comprises some observations about subjugation and the perception of the viewer, indicating how this may be mediated in the approach adopted by the photographer. The role of culture as a constituent determining the perception and reception of images is discussed. The influence of the FSA; its aims and

objectives are discussed in order to establish a framework for analyses in the work of the photographers selected.

In order to enlarge on the discussion initiated in chapter 1, specific examples of the work of Walker Evans and Robert Frank are examined in chapter 2. In this examination the approaches adopted by them are related to the objectives established by the FSA, indicating its pertinence as a model which they reacted against.

Chapter 3 comprises an analysis of the work of David Goldblatt and Bob Gosani. The context of America during the 1930s and contemporary South Africa are compared in the aims and objectives of the FSA and Drum magazine.

In chapter 4 an analysis of the candidate's approach to photography is examined. Discussion of the role of space, lighting, position of the camera, composition and the isolation of only certain aspects of the environments selected, forms a part of such analyses. As indicated in the third paragraph, the work of Walker Evans, Robert Frank, David Goldblatt and Bob Gosani was selected for its relevance to the candidate's work.

In chapter 5 the visual and verbal relationships between image and text are examined with particular reference to the publications in which these photographers' work occur. The effect of titles and the role of text as a means of disseminating information is examined. The function of text was included in order to provide a more comprehensive discussion of the reception of documentary images.

CHAPTER 1
SUBJUGATION

The term subjugation[1] as applied in discourse on photography describes the relationship of the photographer with the viewer. It implies that the photographer presents an image of the subject in such a way as to direct the perception of the viewer in accordance with their view of the subject. This is a formative factor in guiding the viewer's perception of the image. In this chapter the conventions which determine both the photographer's intentions and the audience's perceptions, are discussed. How photographs are attributed with certain meanings in certain cultures is examined, the premise being that culture is an inseparable constituent of communication. Thereafter the historical framework in which Walker Evans worked is examined, and the role of the FSA, as an important catalyst to the documentary genre is discussed.

Meaning attributable to photographs lies not only in what they portray, but in how the construction of the image determines that meaning for the spectator. It is a familiarity with the norms of a particular society at a particular time which determines the legibility of photographs. Elements such as pose, hairstyles, clothing, possessions, jewellery, and also built structures, such as houses, all provide information and meaning about the image of a person, their social standing, and their culture.[2] Thus the subject matter of the photograph is perceived by the viewer as having specific meaning. In order to communicate with the audience, common elements must be found; the photographer, therefore,

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[1]Defined in the Shorter Oxford Dictionary as the condition of reduction to a state of subservience or submission. As this is a linguistic model, it is applied to discourse on photography in this dissertation, as identifying conventions of power/knowledge and the cultural beliefs which determine both the photographer's intentions and the audience's perceptions. The term is used by writers on photography such as Estelle Jussim and William Stott to this purpose. David Featherstone. (ed.) Observations, Essays on Documentary Photography, (California: The Friends of Photography, 1984), p.104, and William Stott. Documentary Expression and Thirties America, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p.40.

[2]Culture in this context is not meant to refer to the degree of refinement of an individual by education and training, but rather to the values and habits attributed to certain groups of people within a social context. An example is the figure of the Virgin Mary in many Catholic homes which testifies to religious beliefs, rather than class, or wealth.

uses certain cues which are shared with the viewer. Culture, Webster states, provides that link.[3]

It must be noted that meaning in photography is contingent on the audience's comprehension the signs and symbols of the medium. To communicate effectively, the photographer must be aware of the signs and cultural cues which the society, at whom the images are directed, take for granted, as modes of communication. The photographer must, in order to function effectively, be aware of these and even how and why a culture has come to adopt these ways of seeing, though the audience may be unconscious of them.

Communication, therefore, is dependent on a relationship between the photographer and viewer.[4] By initiating the communication, the photographer is deciding the terms of the decoding process, (except in the case of radically separate cultures where there would be no communication since the cues would be ineffectual), and if the photographer is aware of his audience's culture, he will be aware of injecting his images with signs which his audience will find easy to interpret. Thus the photographer, in attempting to communicate, cannot absolve himself from that participation by claiming that his audience sees just what they like. The photographer's shaping of the image is crucial to that reading, creating an image whose rhetoric allows it to communicate.[5]

The reception of certain photographs precipitates assumptions by the spectator. Roland Barthes asserts that, 'objects no longer perhaps possess a power, but they certainly possess meanings'.[6] What must be acknowledged is that the

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[3]Frank Webster is the author of The New Photography: Responsibility in Visual Communication, (New York: Riverrun Press, 1980).

[4]Webster, pp.46-47.

[5]'Photographs send messages from an addresser to a viewer. This transmission is made possible by using signs recognisable to that audience'. 'As symbols, as social constructions of reality, they are not reflected upon. A pin-striped suit and overalls are signs of relative status'. Webster, pp.46-47.

[6]Roland Barthes. 'The Photographic Message', in Roland Barthes: Selected Writings, (Great Britain: Fontana Press, 1989), p.202.

photographing of objects does not give meaning to the objects, rather, the context and discourse of the photographs allow those conditions of existence to animate meaning.[7] Thus, as a prerequisite to effective communication, the communicator must have knowledge of the complexity of a culture if the signs are to have substance. An audience's predispositions need to be gauged prior to communicating with them. In communicating visually about any culture, one can question meanings frequently taken for granted, and delve into the complexity of that society's ways of seeing. The photographer Andres Serrano has said that he hopes to 'take a formal tradition and subvert it by inverting the images, abstracting that which we take for granted in an attempt to question not only photography but my own experience of social reality'.[8]

Serrano says of his work, that it is informed by, 'unresolved feelings about my own Catholic upbringing which help me redefine and personalise my relationship with God'. He uses images associated with religion, criticising its conventions, while simultaneously paying idiosyncratic homage to the ideas that Christ originally stood for, '...he challenges the boundaries formed by class and race, and between abstraction and representation, photography and painting, belief and disbelief'.[9]

Since photographic images seem to lay testimony to such accurate reflections of our way of seeing, it is often assumed that they are not in need of interpretation for their comprehension. Susan Sontag states that the reason for this is because, ...'a photograph is not only an image, (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stencilled off the

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[7]"The reality of everyday life is taken for granted as reality. It does not require additional verification over and beyond its simple presence. It is simply there, as self-evident and compelling facticity. I know that it is real. While I am capable of engaging in doubt about its reality, I am obliged to suspend such doubts as I routinely exist in everyday life. This suspension of doubt is so firm that to abandon it, as I might want to do, say, in theoretical or religious contemplation, I have to make an extreme transition. The world of everyday life proclaims itself and, when I want to challenge the proclamation, I must engage in a deliberate, by no means easy effort'. The personal pronoun 'I' is regarded by the authors here, as, standing for ordinary selfconsciousness in every day life. P L Berger and T Luckman. The Social Construction of Reality, (Penguin 1975), p.37, in Webster, p.37.

[8]Lucy R. Lippard. 'Andres Serrano: The Spirit and the Letter'. Art in America, Vol 78, April 1990, p.240.

[9]Lippard. 'Andres Serrano: The Spirit and the Letter', p.239.

real, like a footprint or a death mask'.[10] The view that photographs are the result of a primarily mechanical process, implies that they present a vision of the world where reality is not interpretive. This suggests that the photograph is simply the result of the exposure of an image onto film, and that the photographer's interpretive control is limited. 'The photograph is a consequence of a mechanical process which excludes an active subjective. Its image is there, transmitted without a need to interpret the world'.[11]

The word 'mechanical' implies that the photograph is absent of any autographic or idiosyncratic mark. It is my contention, however, that the photographer uses another kind of means, not strictly autographic, in order to make his statement; for example, camera angle, position in relation to the subject, and framing. By implementing these purposefully, the photographer may imply certain perceptions about the scene. 'It [the photograph] is both 'natural' (an exact record of that which was/is there) and hence does not need to be translated, and simultaneously it is symbolic and thus dependant for its meaning upon the capacity of viewers to interpret, using their knowledge of an array of culturally specific conventions'.[12] Thus the photographer moulds his individual message, conscious that the audience interprets an image using a shared symbolic system which is adopted in an individual manner. The photographer frames a scene through personal experience and inventiveness, created in social relationships, and expressed using a common language.

Since the interpretation of a message is dependent to some extent on personal experience, the response will be, partially, an individual one which varies from one person to another. The photographer also shapes that communication, to some extent, in order to make his social or personal statement. It must, however, be clarified that the response is never merely an individual and idiosyncratic one

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[10]Susan Sontag. On Photography, (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1979), p.154.

[11]Webster, p.156.

[12]Webster, p.57.

because of the system of meaning which underlies all modes of communication. '...to suggest that one's way of seeing is created entirely through personal experience would imply that there can be no communication because we all interpret idiosyncratically. This however is not the case since our perception of certain signs is premised on knowledge of our culture. A way of seeing is constructed through an interplay of ideas and experiences'.[13] Furthermore, these cultural signs can also have conflicting or multiple meanings within one culture, depending on the cultural background and way of seeing by an audience.

Personal experience has bearing on how we see things but it is not exclusively this personal experience which determines meaning within any communication. One's experiences may tend to reinterpret cultural signs, but this act is generally premised on previous knowledge of these signs.[14] This affords opportunities for effective communication which can focus on different interpretations of the same symbol. In many cases the existence of a primary meaning coexists with multiple meanings. These too may conflict with the primary interpretation, but if the context of the sign does not precipitate an explicit clash, it is common for people to retain conflicting images without difficulty. Thus a concept's meaning is created in the interaction of the practices and symbols of a society.[15]

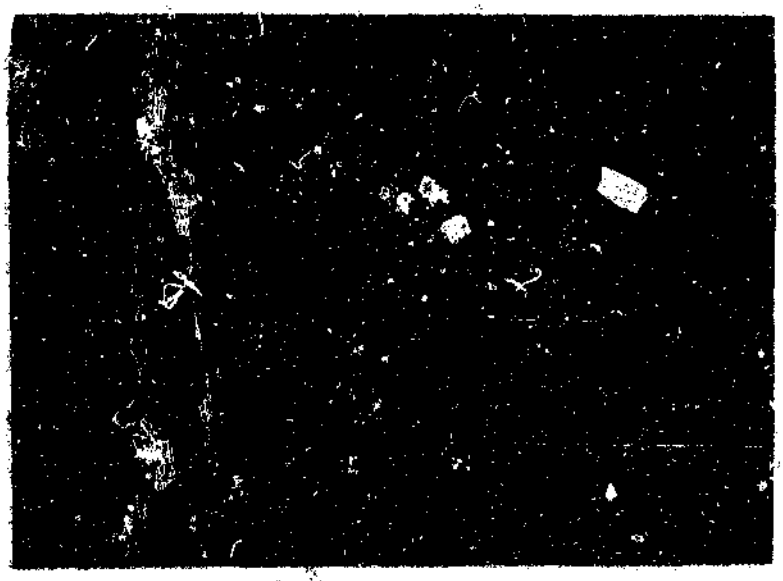
Knowledge or experience of a situation can modify a sign. That is not to say that experience determines the reading of a sign, but rather that it may influence the reading of the sign. Susan Sontag in her book On Photography speaks of the

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[13]Webster, p.63.

[14]Webster, p.64.

[15]Estelle Jussim's essay, Propaganda and Persuasion, reveals two differing responses to Russell Lee's photograph. 'Instruction at Home: Transylvania, Louisiana, 1939 [figure 1]. Jussim indicates that the response from a liberal viewer to this photograph might be that rural blacks, despite abject poverty, are concerned with the importance of reading and writing. In addition, she states that the words, "The rain are fallin'" (seen in the photograph) might be observed by such a viewer, as those attributed to people who often attach plural verb forms to singular nouns. In contrast, Jussim also states that the conservative viewer's response might take a negative view of the subject's intelligence, and assume that their command of English is extremely poor. Thus the 'meanings' attributed to this photograph can be diametrically opposed, or what communication theorists term cognitive dissonance. 'Cognitive dissonance is the process by which individuals reject information that does not support attitudes already held or decisions already made'. Estelle Jussim. 'Propaganda and Persuasion', in Featherstone, (ed) Observations, p.107.



1. Russell Lee. Instruction at Home: Transylvania, Louisiana, 1939.[16]

[16]Featherstone, (ed) Observations, p.105.

searing effect photographs of Bergen-Belsen and Dachau had on her,[17] partially determined by verbal information. Therefore it is not the photograph alone which is solely responsible for the communication, but knowledge gleaned from language, which provides information about the image. 'A photograph, therefore, would seem to be able to pose the question, to imply a situation for which some other medium might be needed to provide the answer'.[18] The effect of text in photographic communication will be examined in greater detail in chapter 5 of this dissertation.

Although personal experience may be brought to bear in the reception of images, knowledge of the signs and cues which prompt that perception are determining factors in establishing common meaning for the viewer.[19]

The perception of photographs may alter over time. Culture is never static, but always in a state of flux; meanings and values change, according to fashion, and the influences of world trends. World advertising trends, for example, have recently tended towards conservation issues which were hitherto not addressed. Another example is a photograph of Marlene Dietrich, taken at the annual Presseball at the Hotel Adlon, by Alfred Eisenstaedt, in 1929.[20] Considered to be extraordinary because Dietrich wore tails and trousers, unheard of at that time, her outfit would not elicit the same response today. Thus, in order to understand photographic images of the past, it is necessary to examine the historical context of these photographs, and the reasons for their production.

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[17] Sontag, pp.19-20.

[18] Jussim, in David Featherstone, (ed) Observations, p.107.

[19] "The emission and the reception of the message both lie within the field of a sociology: it is a matter of studying human groups, of defining motives and attitudes, and of trying to link the behaviour of these groups to the social totality of which they are a part'. Barthes, in Barthes: Selected Writings, p.195.

[20] Alfred Eisenstaedt. Eisenstaedt on Eisenstaedt, A Self-Portrait, (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), p.30.

Photographs tend to belong to history as illustrations of the past; but their value lies not just in what they show, but also in how the photographer interpolates their society through the construction of the image.

An examination of the historical context of the Farm Security Administration reveals how that establishment gave rise to the documentary genre of photography in America. 'We must ask ourselves what conditions contribute towards the success of the genre. What socio-economic climate leads to this sort of concern? Posing the question at the outset of the image-producing process will help to avoid the trap of simply regurgitating the current opinion of one's culture and place the photographer in a position of potential creativity'.[21]

The FSA was an organisation established by President Roosevelt's New Deal programme, to provide agricultural relief to tenants and sharecroppers, and to reduce the mortgage debt of farmers during the depression and the drought of 1934. The New Deal was President Roosevelt's attempt to revive the economy by using major state intervention to promote regulation and subsidisation, and by grafting a social welfare component onto the capitalist system. 'The greatest part of the FSA's activity, however, has centred around it so-called rehabilitation loans. The circumstances of each tenant or sharecropper family are expertly studied; it receives a small loan - the average is about $ 350,00 - for just those purposes that will most benefit it. The loan may permit the family to rent a bit of land, or to buy fertiliser or to raise chickens and pigs for food, or to obtain a draft animal. ...In large measure its remarkable success comes from the fact that families receiving loans are constantly advised and watched over by Department of Agriculture agents'.[22]

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[21] Webster, p.93.

[22] Morton Keller. (ed) The New Deal. What was it? (New York: Editors of the New Republic, 1963), p.65.

Photographers were employed by Roy Stryker[23] to document the achievements of the agency, as well as emphasising the need for additional government relief programmes. The overall purpose of the New Deal was to provide immediate relief to the most destitute victims of the economic havoc and social distress caused by the depression.

Stryker's aims were served by employing photographers who understood the problems and who possessed the sensitivity to portray them. It was assumed that his background as an economist would be helpful for this kind of work; Tugwell initially employed Stryker as illustrations editor for his book, American Economic Life and the Means of Its Improvement, intended as a reformist text for the Contemporary Civilisation course at Columbia University. About seventy of Lewis Hine's photographs of rural and industrial work and workers were used in this publication. It was these photographs which were only acknowledged years later by Stryker. In 1938 Stryker requested Tugwell's endorsement for a Hine retrospective in New York, stating, 'look[ing] back now [at American Economic Life], [I] realise that his photography made much more impression upon me than I had suspected at the time', concluding that 'Hine had been doing the type of work which we [at the FSA] are now doing, back in 1908 and 1912'.[24] Other photographs produced during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, by photographers such as Mathew Brady, (1840), and Jacob Riis, (1890), also helped to provide the historical context for Stryker's theories. Their work dealt with social issues, i.e., Brady's portraits of famous men and women, and later pictures of Civil War Battlefields, Riis's images in How the Other Half Lives, and Hine's photographs of child labour, and immigrants were regarded as a record of their time.[25]

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[23]Roy Stryker was Rexford Tugwell's assistant. Tugwell, the undersecretary of the Department of Agriculture, was responsible for the Resettlement Administration (RA) created by President Roosevelt's Executive Order.

[24]Maren Stange. Symbols of Ideal Life: Social Documentary Photography in America 1890-1950, (Cambridge, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.92.

[25]Jack Hurley. Portrait of a Decade, (USA: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), p.17.

Stryker continued to improve and expand his knowledge of graphic resources and intensified his feeling for the possibilities of the image as a means of communicating social issues, however, Hine's photographs must be acknowledged for influencing Stryker's intentions for the FSA project of the 1930s.

The photographers were expected to have a complete grasp of the social scene they were documenting. Extensive background information about the people, their social mores, economy and politics was provided by him.[26] This information was imperative to the photographers' understanding of the situations they were confronted by.

The FSA group was committed from the beginning to a policy of total truthfulness.[27] The intention was to make photographs which would look like incontrovertible records of fact. Its distinguishing feature was its treatment of the subject in as direct a manner as possible without obvious pictorial exaggeration or by manipulation of the subject. Since the intention was to record events and issues, the term 'straight' photography was applied. In this context it was meant to imply an impersonal and dispassionate rendering of a scene by the photographer - a refusal to intervene in the picture's mediation. This was critical since Stryker feared that aestheticising of images might deviate from his intentions. It is this quality, the apparent absence of photographic style that Stryker attempted to promote. The editing, cropping and implication of a social context was therefore done with a political rather than aesthetic objective.

Walker Evans's modus operandi parallels strongly the professed objectives of this 'straight technique' as promulgated by the FSA. Therefore his work and ideas were appropriated by Stryker to reinforce the style and sense of purpose of the

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[26]Stryker's knowledge of the socio-economic forces at work in various regions of the US was comprehensive. He insisted that photographers know what they were photographing and how it related to the context and circumstances of the times. Each Historical Section photographer had to own a copy of J. Russell Smith's North America, a publication which gave accounts of the socioeconomic factors pertinent to every region of the US. It is this factor which indicates the difference between the Historical Section photographers and others working at that time. Hurley, pp.58-60.

[27]That being that the photographs would correspond with fact or reality, confirming the perception, (popular at the time) that the camera was the ideal instrument for conveying this.

agency. Alan Trachtenberg observes that it was Evans's 'photographic editing of society ' which gave Stryker his rationale for the project and showed him what kind of pictures to seek out.[28]

The recording of information which might one day be of historical interest was an issue both the photographers and Stryker himself were conscious of. The making of an historical document was one of their objectives and much of the work done by FSA photographers, particularly Walker Evans, is regarded as such. Carl van Vechten observes, 'If everything in American Civilisation were destroyed except Walker Evans' photographs, they could tell us a good deal about American life'.[29] John Szarkowski wrote in 1971, 'Individually, the photographs of Walker Evans evoke an incontrovertible sense of specific places. Collectively, they evoke a sense of America'.[30] Alan Trachtenberg states, 'This view of Evans, and of American Photographs - that he prepares a list of particulars, that he inventories a 'real' America - has remained more or less intact'.[31] In a sense these photographs stand for what took place during the 1930s. In so doing they colour the perceptions of an audience about the times and issues they depict.

In the welter of possibilities confronting these photographers, however, it seems logical to assume that certain aspects of a situation were selected in preference to others, in order to emphasise a perception held by the photographer. In the decisions that the photographer makes, in selecting one exposure to another, certain standards are thereby exacted on their subjects. The way they inflect meaning in the making of the picture, indicates their understanding of the language of photographic communication. The effect of these images, as Jack Hurley observes, 'played a key role in conditioning the aesthetic tastes of the nation to the

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[28]Alan Trachtenberg. Reading American Photographs, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), p.245.

[29]Alan Trachtenberg. 'Walker Evans' America, a Documentary Invention', in Featherstone, (ed) Observations, p.56.

[30]Trachtenberg, in Featherstone, (ed) Observations, p.57.

[31]Trachtenberg, in Featherstone, (ed) Observations, p.57.

documentary style, while at the same time it had created a tremendously valuable record of the age of the Great Depression'.[32]

It is believed that the Historical Section of the FSA gave rise to the documentary genre of photography in America. 'The photographs produced during the Depression by the Historical Section of the Farm Security Administration have become the most well known social documentary project'.[33]

n the cultural arena, America during the 1930s looked largely to Europe as the arbiter of tradition, taste and avant-garde directions. Robert J Coady's writings in 'The Soil' a small American literary magazine published in 1916, was an incitement to re-examine American history and culture, and the fine arts in the light of the American experience. For Coady, American Art was 'the aesthetic product of the human beings living on and producing from the soil of this United States'.[34]

During the period between the two world wars, many subjects and themes were identified as American, and photographers, such as Edward Weston, Walker Evans, and Ansel Adams produced work which was decidedly American. Terence Pitts states that they, 'helped identify that which was native to the culture of this continent, and of how photographers, freed of many of the constraints placed upon painters as to what constituted serious subject matter, could make significant images out of Mexican pottery and toys, out of hand-painted road signs, or art of the humble contents of a Sharecropper's shack'.[35]

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[32]Hurley, p.viii.

[33]Grant Kester. 'The Management of Meaning, Documentary and the Administration Crisis'. Afterimage, Vol 18, No 3, October 1990, p.16.

[34]Terence Pitts. Photography in the American Grain. Discovering a Native American Aesthetic. 1923-1941, (Tuscon: Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona, 1988), p.8.

[35]Pitts, p.11.

Many of Weston's Mexican images of 1923-26 typified a photographic modernism inflected by his growing awareness of the aesthetics of popular Mexican arts and crafts. His photographs are considered to be rooted in the classical tradition of America, invested with the quality of folk-art, which to Pitts's way of thinking is an art without any intellectual claims.

Richard Lacayo, in an article in Time, comments on the effect of Ansel Adams's photographs in contemporary America. 'Many are so familiar they seem like national monuments on paper',[36] indicates a perception of Adams's photographs as historical records of the American landscape. In the light of contemporary concerns about conservation, he implies that Adams's photographs, once so apparently timeless, are now historical documents, the record of a lost world.

Walker Evans, too, seemed to concentrate on the theme of the American experience, its rich and poor, skyscrapers and shacks, work and leisure. Evans's first two major projects involved American Architecture. That of Brooklyn Bridge, 1929, and anonymous Victorian Architecture 1930-1931, made at the suggestion of Lincoln Kirstein, then curator of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, which resulted in the first one-person photography exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art, entitled, Walker Evans: Photographs of ninsteenth century houses.

Their work implies an understanding of American life, something which was not easily defined then. What it meant to be an 'American' at that time, was indeed a contentious issue. An anthology entitled America as Americans See It by Fred Ringer celebrated American culture and values, but in contrast, Harold E Stearns, 'Preface' in Civilization in the U S An Inquiry by 30 Americans articulates complaints about the 'emotional and aesthetic starvation' of an America without a useful heritage of tradition.[37]

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[36]Richard Lacayo. 'The Man Who Captured the Earth's Beauty'. Time. September 3 1990, p.51.

[37]Harold E Stearns. Civilization in the U S An Inquiry by 30 Americans, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1922), p.vii.

Maren Stange and Alan Trachtenberg note how the FSA photographs have shaped modern preconceptions of what took place during the depression years. Stange asserts that 'The New Deal. FSA, project, directed by Stryker and employing Evans, Lange, Shahn, Lee, Delano and Rothstein, among others, was the culmination of the documentary movement. Familiar documentary elements were used in the 1930s to create realistic, yet visually appealing images - 'symbols of ideal life', in philosopher John Dewey's phrase - 'formal complexity as well as radical content were suppressed in the pictures that became popular'.[38]

However, it must be noted that the photographers were considered to be co-authors of the pictures, for Stryker's conception was to accumulate 'a pictorial encyclopedia of American agriculture' [39] since he issued regular and detailed shooting scripts to all his photographers. [Figures 2 and 3][40]. These shooting scripts reveal a wide range of subjects which the photographers were intended to focus on, but are also indicative of Stryker's selectivity in determining the kinds of images represented.

One of the themes concerns photographs of people from various income groups, at leisure and at work; photographs of the wall decorations in homes were intended as an index to different income groups. An example of this is: Union Point Georgia, 1941, by Jack Delano [figure 4] and Hildago County Texas, 1939, by Russell Lee [figure 5]. These photographs each show a pair of figures in a lounge setting, one an elderly middle class couple from Union Point, Georgia, the other recipients of government aid from the FSA in 1939.

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[38]Stange, p.xvii

[39]Roy Emerson Stryker and Nancy Wood. In This Proud Land: America 1935-1943 as seen in the FSA Photographs, (New York City: Galahad Books, 1973), p.7.

[40]Stryker and Wood, pp.187-88.

From R. E. Stryker
To all photographers

FSA
1938

Suggestions recently made by Robert Lynd (co-author of *Middletown*) for things which should be photographed as American Background.

Home in the evening
- Photographs showing the various ways that different income groups spend their evenings, for example.
- Informal clothes
- Listening to the radio
- Bridge
- More precise dress
- Guests

Attending church
- Follow through a set of pictures showing people on their way from their home to church
- Getting out of church
- Visiting and talking
- Returning from church to home
- Visiting and talking in the vestibule
- Here again, note the difference in the habits of the various income groups.

The group activities of various income levels
- The organized and unorganized activities of the various income groups

"Where can people meet?"
- Well-to-do
  - Country clubs
  - Homes
  - Lodges
- Poor
  - Beer halls
  - Pool halls
  - Saloons
  - Street corners
  - Garages
  - Cigar stores

Consider the same problem as applied to women.
- Do women have as many meeting places as men?
- It is probable that the women in the lower-income levels have far less opportunity of mingling with other women than do the women of the higher-income groups.

"How many people do you know?"
- There is a marked difference here between the circle of acquaintanceship between the income groups and also on the basis of urban versus rural.

Backyards
- "What do you see out of the kitchen window?"
- Various exhibit pictures could be taken in different towns and on the basis of different income groups.

"Looking down my street"
- Here again, a most interesting set of pictures could be taken, keeping in mind different income groups and different geographical [illegible]

People on and off the job.
- How much different do people look and act when they are on the job than when they are off?
- This would necessitate some very careful camera studies.

Pictures showing relationship between time and the job.
- This would include such things as pictures taken of the same people every ten years, showing how people age in their work, and pictures emphasizing the aged man and woman and the job.

The effect of the depression in the smaller towns of the United States.
- To include such things as the growth of small independent shops, stores, and businesses in the small towns; for example, the store opened up on the sun porch, the beauty shop in the living room

The baseball diamond as an important part of our general landscape.
- This is particularly noticeable when one views small towns from the air.

"Fit for the likes of us"
- What are the things which we feel comfortable doing with some and not with others?

Relationship between density of population and income of such things as
- Pressed clothes
- Polished shoes and so on
  - Is it likely in large industrial areas that even the poor groups will make a greater effort to have polished shoes, pressed clothes, than the same or even a higher-income group might in the smaller populated areas. What effect does wealth have on this?

"How do people look?"
- In towns of various sizes—1500, 25,000 to 50,000, 100,000. Consider the same thing from a geographical standpoint.

The wall decorations in homes as an index to the different income groups and their reactions.

The photographic study of the difference in the men's world and the women's world.

A photographic study of use of leisure time in various income groups.

Compare headlines regionally.
- Take the same topics such as a kidnapping or other news item with national interest and note the manner in which it is treated in the different parts of the country.

From R. E. Stryker
To Russell Lee,
Arthur Rothstein,
in particular

FSA
February 19, 1942

I. Production of foods—fruits, vegetables, meat, poultry, eggs, milk and milk products, miscellaneous products.
- a. Packaging and processing of above
- b. Picking, hauling, sorting, preparing, drying, canning, packaging, loading for shipping
- c. Field operations—planting; cultivation; spraying
- d. Dramatic pictures of fields, show "pattern" of the country; get feeling of the productive earth, boundless acres.
- e. Warehouses filled with food, raw and processed, cans, boxes, bags, etc.

II. Poultry—large-scale operations
- Hatching, shipping chicks
- Get a few pictures "cute" of little chicks
- Real close-ups
- Eggs—get "pictorial" shots of eggs in baskets, in piles, in crates (get pattern pictures for posters)
- Dressed poultry
- Chickens in pens and yards
- Feeding operations

III. General farming—get pictures of representative small farms (California—Texas) General farming, buildings, farmer & family, farmer at work.

IV. Small town under war conditions
- Select a small town some distance from large cities and make a camera study of how this town looks under war conditions.
- Civilian Defense Activities
- Meetings of all kinds—Red Cross
- Farm groups, etc.
- Look for a town near an Army Camp
- Signs—stores, filling stations, etc.
- Selective Service
- Registration of new age groups
- Home gardens, Civilian Defense Activities
- Schools. More neighborliness (Any evidence of this?)

V. Auto and auto tire rationing. A civilian population gets off rubber tires. (Many things should be photographed now before disappearance or marked decline.)
- Old tires piles.
- Used car lots. Especially when enormous numbers of cars are stored.
- Signs—any sign which suggests rubber (or other commodity) shortage, rationing, etc. Horse-drawn vehicles. Blacksmith shops, harness shops, buggies, delivery wagons, horse drays (for trucks), bicycles.
- (What will happen to roadside hamburger stand?) Watch for closed filling stations or eat joints.

VI. The highway
- Watch for any signs which indicate a country at war.
- "Man at Work" pictures. We are still short of these pictures. These should include:
  - (1) highway building—big stuff, e.g., in the Rocky Mts. or major highways.
  - (2) Repair and maintenance.
  - (3) Emphasize the men.

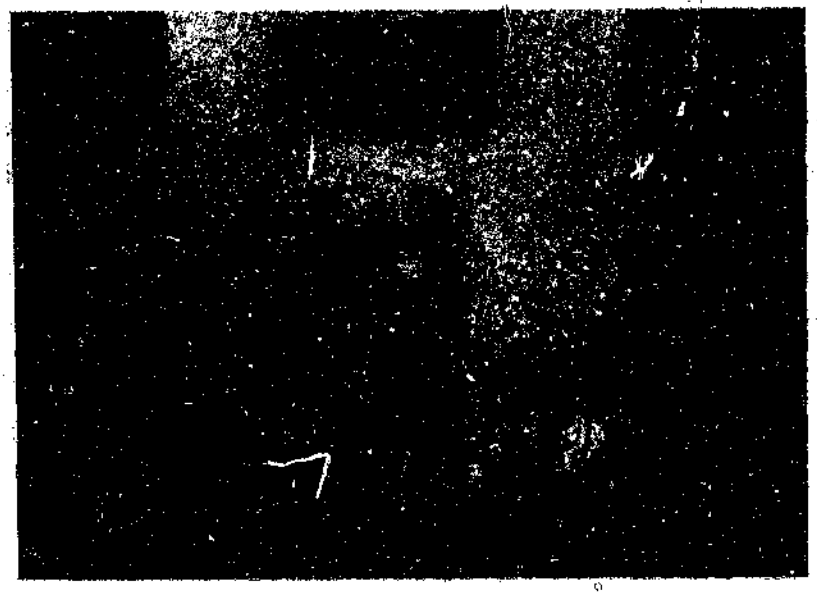
VII. (for R. Lee) Mining, California, Arizona, New Mexico
- Get pictures showing increased activities among prospective and small operating outfits.
- Mercury—near San Jose, California. Cement, Kaiser's cement plant near San Jose, California.
- (See Jack Tobin. Also Sat. Eve. Post article on Kaiser.)
- Miners—faces & miners at work

VIII. The land
- The long shots for a "feel" of the country
- Details

IX. People—*we must have at once:*
- Pictures of men, women and children who appear as if they really believed in the U.S. Get people with a little spirit. Too many in our file now paint the U.S. as an old person's home and that just about everyone is too old to work and too malnourished to care much what happens. (Don't misunderstand the above. FSA is still interested in the lower-income groups and we want to continue to photograph this group.) We particularly need young men and women who work in our factories, the young men who build our bridges, roads, dams and large factories.
- Housewives in their kitchen or in the yard picking flowers.
- More contented-looking old couples—woman sewing, man reading; sitting on porch; working in garden; sitting in park; coming from church; at picnics, at meetings.



4. Jack Delano. Union Point Georgia. 1941.[41]



5. Russell Lee. Hildago County Texas. 1939.[42]

[41]Tagg, p.158.

[42]Tagg, p.159.

We are made aware of differences and similarities: the images are of a home environment, with armchairs, coffee tables and lamps etc. The figures of a man and woman in both suggest, in this domestic setting that they are husband and wife. Both images evoke the concepts of family and home. John Tagg suggests that the difference between these photographs that is perceived by the audience is one of class, and 'that it is equally clear that this dominant form is an ideological form constituted in the form of life and by the realisation of the values, beliefs and modes of thought of the dominant class'.[43]

The tapestries on the walls in each of the homes: one a Moorish dance reminiscent of Delacroix's Women of Algiers, the other an eighteenth century chamber concert, reminiscent of French art, suggests their taste and implies the class and social standing of the individuals. These tapestries allow the audience to make certain assumptions about the figures, their social standing, implied by their taste, and the way in which these interiors are furnished. However, these assumptions are based on the viewer's knowledge of the time, and their knowledge of furnishings in American homes of the 1930s.

These wall decorations also lead one to question what meaning they had for these individuals. Were they made or bought, valued and admired, or worthless and neglected ? Were they hung with care or indifference, in special vantage points; did they adhere to some consumerist impulse of home decoration at that time ? It might also be questioned whether the subjects chose to sit in those positions in the room, so that the wall decorations might be revealed in the photograph or whether they were directed to do so by the photographers in order to adhere to the instructions given them by Stryker.

Environments in which the subjects were photographed were actually stipulated by Stryker; for example: the poor were photographed in Beer halls, Pool halls, Saloons, Street corners, Garages, and Cigar stores. The relationship between

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[43]John Tagg. The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories, (London: Macmillan Education, 1988), p.161.

density of population and income was intended to be revealed in photographs which depicted pressed clothes and polished shoes. Stryker states in a shooting script issued to all photographers by him in 1936, 'it is likely in large industrial areas that even the poor groups will make a greater effort to have polished shoes, pressed clothes, than the same or even a higher income group might in the smaller populated areas. What effect does wealth have on this'?[44]

A later shooting script [figure 3] issued to Russell Lee, and Arthur Rothstein included Auto and auto tire (sic) rationing. 'A civilian population gets off rubber tires (sic)'. After which is stated: (Many things should be photographed now before disappearance or marked decline), indicating Stryker's concern for documenting aspects of American culture which were disappearing because of the Depression.[45] Further instructions were for 'Pictures of men, women and children who appear as if they really believed in the U.S. Get people with a little spirit'. This may indicate Stryker's concerns for communicating a sense of patriotism, and for images which would be nationalistic.[46]

Another aspect was the effect of the depression in the smaller towns of the U.S. Pictures were to include such things as the growth of small independent shops, stores and businesses in the small towns; for example, the store opened up on the sun porch, and the beauty shop in the living room. Stryker states of these pictures, ...'the small town emerged as a thing possessing emotional and aesthetic advances: kinship with nature and the seasons, neighbourliness, kindliness, spaciousness - plus some certain disadvantages: laziness, pompousness, narrowness, lack of economic and cultural freedom',[47] attributing these pictures with a sense of nostalgia, and idealism of the small American town.

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[44]Stryker and Wood, p.187.

[45]Stryker and Wood, p.188.

[46]Stryker and Wood, p.188.

[47]Stryker and Wood, p.15.

Signs were also on the agenda - 'any sign which suggests rubber (or other commodity) shortage, rationing, etc. Horse-drawn vehicles, Blacksmith shops, harness shops, buggies, delivery wagons, horse drays (for trucks), bicycles.' As well as stipulating that the photographers should be on the lookout for 'closed filling stations, eat joints'.[48]

He remarked, of the intentions of the FSA: 'This was part of our job to record contemporary history'.[49]

Earlier, in his work on the publication, American Economic Life, Stryker was learning to construct a documentary image that might succeed, because in it realistic forms of visual expression could control the appearance of seeming social fact in order to express what was currently appropriate and even attractive about the new ideology. To show the inevitably modernising American, in a style credibly humanitarian and artfully individualising, would be Stryker's task at the FSA - made easier because the New Deal government was both the agent of change and the sponsor of representation. Stange states that 'the FSA project appeals because of its seemingly noncommercial values and procedures - and because of the urgently humanitarian rhetoric of its images. The FSA is generally seen as the exemplar of documentary photography, rather than the inheritor and culminating phase of a tradition'.[50]

It was intended to publicise not only the long-standing distress which had necessitated such unprecedented federal intervention but also the ameliorative effects and the unique long-range goals of agency programmes. Sharecroppers and tenant farmers were the object of New Deal publicity, since they existed at the bottom of the agricultural and economic ladder. Perhaps that is why Evans and Agee focused on those people for their publication, Let Us Now Praise Famous

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[48]Stryker and Wood, p.188.

[49]Stryker and Wood, p.16.

[50]Stange, p.106.

Men, (1941), because they lived in rural areas, too isolated and powerless to organise along class lines.[51]

Interestingly, Evans and Agee did not focus on any black family's plight in their publication Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, although there were many. It has been documented that thirty-one families, nineteen of them black, unable to survive in Arkansas, crossed the Mississippi to join Eddy's Co-operative, established by socialist minister Sherwood Eddy. A reason for this might have been the strong American Nationalist feeling which prevailed at that time, taken up by the FSA, which prescribed images with which its audience could identify: the plight of other white Americans. Stryker states in The FSA Collection of Photographs: 'We succeeded in doing exactly what Rex Tugwell said we should do: We introduced Americans to America'.[52]

However, William Stott, in Documentary Expression and Thirties America, comments that the 'audience' is of a higher income group than that which the documentary genre treats. This implies that the 'audience' would have been somewhat removed from the images the FSA produced. ...'documentary treats the actual unimagined experience of individuals belonging to a group generally of low economic and social standing in the society (lower than the audience for whom the report is made) and treats this experience in such a way as to render it vivid, human, and - most often - poignant to the audience'.[53]

Stott emphasises that they conveyed an image of their subjects which never shows them to be responsible for their misery through laziness or moral dereliction. This image of the Thirties depression, Stott says, is intentional. He suggests that the photographs are propagandist and sentimental in their look; 'mournful, plaintive,

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[51] Agee states: 'The job is perhaps chiefly a sceptical study of the nature of reality and of the false nature of re-creation and of communication', in Alan Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs, p.258.

[52] Stryker and Wood, p.9.

[53] William Stott. Documentary Expression and Thirties America, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p.62.

nakedly near tears'.[54] Which implies that the photographs were designed to evoke a reaction from the audience, because they are so poignant. He also reveals the artifices behind the photographs. This is communicated in his discussion about the photographer's relation to their subjects, and the kinds of images they wanted to produce. He cites the example of Arthur Rothstein, who took photographs of his subjects without their being aware of him because when they were aware of his presence 'their sad faces and worried expression, ... their forlorn attitudes, gave way to ... Sunday-snapshot smiles',[55] revealing what people do in front of the camera, - projecting an image of themselves for the photographer, - an image they assume he wants, or which they wish to present. Margaret Bourke White and Erskine Caldwell, he states, adopted the same approach, by their admission, 'it might take an hour before their faces or gestures gave us what we were trying to express..'.[56] This indicates subjugation by these photographers in their attempt to create a certain type of image of their subjects; revealing that they were fully conscious of a kind of expression or gesture which they wanted to convey in their photographs, and which they felt would communicate the subject's plight.

William Stott comments on a look the subjects have, which exists in more than half of the documentary portraits of the Thirties, 'scenes of muted despair'.[57] It is considered a cliche of thirties documentary, and is something which Evans was conscious of, and tried to break away from. Stott identifies this romantic and sentimental quality which pervades the images of sharecroppers and many of the documentary photographs of that time. Suggesting that these images are stereotypes, and that they fail to communicate specific characteristics of the individuals, and are thus identified as 'types', Webster states: 'Where an audience is predisposed to accept a stereotypical representation as reality, where viewers have been attuned to conceive 'reality' through the distorting lens of culture, then

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[54]Stott, p.60.

[55]Stott, pp.61-62.

[56]Stott, p.60.

[57]Stott, pp.61-62.

there is a real danger that a symbol is confused with reality'. He states that the photographer or maker of these kinds of images should be aware of the cultural constituents of society, the development of perceptions of gen... roles, social class outlooks, images of students etc.[58] Stott does not acknowledge that the production of these kinds of images might have been encouraged by Stryker, specifically conveying a certain image of rural America, with which the audience could sympathise.

Webster refers to a film series called Destination America, in his publication The New Photography, Responsibility in Visual Communication. Produced by Jerry Kuehl, the film deals with ethnic groups who had immigrated to America, and it was intended to reconstruct the history of immigrants. Certain objects and images in the film are included to evoke certain meanings and themes in the series. It begins with rough seas, signifying voyage, then a shot panning the Hudson Bay, and the Statue of Liberty, suggestive of hopes of freedom and opportunity. He makes the point that this kind of film, and these kinds of images are rooted in cultural contexts that influence both the viewer's encoding and decoding. Rough seas and the Statue of Liberty in this context are used symbolically to inflect meaning: and rely on the audience's knowledge, and cultural context in order to convey meaning. However, what is disturbing about this series is that the central figure, Metzger, is not perceived as unusual in any way, but representative of the average Jewish immigrant. 'The danger of this is that so many viewers interpret Metzger's success not as a symbol of a particular trend, but actually as the 'truth', valid for all Jews who emigrated to America'.[59]

Images by Walker Evans, and other photographers like Lewis Hine, avoided these commonly found stereotypical images. They indicated the personal and individual qualities of their subjects, and communicated something of the fabric of the societies in which they lived. Trachtenberg notes of Lewis Hine's photographs of

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[58]Webster, p.44.

[59]Webster, p.44.

immigrants in the act of experiencing Ellis Island, that they included details that signified the most unexotic of setting. 'He posed his subjects to allow for an expression of individual qualities that lifts the portraits to a realm beyond mere depiction of immigrant 'types''.[60]

In the 1960 edition of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men[61] a photograph of Ivy Woods, a Sharecropper's wife, reprimanding her daughter is included, suggesting an unsentimental quality of the way sharecroppers might have behaved. Other photographs are cited by Stott, which reveal evidence of this: Annie Mae Gudger, a Sharecropper's wife, whose expression is 'puzzled, not hostile, deeply sceptical'.[62] In Evans's photographs of interiors of Sharecroppers houses, Stott states, 'these rooms are empty, (absent of human figures), the floor swept, the broom stands in the corner on its handle, and beside the empty washbasin a clean towel hangs from a nail. In many of his pictures it is when people are gone, leaving signs of their lives for our unhurried contemplation, that we discover most about them and the group they represent'.[63] Indicating Evans's ability to select and isolate elements of their existence which would communicate an aspect of their lives. Alan Trachtenberg's comment would seem to endorse this, 'For Evans, as we shall see, an antinomian rejection of design upon the camera as a collaborator of social fact for the sake of controlled social change, was the precondition of his work, what allowed him [at a later date] to conceive a project of American photographs as deliberate counterstatement'. Similarly, Maren Stange's observation about Lewis Hine, an acknowledged influence of the FSA project, indicates, 'The essential meaning and importance of Hine's achievement may be that it actually clarifies the process of reform by partly denying it in the very act of continuing and publicising it'.[64]

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[60] Stange, p.52.

[61] Stott, p.278.

[62] Stott, p.67.

[63] Stott, p.62.

[64] Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs, p.206.

The genre of much documentary photography of 1930s America is thus based on the context in which photographs were placed. Working for the FSA determined the kinds of images which were acceptable, and the kinds of images which were produced. The organisations which commission a photographer's work, are therefore important - as the photographer may be constrained by or react against the expectations of the organisation. Cognisance will also be taken where photographers were not working within these constraints. Agee and Evans worked independently on the publication Let Us Praise Famous Men and the kinds of portraits Evans produced in this book reveal evidence of his independence, both in his way of seeing and in the kinds of images he produced. 'Its nature (documentary) as a practice depends on the institutions and agents which define it and set it to work'.[65] It has been suggested by Trachtenberg and Stange, that the use of documentary posed, for reformers, a never-ending series of decisions about the appropriate means to authenticate the documentary photograph, and to authorise its meaning with written text, captions, and identification of the agency presenting the image.

With regard to Evans, it was the FSA which in part defined the terrain for his subject matter, and which gave rise to his subsequent project with Agee, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, and later The Americans. But what must be noted, and is asserted by Tagg, 'What alone unites the diversity of sites in which photography operates is the social formation itself: the specific historical spaces for representation and practice which it constitutes'.[66]

The significance of the photographic image at the time is interpreted by Agee in the 1930s as, 'Not inconsequentially, the camera, with its image both realistic and mass reproducible, rose to become the 'central instrument of the age' and the photograph became the central symbol of modern communication'.[67] The

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[65]Tagg, p.118.

[66]Tagg, p.118.

[67]Stange, p.107.

documentary genre, therefore, appears to provide truthful historical documentation. Yet a study of the FSA shows that the photographer may be manipulating the viewer's understanding of the photograph; using the subject matter and cultural background to a photograph to influence the communication between viewer and photographer.

CHAPTER 2
WALKER EVANS AND ROBERT FRANK

The aims and intentions of documentary photography, as established by Roy Stryker and the FSA, indicate some of the parameters which framed the documentary tradition during the 1930s. Its significance and the impetus generated in the documentary genre were considerable, both in the volume of work and range of subject matter produced, and in serving to direct the attention of the audience in a particular way. In this chapter the work of Walker Evans and Robert Frank is examined, against that documentary tradition established by the FSA, in order to demonstrate its influence in relation to these photographers' work.

Socio political considerations, as exemplified in the practices adopted by the FSA to the documentary genre, are pertinent to the criteria determining the respective approaches of Walker Evans and Robert Frank. The aim of this chapter is to indicate the manner in which the personal perceptions of each photographer are manifested in their particular approaches to documentary photography. Despite similarities in their work such as, subject matter, the consequent impression each creates in their images is attributable to the pictorial construction brought to bear in the rendering of their photographs. In view of this assertion, issues such as composition, lighting, camera angle, and the photographer's point of view are examined with specific reference to the comment they inflect in their images.

Despite the difference in time, - 1930s and 1950s - what links their work and places them in the documentary genre, is their respective treatment of moments of conflict and change. They both reveal the effects of socio-political upheavals in the lives of the individuals depicted in their photographs. In the work of Walker Evans, the effect of the depression provided the content for much of his photography. Robert Frank photographed scenes of American society taken during the 1950s. The fifties, unlike the thirties, were relatively prosperous times for most Americans. There was an increase in household appliances, particularly

TVs. Housing development increased, altering the urban landscape, and inter state highways were constructed. The family car and single family home became the norm. Though poverty persisted, affluence became more visible. However, the political situation at that time was characterised by pessimism and fear. ....'for some politicians, hunting Reds became a passport to fame - to notoriety ... It was the focal point of the careers of Wisconsin Senator Joseph R McCarthy; of Richard Nixon during his tenure as congressman, Senator and Vice-President of the United States; of several of Nixon's colleagues on the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC); of Senator Pat McCarran and other members of the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee; of a phalanx of understudies at the National, State and local levels.[68] Similarities are also evident in the content of their photographs, i.e., cars, luncheonettes, graveyards and street furniture. The subject matter which characterises the work of documentary photographers employed by the FSA; aspects of daily life, characteristic of many Americans. However, Robert Frank enlarged on this subject matter, including images of jukeboxes, flags, and roadside entertainment; elements associated with 1950s popular culture particularly.

The aims of Walker Evans and Robert Frank are parallel in that both attempted to accurately reflect their perceptions of American society in their photographs. The FSA's adherence to certain modes of presentation also provided Evans and Frank with a model which they reacted against.

Their differences of approach to each other are most apparent in the pictorial construction of their images, choice of camera, film speed and the position they take up in the making of their photographs. In the presentation of their photographs, their respective styles of photography are revealed as communicating a personal attitude toward their subject matter. Their personal perceptions vary greatly, and are contingent on the manner in which they construct their images. Photographs are afforded interpretations by viewers, providing cogent examples of the diverse interpretations of what constitutes documentary photography.

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[68]Richard M Fried. Nightmare in Red, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.3.

Walker Evans's photographs illustrate certain characteristics which define his particular style of photography, and reveal the manner in which he inflects comment about the situations he chose to photograph. In 1964 at a lecture at Yale University, where Evans taught photography during the latter part of his career, he spoke about the practice of documentary photography, defining it in these words:

> *My thought is that the term 'documentary' is inexact, vague and even grammatically weak, as used to describe a style in photography which happens to be my style. Further, that what I believe is really good in the so-called documentary approach in photography is the addition of lyricism.*
>
> *Further, that the lyric is usually produced unconsciously and even unintentionally and accidentally by the cameraman - with certain exceptions. Further, that when the photographer presses for the heightened documentary, he more often than not really misses it .... The thing that I'm talking about has purity and a certain severity, rigour, simplicity, directness, clarity, and it is without artistic pretension in a self-conscious sense of the word. That's the base of it - they're hard and firm...*[69]

Evans indicates that the inadequacy of the term 'documentary photography' arises from its use in describing his work, since it is also used to describe photographs taken by the police in depicting a scene or a murder. He claims that while the style of photography in these examples may be similar, the difference lies in their application. He states that his images do not function in the same manner as police photographs, which are intended to provide information, and that the term documentary presupposes a knowledge of this distinction.

He develops this argument by referring to another aspect of his photography - what he calls lyricism. Here there appears to be a conflict between his description of the term lyricism, and his modus operandi. In his photographs, his selection, editing, and the position he takes up in the making of the photograph are, I believe, consciously employed and reveal aspects of his particular style of photography, considerations which appear contrary to his statement that the 'lyric

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[69]Walker Evans, 'Lyric Documentary', lecture at Yale, 1964, in Walker Evans at Work, (London: Thames & Hudson 1983), p.238.

is usually produced unconsciously and even unintentionally and accidentally by the cameraman...'[70] For example, Bethlehem, (1936), [figure 6], depicts crosses and industrial buildings; and the inclusion of cross shaped tops of telegraph poles conveys an ironic comment in this juxtaposition. The 'lyrical' in this context is linked to Evans's personal perception of the scene, and is communicated by his interpretation of it in his photographs.

An aspect of Evans' style is his emphasis on deliberation and mediation in the picture making process, as revealed in many of his photographs. This implies a highly conscious attitude to the construction of his pictures, and which seems to go against notions of the accidental, or unconscious, which he claims is the terrain of the lyric in photography, as employed by him. This is endorsed by Jack Delano, 'I think Walker Evans's was a very studied and classic approach ....'[71]

Since the term lyricism is one more closely associated with poetry than photography, an analogy will be drawn to clarify this point further. Language is considered a system, the basic aim of which is denotative communication, but whose units can be used to convey a richer significance, a more personal expression. 'Is it not the function of poetry to establish another world - another world that corresponds to other possibilities of existence, to possibilities that would be most deeply our own?'[72] The theories of Roland Barthes, Nelson Goodman, and Julia Kristeva illustrate that language is part of the domain of communication, but can also be defined by certain literary 'styles', which could be said to be an expression of the author's perception, for example, Ernest Hemingway, and James Joyce. In much the same way, Evans uses the constraints which govern photography as tools for communicating his personal expression.

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[70] Walker Evans at Work, p.238.

[71] Richard Doud. Transcript of an interview with Jack and Irene Delano, (Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras, June 12, 1985), p.15.

[72] Paul Ricoeur. The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p.241.



6. Walker Evans. Bethlehem. 1936.[73]

[73] Walker Evans at Work, p.122.

This parallel between language and photography is also postulated in the writings of Alan Trachtenberg and Lincoln Kirstein. Both observe a complicity between literary style and photographic style in the work of Evans. 'What Flaubert did for the novel, then a despised form, Evans would do for photography'.[74] Trachtenberg states that both concentrated on developing a personal style in their work, imposing exacting demands through their means of communication, 'The literariness of American Photographs begins in its title'.[75] 'Walker Evans' eye is a poet's eye. It finds collaboration in the poet's voice'.[76]

Evans's observations of the work of Atget also reinforces this analogy between poetic and photographic expression, '...his [Atget's] lyrical understanding of the street, trained observation of it, special feeling for patina, eye for revealing detail, over all of which is thrown a poetry which is not the 'poetry of the street' or 'the poetry of Paris, but the projection of Atget's person'.[77]

It could be argued that these are the exceptions of which Evans speaks, however these issues constitute some of the major considerations which make up Evans's style. One could also argue that if lyricism was produced unconsciously or particularly as he says, unintentionally, then the photographer's 'hand' in the making of the work would be deemed minimal. The considerations that photographers bring to bear, like camera angle, lighting and composition in the picture making process involve certain decisions and choices, and testify to the artist's intentions in making the image. In the absence of these considerations, the picture would be relegated to the level of a 'snapshot'.[78]

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[74]Alan Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs, pp.239-40.

[75]Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs, p.239.

[76]Walker Evans, American Photographs, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938), p.194.

[77]Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs, p.237.

[78]SNAPSHOT. A quick or hurried shot taken without deliberate aim. Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. The term came into general use in the 1880s and is associated with photographs made with simple hand cameras by amateurs. The word also signifies the intention behind the making of the picture - it is intended as a record of a person, place or event, and made with no artistic pretensions or commercial considerations. Brian Coe and Paul Gates. The Snapshot:

Walker Evans was born in St Louis in 1903. He went to New York in 1927 and in 1928 commenced a career in photography. His early works were primarily observations of street life, and his approach at this time was based on impressions attempting to be descriptive. For example, the street scenes taken in New York City 1928-1929. Strong shadow patterns, geometric shapes, and the use of high contrast characterise these pictures and reveal the influence of avant-garde European photographs of the 1920s, which Evans had seen on a visit to Europe.

In his writings in the early 1930s, Evans reveals his admiration for the work of photographers such as Paul Strand and Eugene Atget. 'I came across that picture of Strand's blind woman and that really bowled me over . ...That's the stuff, that's the thing to do ...'[79] The impression their work had on him, their concerns and the dispassionate view which characterises their images was useful to him in defining his own goals, often challenging existing models of photography. But Evans defines his own style of photography within the limits of the medium itself, thereby breaking with the convention of 'art' photography of his predecessors, Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Weston. Stieglitz's photographs appear closer to painting, - a consequence of the albumin process which created a blurred and painterly effect in his photographs. Weston's photographs are perceived within a sensibility refined by painting; texture, composition and spatial tension. 'It is a photograph but we read it as a painting'.[80] The severity, austerity and rigour which characterise Evans' pictures coincide with his professed aims of the practice of photography and display his adherence to its constraints. It is this recognition of the properties of photography, rather than the tradition of painting through which he defines his expression.

The rise of popular photography 1888-1939, (London: Ash and Grant, 1977), p.6.

[79]Letter to Hanns Skolle, in Walker Evans at Work, p.24.

[80]Edmundo Desnoes. 'Cuba Made Me So', in Marshall Blonsky. (ed) On Signs, (Great Britain: Basil Blackwell 1985), p.396.

In 1930 he began to photograph nineteenth century American houses, at Lincoln Kirstein's instigation.[81] Evidence of his direct and austere approach to photography is revealed in these images - an aspect which remained consistent in his approach to photography throughout his career, and which he used during his involvement with the FSA. In 1933 he was employed to take photographs in Cuba for Carleton Beals's book The Crime of Cuba. (1933), and in 1934 he was commissioned to photograph the Museum of Modern Art's collection of 'African Negro Art'.

From 1935 to 1937 he was employed as a photographer for the Farm Security Administration. Walker Evans's contribution to the project was enormous, and in developing his own documentary style, he challenged the boundaries of the documentary approach, and to some extent, Stryker's notions of it. During the time that he was employed by the organisation, he maintained a degree of independence from it. His photographs, and his intentions in making them are distinct from the majority of photographs produced for the FSA by other photographers. As he says, 'I think I was photographing against the style of the time, against salon photography, against beauty photography, against art photography .... I was a maverick outsider'.[82]

The FSA provided the material conditions for his activities, rather than its purpose or rationale - at least as far as Evans was concerned. His involvement with the FSA was helpful to him in defining his own intentions as a photographer, and his collaboration in the project gave rise to his book American Photographs, published in 1938. In this book the sequence of images is intended to communicate certain themes, for instance interiors/exteriors, and American architecture. The pictures are characterised by a consistent point of view, and his interest in social information, the vernacular culture of American society, is communicated as a further theme in the book. The gloss of objects, like rocking chairs and wood

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[81] Lincoln Kirstein was director of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

[82] Paul Cummings. Tape-recorded interview with Walker Evans, (October 13, 1971), pp.11-12. Typescript, Archives of American Art.

fired stoves are used as indicators of their utilitarian function. 'People and their artifacts are mutually possessed by each other'.[83] Much of the content of these pictures is similar to the subject matter commissioned by the FSA, like Sharecroppers, street scenes and interiors of houses, but it also includes photographs taken in Cuba in 1933 as well as pictures of buildings, verifying his interest in American architecture.

In 1938 an exhibition of Evans's work was shown at the Museum of Modern Art, accompanied by the monograph American Photographs.

The FSA owned the pictures he made, but did not control his use of them. It must be noted that the publication American Photographs is in no sense a product of the FSA. In the introductory note to the book, Evans relinquishes all ties with political organisations. He states, 'the pictures are presented without sponsorship or connection with the policies, aesthetic or political of any of the institutions publications or government agencies for which some of the work has been done'.[84]

By 1940 he had left the FSA and began to pursue his interest in the tenant farmer series, commissioned by Fortune and later published in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

From 1945 to 1965 he was employed as the only staff photographer for Fortune. His work was presented in the magazine as 'artistic features', much like the style of the photo - essay adopted by Life magazine at the time. He also controlled the selection and layout of his images. The sequence of images, which he used initially in American Photographs was a dialectic he continued to employ in subsequent years in Fortune.

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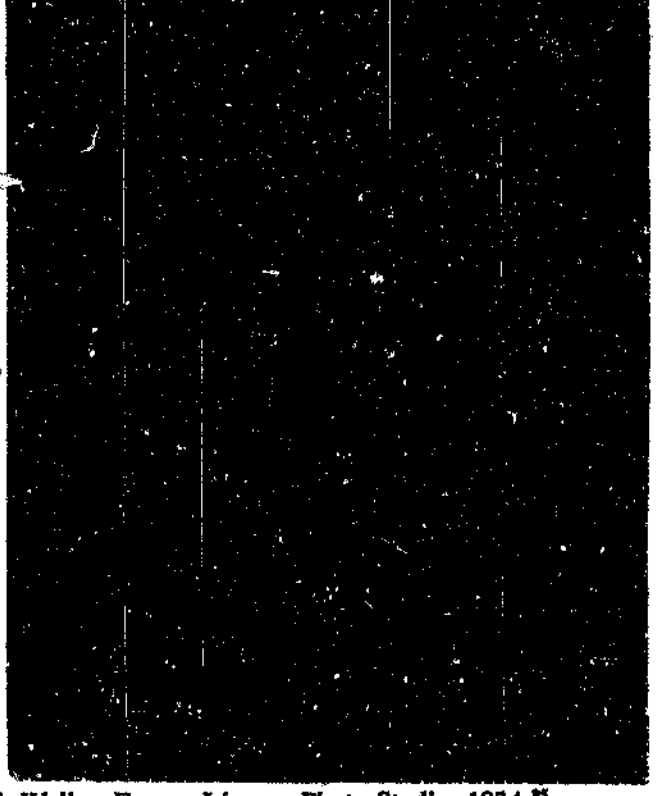
[83]Max Kozloff. 'Signs of Light. Walker Evans' American Photographs'. Artforum. Vol 27, April 1989, p.115.

[84]Walker Evans, American Photographs, unpaginated.

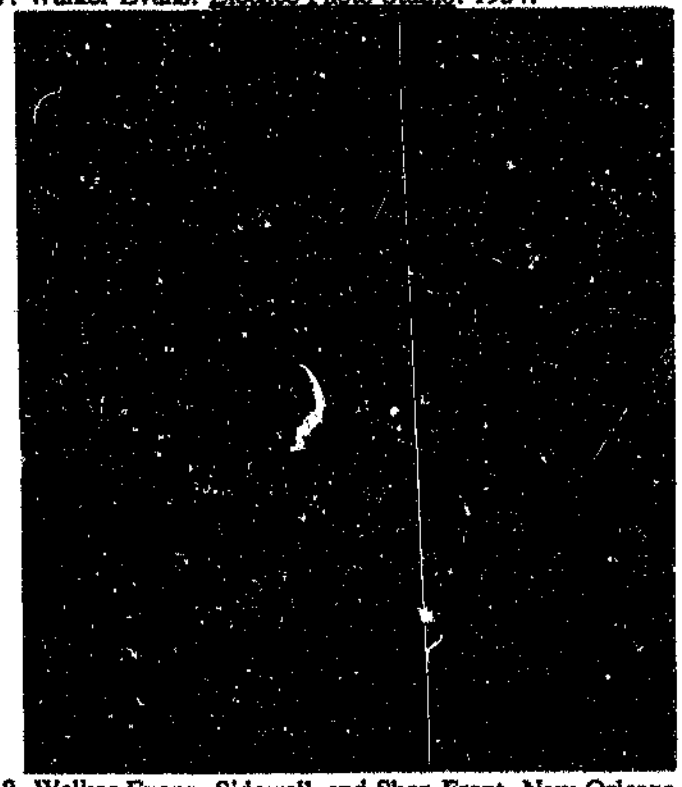
By 1970 he was making numerable photographs of sign boards, subject matter which was used in images from American Photographs, for example, Licence Photo-Studio, (1934) [figure 7] and Sidewalk and Shop Front, New Orleans, (1933) [figure 8] verifying his interest in linguistic and visual notations. In this way, he draws attention to the photographic act of remaking the image, the subsequent presentation, indicates the pictures as a part of his own ironic construction.

In the composition of his pictures, vertical and horizontal elements are photographed parallel to the picture plan, thereby communicating stillness in the image, for example, Sidewalk and Shop Front, New Orleans. [figure 8]. The shop front is taken parallel to the picture plane. The doorway functions as a frame within a frame, and the striped pole and striped facade heighten the symmetry of the image. Using the pictorial construction of the picture, Evans emphasises his attitude to the subject. The predominance of eye-level vantage points encourages a sense of balance and rectilinearity. He strove for clarity of representation, rarely photographing from extremely high or low angles, nor did he use strong lighting techniques for creating dramatic effects. Rather he preferred natural lighting, often waiting for precise lighting conditions when the texture of objects was most evident. In this way he was able to heighten photographic detail in his photographs. His images communicate order and balance. His subjects were never chosen for their inherent drama, but rather as cultural and historical referents and for the pictorial logic he wanted them to satisfy.

His consistently frontal approach anchors his subjects within the photograph, emphasising the sense of order conveyed in the image. At a time of political chaos, Evans gave a sense of physical stability to what he photographed. This is typical of both the exterior photographs of streets, like Main Street Block, Selma, Alabama, (1936), [figure 9] and interior scenes, such as Washstand and Kitchen of Floyd Burroughs' home, Hale Country, Alabama, Summer, 1936', [figure 10]. These photographs, taken from a middle distance view, exemplify his objectivity



7. Walker Evans. Licence Photo-Studio. 1934.[85]



8. Walker Evans. Sidewalk and Shop Front, New Orleans. 1933.[86]

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[85]Evans, American Photographs, Part 1, Illustration No. 1.

[86]Evans, American Photographs, Part 1, Illustration No. 5.

of treatment, what he terms the 'non-appearance of an author'.[87] It is these qualities in Walker Evans' photographs which Stryker believed were the elements of the doctrine of documentary photography as established by the Farm Security Administration. In these images Evans acknowledges the existence of the viewer, but he does not seek to emphasise the latter's physical proximity or possible intrusion into the scene he records. The paraphernalia of jugs, towels and chairs elaborate on the existence of the subject. The objects in these interiors create a perception of the personal space inhabited by the individual. In the interiors which are absent of a subject, the presence of a viewer is the implied subject of the scene. It is also significant that images of this sort, interiors absent of a subject, were particular to Walker Evans. His pictures of billboards, junkyards, signs, main streets, walls and rooms served to enlarge the usable visual tradition in photography, the subject matter of the ubiquitous and the typical which he defined as part of the subject matter of the documentary genre.

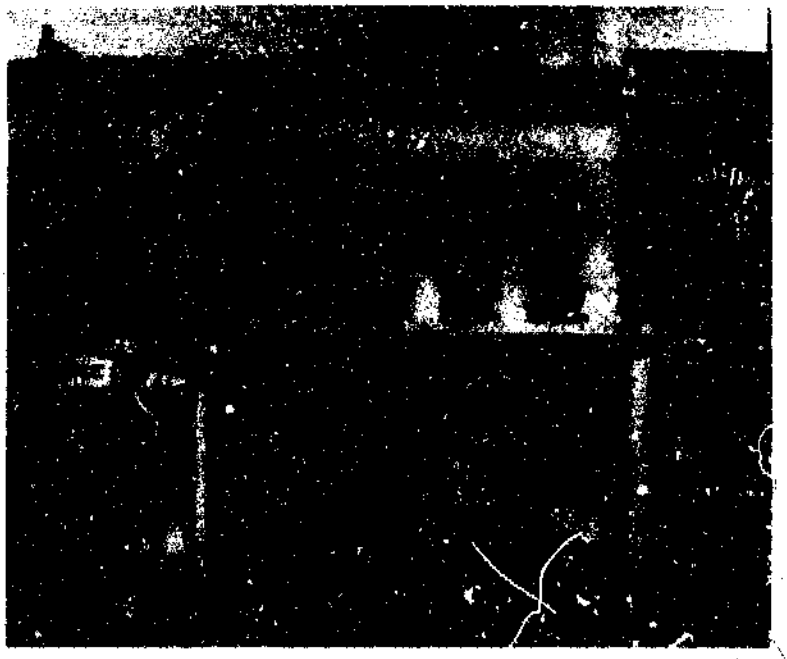
He often photographed several versions of a scene, using differing lenses or cameras. He became aware that the position the photographer takes up in the making of an image determines the photographer's understanding of his subject or scene. For example, by standing back from the subject, or by using a wide angle lens, the subject can be dominated by or function in relation to his environment. Alternatively, by moving closer to the subject - by allowing him to fill the whole frame of the picture, the audience's attention is focused on the subject and details like eyes, nose and mouth are emphasised. For example, Alabama Cotton Tenant Farmer Wife, (1936) [figure 11].

At a time when smaller, easier to handle cameras were becoming popular, with faster shutters and film speeds, Evans preferred the 8" x 10" view camera. 'The large format camera is considered to be the trademark of Evans' technique',[88] In many of his images, the subjects are formally arranged for the picture, implying a

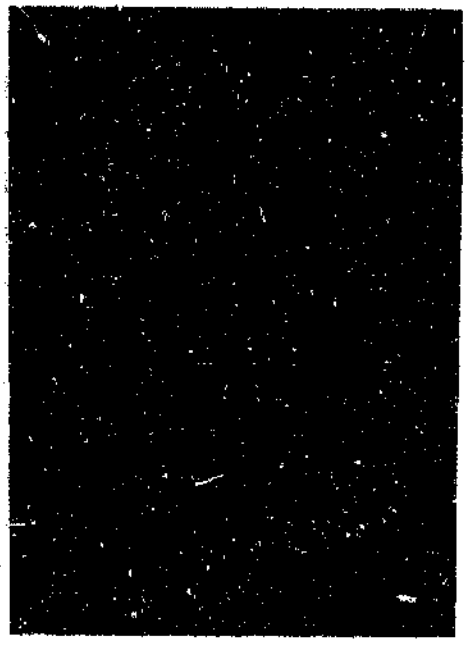
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[87] Leslie Katz. 'Interview with Walker Evans'. Art in America, Vol 59, March 1971, p.83.

[88] Leslie Baier. 'Visions of Fascination and Despair: The Relationship between Walker Evans and Robert Frank'. Art Journal, Vol 41, Spring 1981, p.55.



9. Walker Evans. Main Street Block, Selma, Alabama. 1936.[89]



10. Walker Evans. Washstand and Kitchen of Floyd Burroughs' Home, Hale Country, Alabama. 1936.[90]

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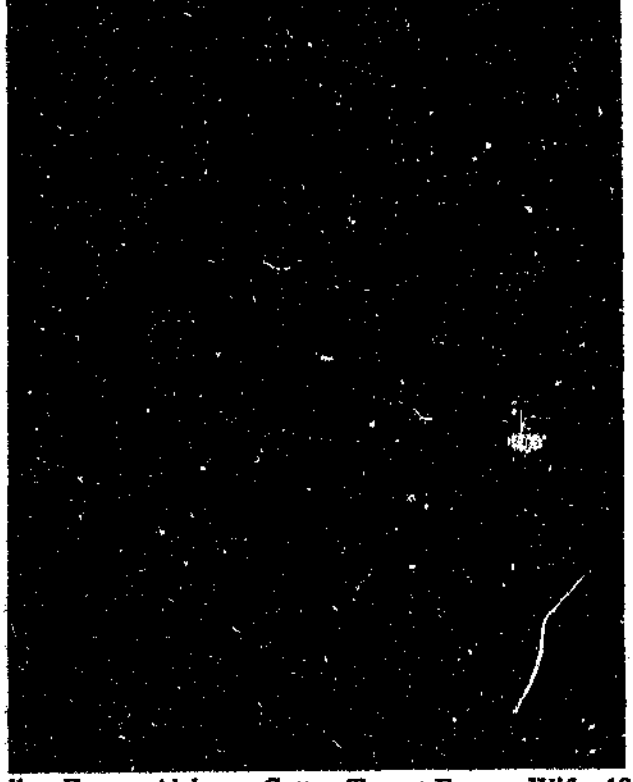
[89]Evans, American Photographs, Part 2, Illustration No. 30.

[90]James Curtis. Mind's Eye, Mind's Truth. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), p.41.

sense of occasion associated with having a family photograph taken. They are rarely engaged in activities nor do they interact with one another. Rather their attention is directed towards the camera, thereby implying the formality of the situation. This can be attributed to the large format camera. The camera was cumbersome to move, placed on a tripod, the height of which would have to be adjusted. A separate sheet of film would be loaded for each picture, and a light reading would have to be taken off the subject prior to the making of the picture. Thus the large format camera demands a slow and painstaking approach. It is for this reason that his subjects are never taken off guard, and this distinguishes his photographs from those of photographers who use smaller hand held cameras, for example Robert Frank and Helen Levitt. It is indicative of his method of deliberation and mediation.

It must be acknowledged that he might have to set up the tripod in a number of positions, until he was satisfied with the view he had chosen. That view would include or exclude certain elements which would communicate his interpretation of the scene, for example, Alabama Tenant Farmer Family Singing Hymns. (1936). [figure 12]. The inclusion of a wooden clapboard house in the background refers to a specific example of American architectural construction and also refers to the subject's environment. Here Evans draws attention to situations which are specifically American, verifying one of the book's themes, that they are indeed American photographs.

In Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, Evans abandons the seemingly dispassionate middle-distance vantage point and cool tonalities that characterised the architectural street scenes of American Photographs in favour of close-ups of Sharecroppers. In these portraits the subjects are aware of the camera and often stare directly at it. Thus they insist on direct examination of the subject. These images make explicit the complicity between the subject and Evans. 'Any portrait photograph is the material trace of a lived through transaction between photographer and subject. But the relationship between these two protagonists - - - the one behind and the other in front of the camera - is typically predicated on an uneven distribution of power. The subject is made to pose and perform like a



11. Walker Evans. Alabama Cotton Tenant Farmer Wife. 1936.[91]



12. Walker Evans. Alabama Tenant Farmer Family Singing Hymns. 1936.[92]

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[91]Evans, American Photographs, Part 1, Illustration No. 14.

[92]Evans, American Photographs, Part 1, Illustration No. 22.

marionette as the photographer brings him or her into pictorial existence'.[93] For example, Alabama Cotton Tenant Farmer Wife, (1936), [figure 11]. The woman's direct stare both engages the viewer and keeps him at bay. Her look is sceptical, perhaps hostile. This is significant in that many FSA images are characterised by frontality in the taking of the picture. This 'look' was intended to endorse their notions about poverty, light, exploitation and geometry. 'Their pictures were often used as propaganda for the agency, but it was propaganda in the best sense - that is, the photographs focused attention on real problems and hinted at real solutions'.[94] In this image Evans seems to go against the intentions of the FSA in order that his images would not be propagandist and also to communicate the dignity of his subjects, despite their poverty.

Although the purpose of the FSA was political, to Evans it was an opportunity to take photographs independently of editors, clients and bureaucrats. He states, 'I didn't like the label that I unconsciously earned of being a social protest artist. I never took it upon myself to change the world'.[95] Evans remains rooted in the documentary genre because of the subject matter he selected and his professed objectivity - what is inescapable, however, is his personal intervention in the photograph.

Robert Frank has long acknowledged that his aims and achievements in The Americans owed much to the example of Walker Evans. He claimed that Evans's photographs, in the publications, American Photographs (1938) and Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (1941), had most influenced him. It is in the structure of The Americans that the influence of Walker Evans' books is most apparent. However, their respective styles of photography are radically different.

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[93]David Joselit. 'The Power of the Portraitist'. Art in America, Vol 79, September 1990, p.180.

[94]Hurley, p.ix.

[95]Walker Evans. 'The Thing Itself is Such a Secret and so Unapproachable'. Image, Vol 17, No 4, December 1974, p.14.

The works of European photographers such as Bill Brandt, Brassaï, and Henri Cartier-Bresson are also significant; he borrowed and extended their themes to reflect his own responses to the atmosphere of postwar America in The Americans. In his photographs, Frank reflects the uneasiness which characterised those times. Cold War anxieties contributed to the rise of anti-communism. Identification of communists via witch hunts instilled fear in many people; politically and socially a growing pre-occupation with anti-communism came to be reflected in every niche of American culture. Artists, actors and writers were the target of many such investigations. Art itself was vulnerable, and some styles were labelled subversive. George Dondero, a conservative Michigan Republican, explained in 1949 that 'expressionism, abstractionism, (sic) futurism, dadaism and cubism were the same subversion-on-canvas used to sap Russia's old regime and now plied by Lenin's heirs against other nations'. He felt that Modern art was communist because it was not accessible to the masses and it did not reveal the positive aspects of society, 'our cheerful smiling people, and our great material progress. Art which does not portray our beautiful country in plain, simple terms that everyone can understand breeds dissatisfaction. Its creators and promoters are our enemies'.[96]

Conservatives, in the fifties, regarded President Roosevelt's New Deal policies at best as restricting entrepreneurs and free enterprise, and at worst, Fascist and Communist. The HUAC was convinced that Communist Party Headquarters were intimately linked to the New Deal's inner sanctums. This was clearly not the perception of the photographers who worked for the FSA at that time. Jack Delano states in an interview with Richard Doud: '...speaking for myself, I felt that I was part of an organisation which was basically interested in the cultural values of America, which had nothing to do with politics but had to do with the Americ · tradition, with the bad things, the good things, the difficulties, the problems, the joys and inspirations and everything that went with it'.[97]

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[96]Fried, p.31.

[97]Doud, p.14.

The anxiety and tensions of the time are a major focus in Frank's work, and it is perhaps not surprising that his book The Americans, published in 1959, and which exhibits his personal perception and expressive technique to communicate those undercurrents, was considered an attack on American patriotism and decency.

Robert Frank was born in Zurich in 1924. Living in Switzerland during the 1920s and 1930s Frank admits was a difficult time. '...if Hitler invaded Switzerland, that would be the end'.[98] He read the work of writers such as Andre Malraux, Jean Paul Sarte and Albert Camus. It was their presentation of lives connected to social and political movements which influenced him greatly.

He first worked as an apprentice for a commercial photographer, H Segesser in Zurich. From 1942-45 he worked for three other photographers and a film company, before moving to Paris. It was there that he produced a book entitled 40 Fotos which included portraits, landscapes, reportage, and studio still lives. This book demonstrated Frank's skills as a commercial photographer, but there is little anticipation of the style that would characterise his work during the 1950s, for instance, extreme camera angle, dramatic lighting conditions and prominent use of grain in his prints. It was on the strength of this work that he was employed by Alexey Brodovitch at Harper's Bazaar in 1947, the year he emigrated to America.

Although he received recognition for his commercial work, he preferred to pursue his own projects. This led him on a self-financed three month trip to Peru and Bolivia. On his return, he continued to work commercially for Junior Bazaar, McCalls's and other magazines. He was invited to join the Paris based picture agency Magnum in 1950, but this was declined for a Guggenheim fellowship, resulting in the publication The Americans. Soon after this book was published Frank ceased still photography, and directed films. These include Pull My Daisy (1959), The Sin of Jesus (1961), OK End Here (1963), Me and My Brother (1965-68), Life Dances on ... (1980), and Home Improvements (1985), a diaristic

[98] William S. Johnson. 'Public Statements /Private Views', in David Featherstone, (ed) Observations, p.88.

video-tape. His photographs have been used on the album covers and sleeves of the Rolling Stones records, Exile on Main Street, and Cocksucker Blues.

It is the publication The Americans which most comprehensively displays Frank's work in the genre of documentary photography, and the manner in which he extends its parameters. His decision to make films was prompted by his feeling that he would merely be repeating previously accomplished variations in still photogra y. The moving picture was for him a way of extending his vision, and a new interest in multiple imagery began when he started making films. Significantly, he focused on his own life and environment in his films, rather than the urban scenes and strangers which characterised his subject matter in The Americans. He describes his recent work as 'trying to show my interior against the landscape I'm in'.[99] His approach to photography, as seen in The Americans, is paralleled in such films as Life Dances On, which had no apparent beginning or end, but rather appears as a slice of life, much like the fragmentary quality of his stills.

In The Americans, Frank explored many of the subjects and themes that had previously fascinated Evans; cars, luncheonettes, graveyards, and street furniture. But The Americans is by no means a pastiche of Evans' work. Frank transformed the subject matter according to his own particular vision in order to create images whose power stems from their combination of deliberate irony and unsettling mystery. His pictures of jukeboxes, flags, politicians and roadside entertainment indicate further subjects which are not used by Walker Evans, nor are they associated with the content of FSA images. These he used to reflect aspects of American society, such as, the jukebox which stands for popular music, the flag stands both as a symbol of unity and, in some cases, reflects the dislocation of American life. For example, Fourth of July - Jay, New York, depicts a patched flag, implying a visual parallel for the disintegration of American society as he perceived it.

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[99] Anne Wilkes Tucker. 'It's the Misinformation that's Important', in Anne Wilkes Tucker. (ed) Robert Frank, from New York to Nova Scotia. (Boston: Little Brown and Company, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1986), p.100.

In much the same way as the FSA's objectives were to accurately record the effects of the Depression during the 1930s, Frank suggests in his statement of intent in The Americans a similar attitude to truthfulness in the depiction of his scenes of America. In the application for the fellowship, Frank stated that his aim was, 'To produce an authentic contemporary document, the visual impact should be such as will nullify explanation... My effort was to express it simply and without confusion'.[100] However, his style of photography varies greatly from the images produced by Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee and other FSA photographers.

In Evans's American Photographs, and Frank's The Americans, both photographers postulate what it is to be an American, and reflect their perceptions of 'Americanness'. Evans recognised American traditions, values and practices which he communicates positively in his photographs. 'I think one of the things that struck me so strongly about Walker Evans' work for example, was how you can see something which might seem sordid, but see the beauty in it, and see it composed in a beautiful way, so that the kind of photograph is an artistic expression rather than merely a document of what happened to be in front of everybody'.[101] Robert Frank's pictures indicate a far more negative perception of America. The subjects in his pictures appear alienated from one another and the audience, either by physical or psychological barriers. Through the inclusion of artificial lighting, pools of light and shadow exist in his pictures, communicating a sense of gloom, for example, Bar -New York City, [figure 13]. As Jack Kerouac observes in the Introduction to The Americans, 'After seeing these pictures you end up finally not knowing any more whether a jukebox is sadder than a coffin'.[102] The idea of being an American, as distinct from English or German for example, was not clear and Frank capitalises on this aspect of American society in his photographs, while Evans avoids it, i.e. Walker Evans'

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[100]Robert Frank. 'A Statement' U S Camera, 1958, p.115, in Nathan Lyons. (ed) Photographers on Photography. A Critical Anthology, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966), p.66.

[101]Doud, p.15.

[102]Robert Frank. The Americans, (New York: Aperture, 1959), p.5.

inclusion of images of billboards refer to popular American imagery and in the case of Torn Movie Poster (1930), the letters S A are implicit of the abbreviation USA, and also denote locales. Images of w[illegible]away top soil is a sign of erosion, a freshly made grave if a child, the sign of a p[illegible]mature death. Architecture and the facial features of his subjects denote signs of a more vast landscape.

In Robert Frank's publication, the photographs are metaphoric, communicating his despair, 'a car is a casket, a trolley a prison, a flag a shroud'.[103] Images of cars are associated with the presence of new highways and service stations. They indicate how the American landscape was altered during the 1950s and imply the constant mobility which took place. As Frank himself observes, "This is a land in which people are still camping, instead of long ago settled. In the 1950s the automobile dominated the American Scene. It was every family's first major possession. It offered transportation, status, recreation, shelter and escape. Stickers and dangling objects advertised political and religious beliefs'.[104]

Evans concentrates on aspe[illegible]f American life which define American traditions and conventions, for exam[illegible]e way of life the architecture, the decoration of houses. Frank, on the contrary, recognised and depicted the continual mobility of the people, and the lack of American traditions that seemed to threaten the order of society. The increase of foreign immigrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth century changed America dramatically. Thus Frank's images testify to the examination and the re-examination of the nation's character. The title of his book implies a specific group of people, unified geographically, and by common cultural symbols, like the flag. However, through his photographic style, the tilting of the camera and his printing style, he communicates a sense of the disparity of American society. 'Even when signs appear, to denote other purposes

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[103]Tod Papageorge. 'Walker Evans and Robert Frank: An Essay on Influence', Exhibition Catalogue, (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1981), p.8.

[104]Tucker, p.95.



13. Robert Frank. Bar - New York City.[105]

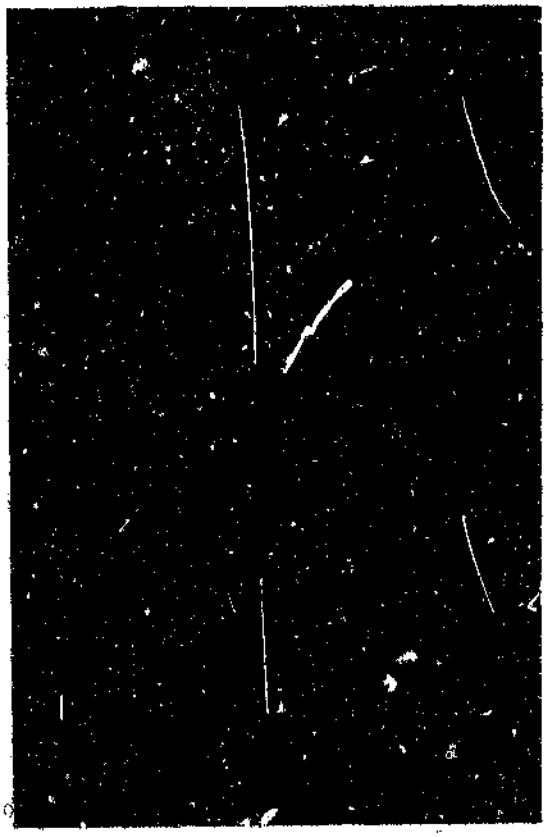
[105]Frank, The Americans, p.97.

(as they would in Evans), they exist here only to incriminate the make up of the culture and people's acceptance of it'.[106]

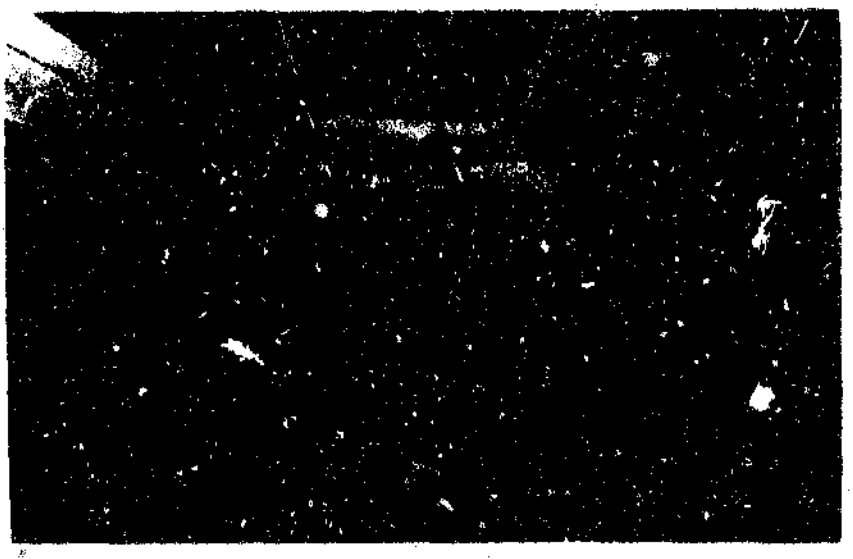
The frontal image, contained by the limits of the frame, which characterises Evans' work is dispensed with by Frank. Subjects are positioned at the edges of the frame, frequently cut off by it, because of the angle he takes up in the making of the picture. Photographic detail, which characterise Walker Evans' photographs, is substituted for blurred silhouettes. This is the result of the use of high speed film in low lighting conditions which creates a grainy picture. By consistently tilting the camera, verticals in the picture converge, and the subsequent impression is one of disorder. Combined with exaggerated grain and shallow depth of field, the ominous quality of the subject is conveyed, for example, Bar-Gallup, New Mexico (1955) [figure 14]. The silhouette of the figure on the right looms above the eye level of the viewer, and the facial features of the figure in the background are obscured by the shadow of his hat.

Unlike Evans, his subjects do not seem to be aware of his presence, they do not interact with him, nor therefore with the viewer. In many of his photographs the viewer is made aware of events beyond the camera's field of vision. Frank deliberately calls attention to the viewer's presence in order to frustrate, not only the viewer's attempt at participation, but also their ability to understand the scene depicted. In En Route from New York to Washington, Club Car, [figure 15], the slightly blurred backs of two men loom large in the foreground and act as barriers to the viewer's involvement in their private conversation. In Parade - Hoboken, [Figure 16] the parade itself is not depicted, thus preventing the viewer's involvement in the activity which takes place. The subject in this image is also prevented from participating in the event, since her vision of it is obscured by the American flag. Where the aim of the FSA was one of information, Frank, in his images, seems to subvert the photographic act into one of exclusion. 'He repeatedly appears to be attempting to find a way to make a statement which uses the presumed authority of the camera image, its implicit claim to capture not only

[106] Max Kozloff. 'Signs of Light. Walker Evans' American Photographs', p.118.



14. Robert Frank. Bar-Gallup, New Mexico. 1955.[107]



15. Robert Frank. En Route from New York to Washington, Club Car.[108]

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[107]Frank, The Americans, p.69.

[108]Frank, The Americans, p.27.

the surfaces but the deeper essence of the external world, to articulate an authentic personal response'.[109]

In this way, Frank comments on his impression of America at that time; a time of implicit distrust, political upheaval and an examination into un-American activities. When The Americans was first published in 1959, it was not favourably received, although one critic, James M Zanutto, concedes that Frank had a strong point of view. Jack Kerouac's introduction to the book is extremely positive, almost anticipating the criticism that would be levelled at it, he criticises the critics, 'Anybody doesnt like these pitchers dont like potry, see ? Anybody dont like potry go home see Television shots of big hatted cowboy being tolerated by kind horses'.[110] The response to Evans' book, by contrast, was positive. Thomas Dabney Mabry wrote that the work possessed 'a power which reveals a potential order and morality at the very moment that it pictures the ordinary, the vulgar, and the casually corrupt'.[111] It is through comments such as these that the range of Evans' subject matter is indicated; and this could be one of the reasons critics condemned Frank's work as 'one-sided' and propagandist. Arthur Goldsmith comments that it is not about America, and that the prints are flawed by grain, blur and muddy exposures. He states that his impression of the book is sloppy.[112]However, Jack Kerouac's exclamation, in the Introduction to The Americans conflicts with Goldsmith's view, 'The humor, (sic) the sadness, the EVERYTHING -ness and American -ness of these pictures!'.[113]

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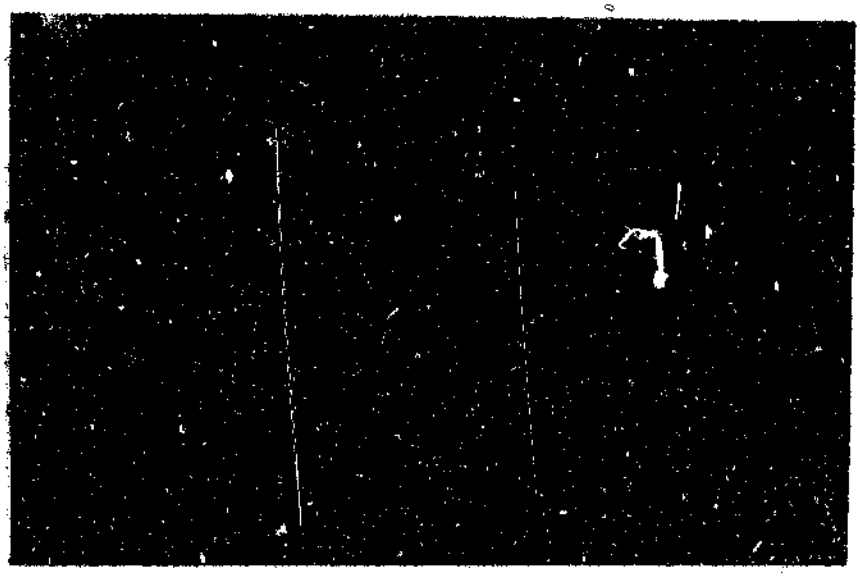
[109]Charles Hagen 'Candid Camera'. Artforum, Vol 24, Summer 1986, p.116.

[110]Frank, The Americans, p.9.

[111]John Szarkowski, American Photographs, Exhibition catalogue, (New York: Museum of Modern Art. 1973), p.15-16.

[112]H M Kinzel and Arthur Goldsmith, Review of The Americans, in 'An Off Beat View of the USA', in Tucker pp.36-37.

[113]Frank, The Americans, p.5.



16. Robert Frank. Parade - Hoboken.[114]

[114]Frank, The Americans, P.13.

This, ironically is Frank's modus operandi, the means by which he communicates his fragmentary view. It owes much to the intellectual atmosphere of the time, stimulated by American Abstract painting, an influence attributed to the Armory Show, of 1913. 'It excited the young painters and sculptors, awakened them to fresh possibilities, and created in the public at large a new image of modernity.

Paintings which had only a vague connection with visible nature were exhibited for the first time, and were recognised as 'a direct means of conveying feeling....' the image acquired an aspect of fantasy or of some obscure region of thought'.[115] Instead of giving an account of America, as Evans did, he provides only glimpses and impressions of it. Max Kozloff observes that America was Frank's 'adopted' country, this being one of the reasons he could make such a statement about it. As a European, he is able to make a personal statement which is as much about America as his inability to connect with the country. Thus a fundamental difference is revealed between the two photographers. The older Evans identifies strongly with the culture, revealing his ties to the country, the younger photographer criticises the country of his adoption, and by implication Evans view of it. As if anticipating the criticism that would be levelled at The Americans, Frank comments in his statement of intent, that 'opinion often consist of a kind of criticism'.[116] His images contrary to Evans, confirm the dejectedness and estrangement he himself felt. His view, unlike Evans's, is cynical.

Despite similarities in the subject matter and the structure of their publications, and their firm routing in the documentary genre, the analysis of their stylistic differences serves to indicate the diversity of expression of each of the artists. Robert Frank, through his photographic style, challenged the boundaries of photography, and thereby extended its expressive possibilities. He was able to dispense with the clarity of photographic detail, the dispassionate middle-distance

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[115]Meyer Shapiro. Modern Art, 19th and 20th Centuries, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1978), p.136.

[116]Frank, 'A Statement' in Lyons, p.66.

view, and expressive facial features, adopted by Evans to communicate his perception of the thirties. Instead, Frank provides an alternative to Evans' views by utilising blurred silhouettes and strong lighting which he used to serve his own expressive purposes. In so doing, he makes his counterstatement a criticism of the older artist's work. In these differences are some of the limits and distinctions of the term documentary photography as it evolved during the 1930s.

CHAPTER 3
DAVID GOLDBLATT AND BOB GOSANI

The criteria and context which characterised documentary photography of 1930s America, and which influenced Evans and Frank, is pertinent to the examination of the work of David Goldblatt and Bob Gosani.

Photographs by David Goldblatt and Bob Gosani have been selected in order to reveal their perceptions of similar and differing aspects of South African society. David Goldblatt deals with a range of subjects of varying application, such as environments in Soweto, the transportation network from KwaNdebele to Pretoria and middle class life in Boksburg. Bob Gosani's work differs in that he photographed aspects of his own people, culture and society exclusively for Drum. Both present to the viewer an historical depiction of South Africa, but rather than an objective record, each communicates their personal style of photography.

David Goldblatt was born in Randfontein in 1930. He matriculated in 1948 at Krugersdorp High School and subsequently worked for a photographer. He was interested in magazine photography and impressed by the picture magazines of the time: Life, Picture Post and Look. It was his intention to become a magazine photographer when he left school. However, magazine photography was virtually unknown at that time, and it was only 10 years later that he commenced a career as a professional photographer. He became Associate Editor of Tatler magazine, and subsequently worked for Vogue, South Africa, and later Vogue International. At that time he was photographing and recording Afrikaners and mine workers, resulting in the publications, Some Afrikaners Photographed and On the Mines. In the seventies he worked on a number of projects, one of which was in Soweto. Another was the white middle class environments of Johannesburg's northern suburbs and Hillbrow, and in the early 1980s he was engaged with the middle class white community of Boksburg which resulted in the publication In Boksburg. 'They were a latter-day exposition of the same underlying values and world view

of what I knew of Randfontein when I grew up there'.[117] More recently, The Transported was published, which is a photographic essay on homeland transport.

Goldblatt describes his work as 'critical observation', as distinct from 'social documentary photography'. Goldblatt sees 'social documentary' as the work of photographers who are concerned with exposing social conditions. Particularly those of the poor. He believes that its intention is to change those conditions for the better.[118] That kind of photography, he states, has a propagandist value, albeit a 'good' one. Beaumont Newhall, defined 'documentary photography' in 1... as 'factual' records made for 'definite sociological purposes ...'[119] In this respect Goldblatt's opinion about the documentary genre closely resembles Evans's, as indicated in the previous chapter. It is the candidate's contention that Goldblatt's purposefulness, as exhibited in his construction of images and his austere presentation of images is the result of Evans's influence. Many of Goldblatt's statements and opinions about his own work are frequently, similar to t... Evans'. Both reject the term documentary photography for describing their work.[120] Both have a preference for an image which is hard and firm;[121] expressed by Goldblatt as a preference for images which are 'lean'. However, his admiration for other photographers, such as Eugene Atget, Paul Strand, Edward Weston, Lee Friedlander, and Alfred Stieglitz, must also be acknowledged as lesser influences.

While Goldblatt accepts that photographs might record history, that they are in a sense 'documents', he believes that there is a prevalent subjective element, which is his vision, his understanding and his perception. It is these elements which he uses to inflect comment in his photographs. He states that his work has to do

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[117]Joyce Ozynski. 'Joyce Ozynski Interviews David Goldblatt'. ADA, 1st and 2nd Quarters, 1990, p.10.

[118]William Kentridge. 'Interview with David Goldblatt'. Ch... 4 Production, (Great Britain, 1986).

[119]Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs, p.190.

[120]... Chapter 2, p.29.

[121]cf. Chapter 2, p.33.

with social conditions, but his concerns are with the nature and underlying values of the social milieu rather than with the exposure of those conditions. This statement, however, is at variance with the work he produces - since his concerns are with the preconditions of struggle. His subject matter, Afrikaners, the people of KwaNdebele, and images taken in Soweto are strongly related to prevailing social conditions, the result of Verwoerdian legislation and its effect on South African society. It is those distinctions between Afrikaner, White and Black communities which he defines in his photographs. The content which he focuses on is inseparable from the meaning generated.

Ivor Powell states of Goldblatt's work that it is a self-consciously detached documentary style. Powell observes 'David Goldblatt is not just a documentarist. In The Transported he has - in much the same way as he did years ago in his book On the Mines - created an overwhelming metaphor and mood by purely formal means'.[122] Steven Watson states, 'His work as a whole goes to show that there is as much, if not more, evidence of the condition of a culture in a study of a Vibracrete wall - in the malady of its face - brick texture - as there might be in the action shot of a hurled brick. Like very few others before him, he strikes one as actually having looked at the evidence of South African lives .... He is in fact the finest cultural historian we possess'.[123]

In both these quotes, Powell and Watson suggest that Goldblatt's work inflects social comment in the kinds of images he produces. Both imply that his work contains the photographer's subjective response and attitude, and is not only passive documentation. Steven Watson reveals Goldblatt's propensity for observing subjects in an inactive rather than active state. It is this quality which is one of the hallmarks of Goldblatt's style. Another characteristic which Powell and Watson identify is the inclusion of objects or elements which stand as metaphors, and which communicate specific meaning within the photographic image: thus

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[122]Ivor Powell. 'The Chillingly ordinary plight of the nightriders'. Weekly Mail, August 11-18 1989, p.24. Ivor Powell is a journalist and art critic for The Weekly Mail.

[123]Steven Watson. 'A version of Melancholy'. ADA 1st and 2nd quarters, 1990, p.38.

identifying Goldblatt's propensity for focusing on quintessential features about the societies he photographs.

What excites him, he states, is the way the photograph comes to stand for what is out there, confirming the 'documentary' quality of the photograph, suggesting that photographs imply some degree of truth. 'It's not something I do with my hand as a painter, it's not something that I do with my mind as a writer, it's something that happens by way of a photographic process, which requires that the film take on itself some aspect of reality out there which is inexorably related to that reality'.[124] It is this notion of truthfulness which characterises the genre of documentary photography. 'Photographic documents isolated and defined actuality; they possessed a quality of authenticity that led to their use as evidence'.[125] Farm Security Administration photographers' intentions differ from those of Goldblatt's since their images attempted to appeal to the viewer, and thus alter the plight of the subjects. Goldblatt states that he does not think that his photographs are politically effective, and that they are incapable of changing the manner in which people behave.[126]

In an interview with William Kentridge, Goldblatt comments that photography for him was a way of probing what was happening and his relationship to it. He says 'I felt a great need to protest, it seemed that the world was quite unaware of what was happening in South Africa.... I took it upon myself to tell the world'.[127] In this statement, Goldblatt seems to equivocate between his intentions of probing, - in a sense implying the exposing of certain situations, and of observing, without subjective coloration.

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[124]Kentridge, Channel 4 Production.

[125]Anne Wilkes Tucker. 'Photographic facts and 30s America', in David Featherstone, (ed) Observations, p.41.

[126]Candidate's interview with David Goldblatt, April 1990.

[127]Kentridge, Channel 4 Production.

He asserts that he cannot go along with the doctrine of documentary photography because the experience of taking the photograph is of paramount importance to him, and the print is secondary to the meaning and circumstances which gave rise to it. He says there is a gap between the initial experience of taking the photograph and the product itself.[128] Goldblatt here seems to contradict himself since his photography is the product of that experience and the means by which he makes his statement. After all, it is the photograph which he offers for public consumption; he supposedly edits and decides which photographs to put out.

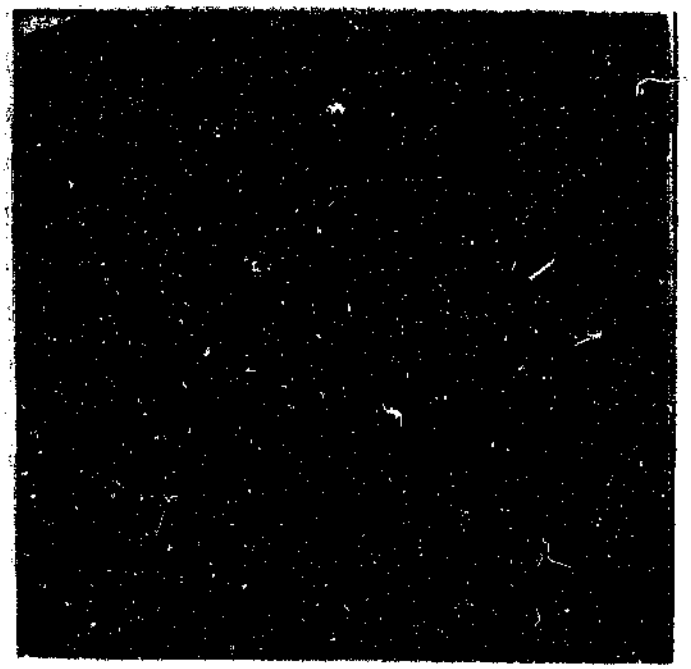
Taking note of David Goldblatt's intentions and the response to the work as outlined, it is clear that his photographs are in a sense 'documents'. However, in addition to the analogical content itself (the scene, object or interior), it must be acknowledged that Goldblatt's treatment of the image, such as the inclusion of objects, the range of subjects he uses, and the position he takes up in photographing the scene are of primary importance to the meaning of the image.

David Goldblatt's photographs bear testimony to the social milieu of South African life. His intention to reveal aspects of commonplace life is suggested by both the environments and the subjects he photographs. The environments are not spectacular or extraordinary, in fact they are often mundane, for example, Mid-morning at a bus stop in town. [figure 16]. It is this aspect of Goldblatt's photography which sets him apart from younger South African documentary photographers, whose images are immediate, and who see their task as more explicitly political. Goldblatt states that the concerns of contemporary photographers lie in the belief that their photographs have immediate beneficial effects, or the potential for having those effects. He ratifies this statement by adding that there have been moments in history when such photographs have been enormously important, an example being the Hector Petersen photograph.[129]

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[128] Candidate's interview with David Goldblatt, 1990.

[129] Candidate's interview with David Goldblatt, April 1990.



16. David Goldblatt. Mid-morning at a bus stop in town.[130]

[130]David Goldblatt. In Boksburg. (Cape Town: The Gallery Press, 1982), Illustration No.5.

His comment that he is, 'concerned with the quiet moments in between events, rather than the events themselves',[131] is defined in his seemingly straightforward, and contemplative approach to photography. His subjects are 'ordinary' people, often photographed in passive, rather than active poses, i.e., lying on a bed, or sitting in an armchair in their homes, gazing blankly into space, for example, Margaret Mcingana at home on a Sunday afternoon, Zola, Soweto, 1970. [figure 17]. Their values and culture are communicated by the clothes they wear as well as the objects they furnish their houses with. These objects are, I believe, used consciously by Goldblatt as inducers of associations and ideas. A statue of Michelangelo's David in Chairman of the Boksburg Town Council's Management Committee, Councillor Chris Smith and Mrs Smith, at home. [figure 18], communicates as much about the subject's taste and values as the straw mat and brillo can in The peasant woman's oil lamp, Coffee Bay, Transkei, (1975) [figure 19]. These objects are frequently positioned at the edges of the frame, rarely included in their entirety, but are easily recognisable indexes of cultural values, for example, piano, chandelier, fence and table. The viewer's attention is thereby directed to the edges of the photograph, emphasising the camera's characteristic framing of a scene.

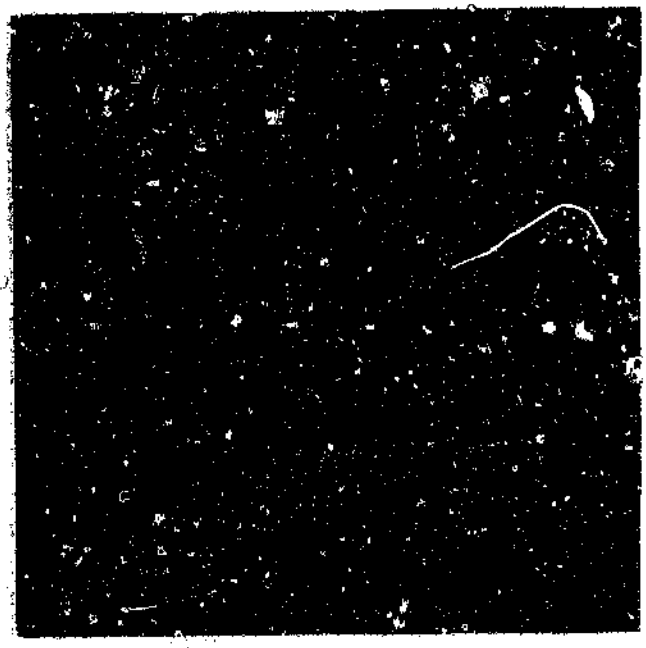
Despite the range of environments that Goldblatt is concerned with, he rarely produces images of black and white South Africans together. In the few images in which he does, it is the social and cultural differences between them which are most striking, for example, Meeting of the worker-manager Liaison Committee of the Colgate Palmolive Company. The clothing worn by the subjects in this photograph emphasise employer/employee relations, implying the social, cultural and economic disparity between them. An exception is Half-time during the amateur league soccer match at Prince George Park, in which evidence of interaction on the sports field is witnessed, albeit divided by teams. By separating images of blacks and whites, Goldblatt implies the physical separations of this society.

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[131] Linda Lasrman. "Transcripts from a Conversation with David Goldblatt". De Arte, Vol 32, 1985, p.38. Linda Lasrman was temporarily Departmental photographer in the Department of History of Art and Fine Arts at UNISA.



17. David Goldblatt. Margaret McIntyre at home on a Sunday afternoon, Zola, Soweto. 1970.[132]

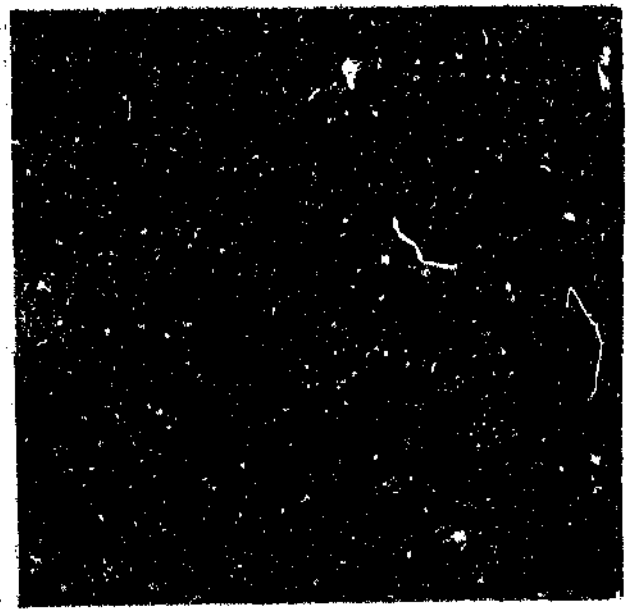


18. David Goldblatt. Chairman of the Boksburg Town Council's Management Committee, Councillor Chris Smith and Mrs Smith at Home.[133]

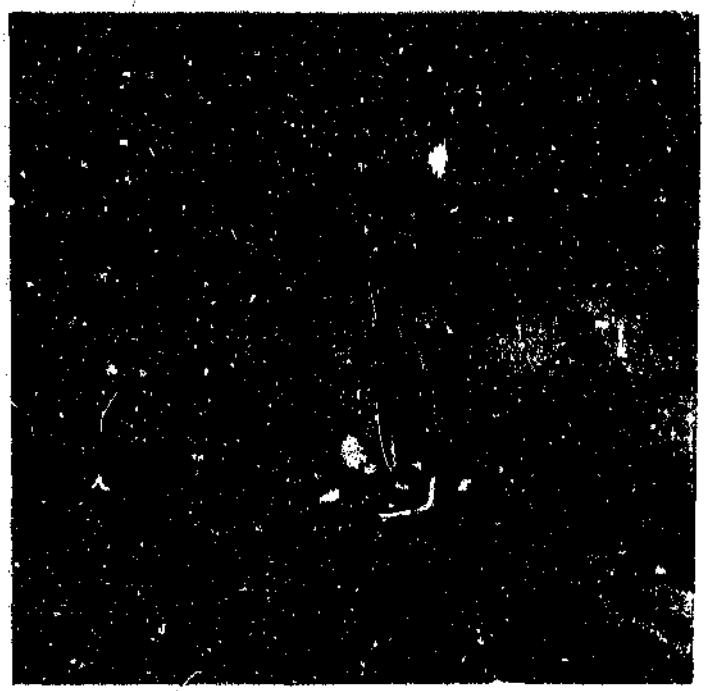
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[132]David Goldblatt and Nadine Gordimer. Lifetimes: Under Apartheid. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986), p.43.

[133]Goldblatt, In Boksburg, Illustration No 19.



19. David Goldblatt. The Peasant Woman's Oil Lamp, Coffee Bay, Transkei. 1975.[134]



20. Bob Gosani. The Americans.[135]

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[134]Goldblatt and Gordimer, Lifetimes: Under Acartheid, p.27.

[135]Jurgen Schadeberg. (ed) The Finest Photos from the Old Drum, (Johannesburg: A Bailey's African Photo Archives production, 1987), p.79.

The photographs printed in In Boksburg are most representative of Goldblatt's dispassionate and austere approach. This is emphasised by the lighting in these photographs, taking during autumn and winter, when the highveld light is at its most harsh. These images are cool and intellectual, rather than emotional. There is no aestheticising of the images, thereby creating dreary images of the interiors of Boksburg and the people who inhabit them. In contrast to the photographs of Boksburg, softer more ambient lighting is used in photographs such as A peasant woman at home, Coffee Bay, Transvaal, (1975) These images lack the harshness and austerity of the Boksburg photographs. It is in Lifetimes: Under Apartheid that the greatest range of Goldlbatt's photographs is found. These images represent some of the most diverse aspects of South African society. Ways of living are contrasted and made poignant through their juxtaposition, rather than aesthetic means. It is through the minutiae of detail in his images, the textures of roads and mountains, walls and cloth, that the fabric and values of South African societies are depicted.

Photographs by Bob Gosani contrast strongly to those of David Goldblatt. His style of photography is emotional and raw, quite unlike the detached quality of David Goldblatt's images. The context or environment in which he photographs is rarely deemed significant, rather it is the subjects who dominate the picture. An exception is The Americans, [figure 20], where the township scene contextualizes the image. However, Gosani's approach to photography is in part attributable to the editorial policies of Drum. Therefore, the aims and intentions, content and style of the magazine, and the historical framework in which it operated, are of consideration in examining his approach to photography and the pictorial construction utilised by him.

Bob Gosani was born on 19 October 1934 in Ferreirastown. He matriculated at Gordon Prescott High School. He was introduced to Drum by his uncle Henry Nxumalo, who was a journalist for it, and began working for the magazine in 1952.

Initially named The African Drum, it was co-founded by Bob Crisp, a well-known cricketer, whose concept of it was paternalistic and 'tribal'. The content was educative, including articles about soil erosion, African art and 'Music for the Tribes'. Jim Bailey, the sole proprietor of Drum sacked Crisp, and altered the magazine dramatically; using larger pictures, shorter, but better written copy, and dispensed with educational articles entirely. His aim was to produce a modern, city-oriented, investigative magazine which he named 'Drum'. The main features typically concerned crime, music and township news. Advertisements promoted correspondence colleges, mail-order clothing, toothpaste, Nugget polish in a cartoon strip format, and skin lightening cream. Bailey also organised meetings in various townships to discuss what people wished to read. Realising that he was talking to the respectable middle class, whom he assumed would be unlikely to be typical of the broad mass of his public, he then arranged meetings with the burglars of Orlando to establish their tastes in these matters. Thus he established his readership.

The intentions and objectives of Drum were social exposé, but the magazine did not adopt a revolutionary voice, rather it appealed to authority in the name of civilised values and better race relations. It must be noted that Malan's Nationalist Party had come to power in 1948, and the subsequent years were characterised by one repressive law after another; described by Brian Bunting[136] as South Africa's Nuremberg law. Between 1948 and 1960 the government legislated against mixed marriages, interracial social mixing in cinemas, restaurants and beaches. The Population Registration Act established a racial register, subjecting many to 'reclassifications'. The Group Areas Act ensured that different race groups lived in separate residential areas. The Natives Resettlement Act of 1954 began the process of forcible removals of 57 000 Africans from Sophiatown, Martindale, Newclare and Pageview, to Meadowlands and Diepkloof, some 20 kilometres from the city centre. Sophiatown was then designated a whites only area and

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[136] Brian Bunting. The Rise of the South African Reich, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp.158-93, in Michael Chapman. (ed) The Drum Decade. Stories from the 1950s, (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1989), p.184.

renamed Triomf.[137] This was of especial pertinence to Drum since Sophiatown was the yardstick of urban African source material and commercial enterprise. Graeme Addison observes, 'the location of Sophiatown functioned as an equivalent to Greenwich Village or the cafes of Montmatre in other literary upsurges'.[138]

Despite Drum's intentions of exposing and commenting on socio-political conditions at that time, its success is attributable to the fact that it did not report about these issues exclusively. Boxing matches, gangland crimes, shebeen life and the production of several 'opinion pieces' also characterised the content of Drum. 'it was a popular interpreter of trends and events, part of the pattern of township life, attending as much to boxing as to the Defiance Campaign'.[139] It also did not offer one point of view to its audience, but catered to a variety. Its independence is apparent in the series of articles 'Masterpieces in Bronze' which dealt with biographies of prominent figures associated with the ANC, as well as those who opposed it.

The writers on Drum were concerned with what was happening to their people, their values, their culture. Drum stories addressed human need and aspiration, a counter measure to a battery of inhuman laws. Michael Chapman states, 'But Drum was part of the socialising process of the fifties: it helped to record and create the voices, images and values of a black urban culture at the precise moment that Minister of Native Affairs, Verwoerd, was setting out to render untenable any permanent African presence in the so-called 'white' cities'.[140] Graeme Addison observes, 'Drum was neither a political paper nor a newspaper of record, but was an entertainment-expose-picture periodical crammed with fiction and muckraking, busty broads and huckster advertising, superficially rather like Scope magazine today. The curious thing about Drum - the problem, one could

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[137]Chapman, (ed) pp.184-85.

[138]Graeme Addison. 'Drum Beat: An examination of Drum'. Speak, Vol 1, July - August 1978, p.8.

[139]Addison, p.6.

[140]Chapman, p.187.

say - was that it appeared to function as a political instrument in spite of its tawdry, irresponsible air; that its commercial guise somewhat belied its importance as an articulator of the black experience and black aspirations'.[141]

Articles were written in short story form, often giving first hand personal accounts of the socio-political situations of the time - for example, Mr Drum goes to Jail March 1954 [figure 21] was a story by Henry Nxumalo, who deliberately got himself arrested on a trivial pass offence in order to do an expose of prison conditions. His personal testimony focused on issues of ill-treatment of African prisoners at The Fort. Accompanying the article were photographs, taken secretly from the roof of adjacent block of flats, by Bob Gosani. Arthur Maimane, one of the first black journalists to work for Drum, comments that pictures were necessary because the word of the black man didn't mean anything at that time.

Paris Match, Picture Post and Life were used by the contributors to Drum as referents, the magazine adopted a similar style; reporting and photography reflected the contemporary scene. Drum was published monthly and had a readership of approximately 80 000 by 1954, by 1955 it had expanded into the biggest non-white magazine in Africa. The fifties, according to Aggrey Klaaste, (editor of the Sowetan), were the Renaissance of black writing. It was a time when black newspapers were beginning to make an impact. Michael Chapman observes, '... the stories of Drum extend beyond their own communicative immediacy to release an extra-textual dimension of significance'.[142]

The distinguishing feature about Drum stories is their style. Drum's popularity rose through the recording of major political events as well as township life. Its success is in part attributable to this. Its racy journalistic style and the rawness and immediacy of its images were also contributing factors. The photographs

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[141] Addison, pp.5-6.

[142] Chapman, p.184.



21. Bob Gosani. Mr Drum goes to Jail. 1954.[143]

[143]Jurgen Schadeberg. The Fifties People of South Africa. (Johannesburg: Heinemann, 1987), p.92.

published in the magazine are not sentimental but rather reveal the fabric of life at that time - glamour girls, children playing, penny whistles, crime and death.

Despite its intentions of social exposé, Drum contributed to a feeling of unity for black people. 'The common denominator was the glorification of individual mobility in relation to the class values of the 'New African'. And the New African, as a concept and an inspiring example, was often viewed in terms of a united black front. Langston Hughes's several contributions to Drum served, for example, as a reminder of the successful Negro American'.[144] In view of the political situation at that time, the fifties are regarded with great nostalgia today; this is probably due to the vibrancy of the time which Drum managed to evoke. 'For just as Drum evoked images of pin-ups, nice times and violence in love and temper, so did Sophiatown...'.[145]

Aggrey Klaaste attributes this to the fact that it was a special time, Fordsburg, Alexandra Township and District Six in Cape Town were cosmopolitan; 'but for government policy' he states, 'this is what it could have been like'.[146]'It was the best of times, the worst of times. ...Now that nostalgia has blurred the realities, and a new generation looks back on that golden age of the early fifties before laws and bannings clamped down on free expression, it is easy to forget the worst of times, to be carried away by the exuberance and sheer optimism, to look at the escapes from misery, rather than the misery itself'.[147]

Since Drum was a monthly magazine, the stories and reportage differ to those of a daily newspaper. This is a critical issue with regard to the analysis of Gosani's photographs. Arnold Gingrich's description of the role of the magazine photographer, 'The exigencies of monthly magazine deadlines preclude reportage

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[144]Chapman, p.197.

[145]Chapman, p.205.

[146]Candidate's interview with Aggrey Klaaste, Editor of The Sowetan, February 1991.

[147]Schadeberg, (ed) The Finest Photos from the old Drum, p.127.

as such, whether with a camera or with a typewriter. ... So what's left to show you, like what is left to tell you, must be largely interpretive by the time a monthly magazine comes around. ...The photograph plays a dual role as historian and as commentator'.[148]

It is believed that the event-orientated story is the traditional territory of the photojournalist. However, in the work of Bob Gosani, and many other magazine photographers, for example W Eugene Smith and Diane Arbus, meaning goes beyond mere reportage and reveals subjugation. For instance, Diane Arbus's description of photographing Senator Eugene McCarthy on election night in 1968 reveals her intentions of communicating something other than the facade he was initially willing to show. 'McCarthy was fun and very complex and the picture is very good, haunted. He looks like a defrocked priest. I nearly got the classic brushoff of 4½ minutes, with him contriving to present his face to me without being there at all. It was Panicking. But I resorted to mentioning my brother (poet Howard Nemerov) shamelessly and he knew his poetry so then he really began to talk to me and let me hang around and watch and listen while he telephoned his condolences to Humphrey, composed sample comic telegrams to Nixon, spoke to one of his daughters, did a TV interview and read me something and told me dirty stories about Lincoln'.[149]

Similarly FSA photographers made a clear distinction between their work and that of photojournalists, indicating an alliance both with magazine photography and the approach adopted by David Goldblatt. 'No, I think the best way to put it is that newspictures are the noun and the verb, our kind of photography is the adjective and adverb. The news picture is dramatic, all subject and action. Ours show what's back of the action'.[150]

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[148]Doon Arbus and Marvin Israel. (eds) Diane Arbus: The Magazine Years, (New York: Aperture, 1972), p.154. Arnold Gingrich was Esquire's founder.

[149]Arbus and Israel, (eds), p.161.

[150]Stryker and Wood, p.8.

Certain similarities can therefore be acknowledged between FSA photographs and those depicted in Drum. Although its independence from government sponsorship indicates a major difference, both sought to express each nation at a time of political and social crisis. Drum photographers and journalists did not seek to elicit their audience's sympathy, as is acknowledged in part as the purpose of the FSA, but rather emphasised the broad spectrum of issues about black people for black readership. Each is located in the socio-political scenario of the time. The 'Drum Decade' has been a significant contributor to the documentary genre in South Africa, however on a much smaller scale than the FSA in America. Although the effect that it had was far reaching, one of its major achievements, which is not recorded as an objective by Drum, is observed by A P Mda in these words, 'the introduction of pictorials and monthly journals in which Africans feature prominently [has] revolutionised the entire field of journalism among Africans ... [and has] struck deep into the social life of the African people in town in particular ... These welcome changes [have] had an immediate impact on the psychological make-up of our people, more especially the youth. The resultant feeling among vast sections of our people [is] that of self-importance... This ... fact has been of immense value. When people begin to realise their own intrinsic importance as human beings, they are on the road to full nationhood. It is only a little step to a consciousness of rights, and to an awareness of the anomalous position under which vast sections of the people are denied elementary democratic rights. No doubt the monthly journals and pictorials have served in no small way to destroy the sense of inferiority and futility which have eaten into the very vitals of our national life, generation after generation'.[151]

Of South African photography, Goldblatt says that it has never fulfilled its potential. 'We are the same age as the United States where photography has blossomed, producing great photographers right from the beginning. It may be that there is work here which remains to be discovered, or possibly that it has

[151] Chapman, p.199.

been destroyed, but I've not seen much evidence of that. We just don't have the record that the U S had even before it was a very heavily populated country'.[152]

It may be argued that documentary photography in South Africa is a far more recent phenomenon, the camera being used in this context was a weapon in the ongoing struggle against a racist regime. The portrayal of apartheid and resistance against it is depicted by photographers such as Omar Badsha, Paul Weinberg[153] and many others. David Goldblatt, although his work is located in this context, is one of the few photographers who have defined an alternative terrain to these mainstream concerns in photography in South Africa. The words of Steve Watson articulate Goldblatt's concerns and vision: 'His photographs, especially those collected in Some Afrikaners Photographed (1975) and later in In Boksburg (1982), give new definition, even paradoxical depth, to a word often used of South African culture in general ; 'shallow'. They reveal as nothing else before them the very textures of experience in this country, and with so great a degree of attention that it is these textures themselves - the Orlons, Perlons, Nylons and Crimplenes of the great mass of South African lives - become as representative as any of the more obvious cultural icons. ...So steady is his gaze, that such objects, such surfaces, are revealed not only in the poverty of their design, but an entire culture starts dissolving, is reduced to a basic, primordial nakedness, to the vacancy inherent in such things'.[154]

Pictorial elements such as format, context, lighting, composition and camera angle in selected photographs by David Goldblatt and Bob Gosani reveal the perceptions and the differing pictorial construction of each photographer. They are A girl and her mother at home, [figure 22] by David Goldblatt from the publication In Boksburg, and Casanova was there, [figure 23] by Bob Gosani, from the publication The finest photos from the old Drum.

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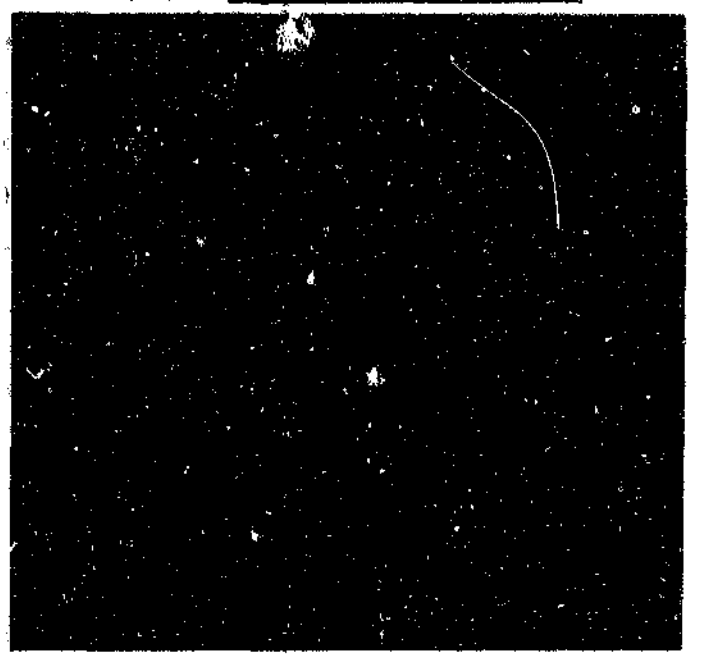
[152]Jennifer Sorrell. 'David Goldblatt Less is More'. ADA, First and Second quarters, 1990, p.9.

[153]Both photographers presently work within the parameters of the South African documentary genre as defined here by Goldblatt.

[154]Watson, pp.36-38.



22. David Goldblatt. A girl and her mother at home.[155]



23. Bob Gosani. Casanova was there.[156]

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[155]Goldblatt, In Boksburg, Illustration No. 20.

[156]Schadeberg, (ed) The Finest Photos from the Old Drum, p.19.

In the photograph, A girl and her mother at home, the expanse of patterned carpet and the drawn curtains, with an elaborate fringe across the top, seem to dominate the photograph. A young girl sits at a grand piano with her back to the viewer. Her mother sits on a couch, with a dog on her lap. She is wearing white stockings, her legs are tightly crossed, and the angle of her head, away from the camera, communicates a lack of movement, and an absence of interaction with the things around her. The mood in this photograph is one of emptiness rather than stillness: the subjects in the room appear to be inanimate.

Casanova was there depicts four people at the Bantu Mens' Social Centre, at an April Fools' Fancy Dress. They all have their arms around each others shoulders, and their physical proximity communicates a feeling of closeness between the subjects. Their poses are relaxed, one man leans his head on one of the woman's shoulders, suggesting that there is a bond between them. The feeling is one of two couples on a night out. The leg of the man on the right hand side of the picture is raised, crossing over the laps of the others, which has the effect of visually and physically uniting the four people.

FORMAT

The format of both of these photographs is square, revealing the use of a medium format camera, somewhat more cumbersome than a 35mm camera. In view of the spontaneity of Gosani's photograph, his dexterity with this format is implied, while Goldblatt's photograph reveals a far slower, contemplative approach communicated by the stillness of the figures, indicating that he was not required to take the photograph quickly. That is not to say that his ability with the camera is any less expert than Gosani's. In the former, elements like chair, couch and piano are arranged on the periphery of the frame, and none of them are included in their entirety. These objects project into the photograph at the edges of the frame and contrast with the empty space in the foreground. In the latter the figures are tightly cropped by the limits of the frame. They occupy the foreground space, thereby becoming the subject of the photograph. In Goldblatt's photograph, the subjects and objects occupy the space in the middle distance, and it is furnishings,

such as carpet, curtains and piano which dominate. In both the choice of the square, rather than rectangular format, is used to direct the viewer's eye in a particular way. In the former, one's eye moves from the central empty space of the carpet to the edges of the frame. In the latter, the viewer's attention is not directed towards the edges of the frame, but to the subjects in the image. In both images, the viewer's eye moves from one object or subject to the next, never focusing on one element in preference to another. Similarly, the square format and formal construction of each image does not allow the viewer's eye any repose.

In A girl and her mother at home the figures occupy the middle distance of the photograph. The daughter has her back to the camera and the subjects do not interact with one another, or with the photographer. Their poses are stiff and formal. The empty space in the centre of the image, and the subjects' inanimate poses create a sense of stillness. Their position within the image, at either side of the photograph, communicates a sense of their isolation. The drawn, translucent curtains provide a barrier to the outside world, and the birdcage stands as a metaphor for the environment in which mother and daughter exist, implying a feeling of restriction. The objects in the room have certain meanings and provide information to the image. For instance, the decorative leaf patterned carpet and the curtains, the ornate pillar on which the bird's cage stands and the grand piano, create an impression of the tastes and values of the subjects. 'Special importance must be accorded to what could be called the posing of the objects, where the meaning comes from the objects photographed (either because these objects have, if the photographer had the time, been artificially arranged in front of the camera or because the person responsible for layout chooses a photograph of this or that object). The interest lies in the fact that the objects are accepted inducers of associations of ideas. They are thus the elements of a veritable lexicon, stable to a degree which allows them to be readily constituted into syntax. Objects no longer perhaps possess a power, but they certainly possess meanings'.[157]

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[157] Barthes, Barthes: Selected Writings, pp.201-2.

In Casanova was there, the subjects' poses are relaxed and casual, they interact with one another. They are aware of the presence of the photographer, smiling at him, and therefore the viewer, a characteristic seen in much of his work, for example, Ballroom Champ, [figure 24]. In contrast to Goldblatt's photograph, no objects are included, and it is the figures which form the subject of the image. The women wear beads around their necks and their dresses are made of African print material, suggesting their ties to African culture. The womens' faces are painted with a single line down the centre, and dots on their foreheads and cheeks. The men wear jackets and collared shirts. Their attire suggest that they have 'dressed up' for the occasion. The lines of bias binding on the womens' dresses suggest a parallel for the ornamentation on their faces, and create the impression of 'fancy dress'. They all smile and both women make eye contact with the photographer and, therefore, the viewer; they have not been taken off guard nor do they seem self-conscious in the presence of the camera.

ENVIRONMENT

In Goldblatt's photograph, the choice of environment is specific. It is their home, with all their accoutrements; and the objects in it are intended to convey certain meanings about the inhabitants. The interior of Gosani's photograph is unspecific. The wall behind the subjects is bare with the exception of an uneven painted mark, made with a broad brush, which reveals the textured curves of the plastering and is a tacit reference to the environment.

TEXTURES

In the photograph by Gosani, the texture of the wall, its rough hewn quality, contrasts with the smoothness of the subject's skin, which seems to reflect light. Gosani, unlike Goldblatt, uses texture to heighten the contrast between the subjects and their environment. He draws attention to the texture of the fabric they wear, rather than the environment in which they are photographed. The photograph by Goldblatt represents a wide range of textures; the carpet, the curtains, the upholstered material on the chairs, the grand piano, the woolly poodle on the



24. Bob Gosani, Ballroom Champ.[158]

[158]Shadeberg, (ed) The Finest Photos from the Old Drum, p.88.

chair, the stockinged legs of the mother and her powdery skin all seem to absorb light rather than reflect it. He states of the 'Boksburg project' that he wanted to convey the 'remarkableness of this most unremarkable place. In order to be faithful to its unremarkableness I felt there should be no photographic enrichment through the use of dramatic lighting, wide angle or long focus lenses or tonal exaggeration of the image' [159]

LIGHTING

David Goldblatt almost always uses available light when photographing, stating that it is the preferred light source for him. In A girl and her mother at home, the translucent curtains prevent any direct sunlight from entering the room apart from a narrow beam of sunlight which crosses the floor diagonally. The drawn curtains have the effect of dispersing the light evenly in the room. Gosani, on the other hand, has to use whatever means of lighting are demanded by the situation, in this instance he uses a flash to illuminate his subjects. With this light source he creates the feeling that the photograph was taken at night. The subjects' faces are illuminated by the flash, and the wall, and lower parts of the subjects' bodies are in semi-darkness, which further directs the viewer's attention towards the subjects' faces, as the centre of interest.

COMPOSITION

Goldblatt's composition creates a feeling of space: the large empty space in the centre gives an impression of the size of the interior. The horizontal band of the curtains in the background and the arrangement of the objects and furniture at the edges of the frame of the image create a feeling of order. Gosani's figures lean against one another in a haphazard and disorderly manner, suggesting the spontaneity of the taking of the photograph. Gosani's photograph reveals a fleeting moment, captured indelibly on film, whereas Goldblatt's photograph by

[159] Ozynski, 'Joyce Ozynski interviews David Goldblatt', p.10.

contrast creates the impression that this girl and her mother habitually occupy those positions in the room.

CAMERA ANGLE

The position Goldblatt occupies, while taking this photograph seems to be one to the left of the frame, slightly higher than a sitting position. Since the subjects do not interact with the photographer, the viewer is not invited to participate in the image. It is as if Goldblatt has cut a window into the room, and we observe, as voyeurs into the lives of the inhabitants. The camera angle is, I believe, deliberately ambiguous, not intended to 'occupy' a space in the room. In Gosani's photograph, the camera's position is frontal, and slightly higher than the subjects. The manner in which the subjects fill the frame of the image suggests his proximity to the subjects and thereby implies his interaction with them; indicating a more candid approach to photography.

The influence of the FSA and especially Evans on Goldblatt and the comparable role which Drum fulfilled for Gosani, provided a structure within which these photographers worked. Combined with the parallel conditions of socio-political deprivation and hardship, the intentions and effect elected by their photographs reveal dramatic differences of approach. The perceptions of each are revealed by the personal inflection expressed in their images. Gosani's images rely on tension and drama in the subject matter and construction of his images. Drum, the magazine for which he worked, its aims and intentions, create additional motivations, indicating a further dimension of significance to his work. His approach, although at variance with Goldblatt's more contemplative approach, serves to direct attention to the diversity of what constitutes documentary photography.

CHAPTER 4
THE CANDIDATE'S WORK

The candidate places herself in the documentary genre as it is revealed by photographers such as Walker Evans, Robert Frank, David Goldblatt and Bob Gosani. In this chapter the candidate's approach to photography is examined with specific reference to the selection of subject matter, composition, pictorial construction, lighting and the position of the camera. These concepts form part of the theoretical underpinning of the dissertation. Since the theoretical and practical components of the research took place concurrently, influences to the candidate's work are in part ascribed to the theoretical research undertaken in the preceding chapters. Where applicable, these influences are discussed. It is argued that the approach adopted is contingent both on the candidate's attitude to and perception of the subject matter selected; the contention being that photographers render to varying degrees their perception of a subject so as to give expression to that perception. The pictorial arrangement of the photograph: the manner in which it is constructed is dependent on this. It is the result of conscious choices in the arrangements and selection of the subject.

The subject matter was chosen for its pertinence as being revealing of a particular group of South African society. Attention is focused on a particular socio economic group within this society, namely black domestic workers in their living spaces. The home signifies a place of refuge and security, and is often a reflection of the personality of the occupier. Forced removals, overcrowding in townships and accommodation which is contingent on employment, have eroded the sanctuary and security of this fundamental private space. The range of what the home environment comprises was therefore a pertinent issue in the selection of subject matter. Domestic workers were selected as a particular group representative of the preceding notions. Although not homeless, their tenuous position within this social structure leaves them only marginally better off.

Due to the transience of this groups habitation, it was subsequently decided to enlarge the subject matter to include rural environments, whose existence was of a more permanent nature. This permitted the candidate to photograph these subjects over a period of months, creating continuity in the photographic procedure. A further motivation for this was to indicate a broader dimension of the subject matter selected. The depiction of both types of environments, urban and rural, were thereby intended to complement one another, highlighting similarities and differences of the living spaces encountered. In consequence, changes in the approach adopted by the candidate have become apparent.

A primary concern during the initial stages of the practical component was for clarity and detail in the photographic image. Subjects were evenly illuminated, the texture of skin, walls and objects within the living spaces were photographed in order to heighten maximum detail in the image. The framing of subjects and interiors at this time was intended to communicate a sense of stability and an orthogonal framing of the prints is apparent. Subjects tended to be inactive, their attention is directed towards the camera. Concentration on symmetry and the inclusion of subjects and objects in their entirety characterises these photographs.

Tilting the camera, and photographing subjects against the light which rendered them as silhouettes in the photographic image characterises the succeeding approach. The latter approach also facilitated a more deliberate method in framing and shaping images. Spatial considerations became more prominent, and juxtapositions of figures assumed greater significance in the construction of images. Extremely high and low camera angles were utilized differently to those of the preceding images. In the earlier photographs this was applied to include elements particular to the subject, ie, clothes, pictures and furnishings. In the later photographs such camera angles point to the exclusion of objects and the cleaving of figures. The clarity and balance evident in the earlier work was forfeited for a more expressive approach, thereby affording personal perceptions of the candidate to take precedence. The application of these issues in the practical component of this submission is analyzed, and certain perceptions of these methods of pictorial construction discussed.

The choice and treatment of subject matter is intensely personal. In 1951 Berenice Abbott presented a paper at a conference at the Aspen Institute, Colorado. She concluded by saying: 'Photography cannot ignore the great challenge to reveal and celebrate reality'.[160] Thus, the content of the photograph is read by the audience as having a particular significance. The photographer, however, selects the subject matter and that choice is dictated by the motives of the photographer. The choice of subject matter, therefore, is the first of a series of pictorial and procedural decisions, dictated by the expressive intentions of the photographer. Choice of subject matter defines the terrain and is identifiable to the expressive technique employed. 'In order to reconcile these two issues, the photographer relies on occasional coincidences between the shapes and images'.[161]

The FSA defined Evans' subject matter, but it is his austere approach, 'the non-appearance of an author' that defines the style he adopted. The individual photographers' approach to his subject is inseparable from the manner in which a scene is depicted. The subject matter in David Goldblatt's publication In Boksburg, expresses his wish to explore something of his own background in the life and values of middle-class white, urban society. He states: 'Randfontein, (the town in which he grew up) was still too painfully close to photograph with the intimacy and dispassion I sought'. [162]

Diane Arbus chose to photograph subjects who existed on the periphery of society. She attributes this to being born into an upper middle class, and the subjects she focused on were strange to the world she had encountered as a child. 'I was born way up the ladder of middle class respectability and I've been clambering down as fast as I could ever since'.[163] Goldblatt's and Arbus's choice of subject matter is

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[160]Tagg, p.153.

[161]Siegfried Kracauer. 'Photography'. in Alan Trachtenberg, (ed) Classic Essays on Photography, (New Haven, Connecticut: Leete's Island Books, 1980), p.262.

[162]David Goldblatt. In Boksburg, (Cape Town: The Gallery Press, 1982), unpaginated.

[163]Patricia Bosworth. Diane Arbus. A Biography, (London: William Heinemann, 1984), p.167.

motivated by different reasons. Goldblatt sought out a certain community, - Boksburg - which he identified with since it displayed some of the qualities which he had experienced as a child living in Randfontein. 'If, in one sense it was not too material which community I photographed, then in another, it had to be Boksburg's'.[164]Diane Arbus, on the other hand, explored environments and people whose existence and way of life were alien to her.

Despite these differences, certain similarities exist in their approaches. Both photograph in an apparently non-expressive, pictorially unmanipulated manner. Intervention in the taking of the picture is deliberately minimised. Both reject the use of dramatic photographic techniques which they believe can be construed as an aestheticising or romanticising of the subject, such as, tilting of the camera, strong lighting, wide angle or long focus lenses and tonal exaggeration of the image. Goldblatt felt that these techniques would detract from his vision of Boksburg- which is undramatic and unrelieved.[165] It was Arbus's intention to make the subject dominate the picture in as unmitigated a manner as possible. This was achieved by photographing the subject in a predominantly frontal and symmetrical manner. Her photographs are taken from an eye-level vantage point, leaving the viewer with the perception of scale which is neither exaggerated or diminutive. The subject stares directly at the camera.

Both photographers insist on an implicit absence of intervention, and an apparent passivity in their approaches. Their images are, however, locatable within the practice of a particular form of photographic construction. Their respective styles of photography are identifiable, and cannot be divorced from the techniques they adopt. Nonetheless, their similar approaches to the photographic procedure and the subsequent expressive results, reveal quite different attitudes towards their subjects. Goldblatt does not attempt to engage his subjects in the picture making

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[164]Goldblatt, In Boksburg, unpaginated.

[165]Ozynski, 'Joyce Ozynski interviews David Goldblatt', p.10.

process. 'I wanted the subject to go on with life'.[166] Yet he clearly interrupts that life in order to photograph. The printing of the pictures is deliberately evenly toned, absent of the drama invoked by high tonal contrast, and is suggestive of the facelessness of the interiors he depicts. Through his seemingly passive view is an implicit criticism of the community. Arbus's approach has the effect of a confrontation between the subject and the photographer and therefore, by implication the viewer. Personal styles of photography evince a preference for one type of arrangement or another - as revealed in this comparison, and the work of Walker Evans, Robert Frank and Bob Gosani discussed in the preceding chapters. It is by way of these decisions that they give expression to their personal perception.

Goldblatt's photographs in In Boksburg can, therefore, be said to depend on his understanding and perceptions of that community. However, the nature of these photographs is such that Goldblatt will have us believe that this is what they (the subjects) habitually do, and it is questionable how far his depiction of those aspects is influenced by his understanding of the situation and the presentation of his intentions. He may, in fact be caricaturing the subjects, rather than revealing the range of that communities' behaviour. His selection of the subjects photographed may be criticised for its implicit one sidedness. The selection of the particular, in order to reveal something of the subject matter on a broader level, is a major contributor to the photographer's intended statement. How far do the subjects conform to the photographer's perception, rather than allowing the situation to determine that perception? 'If we see perception as a form of contact and communion, then control over what is perceived is control over contact that is made, and the limitation and regulation of what is shown is a limitation and regulation of contact'.[167]

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[166]Ozynski, 'Joyce Ozynski interviews David Goldblatt', p.10.

[167]Erving Goffman. The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. (England: Penguin Books, 1976), p.41.

While many photographers, working within the documentary genre, have deliberately adopted a dispassionate view in order to make their statement, like Walker Evans and David Goldblatt, others express their intentions differently. It is in the realm of a more instinctive, perhaps idiosyncratic, personal vision that photographers like Robert Frank, Bob Gosani and more recently, Josef Koudelka, have enlarged the expressive possibilities of the medium. These photographers employ certain techniques and lighting conditions in a distinct and often expressive manner. Berger contends that, 'what distinguishes a memorable photograph from the most banal snapshot' is 'the degree to which the photograph explains the message, the degree to which the photograph makes the photographer's decision transparent and comprehensible'.[168] Therefore the framing, choice of lens, composition and camera angle are issues which the photographer recognises and uses in order to channel meaning.

The examination of environments/interiors and ways of life of black South Africans, in urban and rural areas, taken in the houses in which they live, was therefore the subject matter chosen for the practical component of this dissertation. Because of government legislation, access into the townships has been restricted for most white South Africans. The areas were unfamiliar to the photographer, - something she had not encountered before.

> *First, the scale of proportion was reversed: in the city, and in my suburban street, the buildings rose above, the gardens made a space around the people - we lived as city people do, in the shelter of the city, in a context that, while overshadowing, also provides the dignity of concealment: figures in the street pass out of sight under trees and shadows, living passes out of sight behind walls and fences. By contrast, an African township looked like something that had been razed almost to the ground. The mass of houses and shacks were so low and crowded together that the people seemed to be swarming over them, as if they had just invaded a deserted settlement. Every time I went to a township I was aware of this sudden drop in the horizon of buildings and rise of humans - nothing concealed, nothing sheltered, in any but the most obvious sense, any moment of the people's lives. A blinding light of reality never left them. And they lived, all the time, in all the layers of society at once: pimps, gangsters, errand boys, washerwomen, schoolteachers, boxers,*

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[168] John Berger. 'Understanding a Photograph', in Trachtenberg, (ed) Classic Essays on Photography, p.292.

musicians and undertakers, labourers, and patent medicine men - these were neighbours, and shared a tap, a yard, even a lavatory.[169]

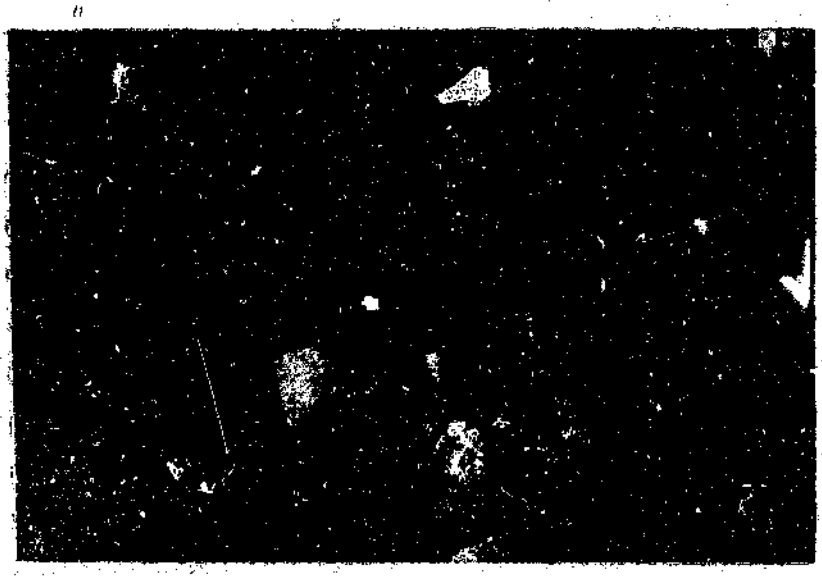
The candidate found that the townships are less like an arrangement of houses, than a gigantic row of rooms. The proximity of houses afford little privacy. The exterior spaces between the houses operate as a place to congregate. In these environments, it appears that there rarely exists a conventional family in a western sense. These homes appear to be inhabited by brothers, sisters, lovers and often a number of children. A quick and decisive operation with the camera was required in photographing the profusion of both people and possessions in these interiors. Photographs taken initially of these kinds of environments, were too overcrowded and unshaped for inclusion. However, a later example is Dancing, Klipriviersberg, (1991). [figure 25].

The candidate chose to include 'rooms' occupied by domestic servant in the suburbs of Johannesburg, for their pertinence to that which constitutes the 'home'. In the latter interiors, the constraints of space were such that the photographer's point of view was determined more by the arrangement of furniture than by purposeful selection.[170] Each 'house' in the urban areas, comprised of only one room, where eating, sleeping and entertaining takes place. Rural environments were included subsequently as a response to the urban environments, and were intended to provide a broader dimension to the practical component. The rural interiors are larger than their urban counterparts, and therefore afforded a more deliberate selection of camera angle and placement. The photographers' point of view, deemed critical in the construction of the image, was, therefore accommodated more extensively in the latter environments.

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[169]Nadine Gordimer. A World of Strangers, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), p.122.

[170]National building regulations for the minimum habitable room size are: 6m² floor area, 2 x 3m wall to wall, and 2,4m wall to ceiling. These measurements are comparable to those of a double compartment of a train. The minimum area for windows, inclusive of frames is 10% of the floor area. South African Standard. Code of Practice for the application of the National Building Regulations, (The Council of the South African Bureau of Standards, 0400-1987, (as amended 1988 and 1989), pp.51 and 100.



25. Dancing, Kliprivierberg. 1991.

'...my object is to show what I have found and not what I was looking for'.[171] The pictures taken are products of the candidate's perceptions and experiences. Many of the preliminary photographs formed useful background material from which to select areas for extended study. An overview reveals that in the later images, lighting conditions have altered, strong contrast of light is more prevalent, and the composition of the photographs are different. During the course of the research the candidate became more conscious of the edges of the picture which were subsequently used to cleave subjects and objects rather than include them in their entirety. Photographs arrest the passage of time, and this kind of rendition can be said to emphasise this quality. Their spatial and temporal dimensions are wrested from the passage of time, and the picture's subsequent presentation within a picture-frame further implies its removal into another spatial setting, placing it in a new context or frame. Fragmentary qualities of the photograph are therefore emphasised by the cropping and framing of the image, indicating their existence as fragments extracted from a multiplicity of perspectives. Those portions which are represented in the picture are reminiscent of shards. Textures of floors, walls and clothing are selected in a way that emphasises the nature of photographs as fragments.

The selection which takes place is contingent on the framing and the interplay of presence and absence in the image. Subsequent to the selective processes that took place during the photographing procedure, another selection occurs, - the selection of images from the contact sheet. This selection is mediated by the result affected by the appearance of the image. Lighting, spatial arrangement and nuances of expression on the subjects' faces contribute directly to the impression of the image, and dictate the decision making process in the selection of the most appropriate image.

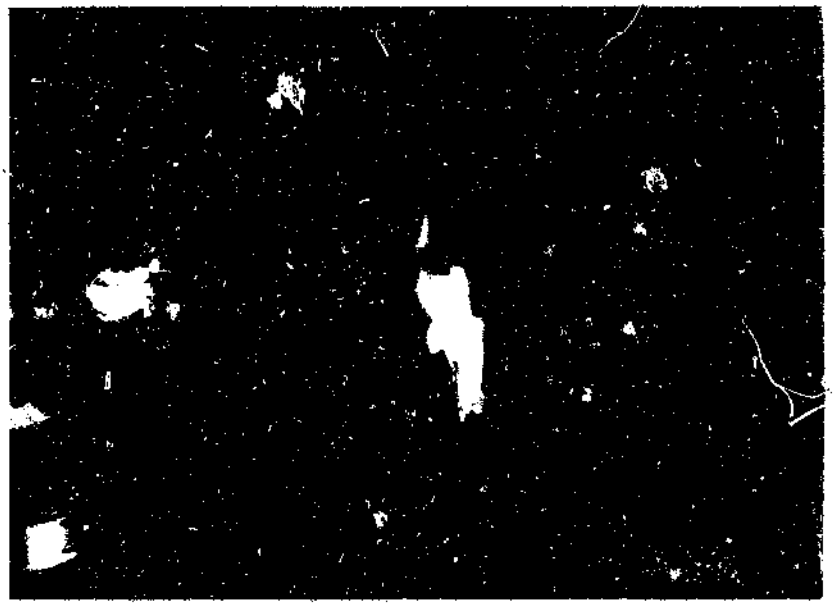
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[171] Alfred Barr. Picasso, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1946), in Herbert Read. The Philosophy of Modern Art, (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p.39.

It became, not so much the recording of a certain situation in a calculated and dispassionate way, as occurs in the work of Walker Evans and David Goldblatt, but rather the response the camera elicited from the subjects and how that appeared. In so doing, certain traits were revealed. With some subjects, the camera was associated with a performance, often resulting in a 'self-dramatisation' by the subject, for example, Adam Sithole, Randfontein (1991). [figure 26]. In these instances the subject in the presence of others, or in the situation where the subject is confronted by the photographer, the individual may infuse his activity with signs which dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory facts that might otherwise not appear. 'For if the individual's activity is to become significant to others, he must mobilise his activity so that it will express during the interaction what he wishes to convey'.[172] This 'act' often reveals the contradictions and ambivalence of the situation.

In photographs of this type there is a kind of spontaneity attached to the event. What is fixed onto the film might be said to occur randomly, without any directorial intention from the photographer. The arrangement of the subjects are transitory and momentary. But another aspect of this process is the photographer's ability to previsualise, or even anticipate, how a certain composition might appear in the final photograph. Through the photographer's awareness of figures outside of the frame, the pressing of the shutter might be delayed, to allow a figure to intrude partially or completely into the picture. In Klipriviersberg, (1991) [figure 27] the figure of the child on the right was initially obscured by the central figures in the image. By delaying the pressing of the shutter, it was hoped that the child might continue walking, as she was doing, and reappear in another position within the frame. Her inclusion in the photograph was considered important to the composition of that image. Her seeming disregard for the camera contrasted with the central figure's interaction with the photographer. Her pensive posture provided another dimension to the photograph,

[172] Coffman, p.40.



26. Adam Sithole, Randfontein. 1991



27. Klipriviersberg. 1991.

and her position on the right of the image balanced with the two men on the left who concentrate on, or respond to something outside of the frame
The subconscious interventions of the photographer are rationalised only after the collaborative interaction between the subject and the photographer have taken place. Gestural interchanges by the subject become a visual substitute for speech, for example, Klipriviersberg (1991) [figure 27], - the woman's right hand is raised in a gesture of waving, implying either a greeting or farewell. Her facial expression is serious, sceptical, even hostile, suggesting an ambiguity between her gesture and facial expression. This kind of examination of the figures, the young boy gesticulating at the camera, are analyzed in order for the photographer to extract the significance inherent in the image, and so interpret that which had been perceived.

People are depicted in differing roles and situations. Unlike Goldblatt and Evans, whose depiction suggests what their subjects habitually do, the photographs which make up this dissertation are not intended to express such a purpose. Their awareness of the camera precludes such a possibility. While they might sit in a space which is personal to them, their expressions and gestures are intended to imply also an image of themselves that they would like to have recorded, since they are so conscious of the camera. ....'everyone is always everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role ...'.[173] These concerns indicate certain differences between the approach adopted by the candidates and that of Gosani, Frank, and Goldblatt. Unlike Gosani, she remains an outsider to the circumstances depicted; in distinction to Frank and Goldblatt, the subjects are engaged in the photographic act. For example, Bekkersdal (1990) [figure 28].

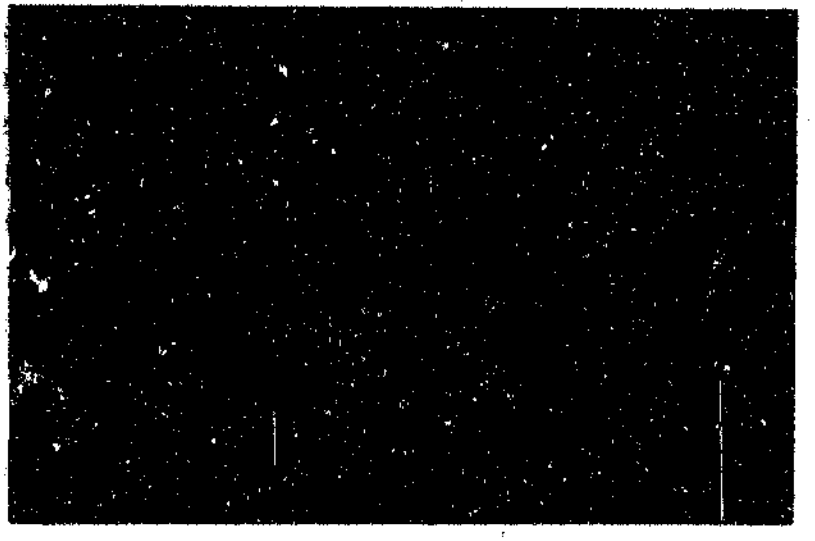
A subject's expression might move from scepticism and hostility to surprise, amusement and sometimes to a dramatic show in front of the camera. The intention was to capture what they themselves wished to reveal. Subjects were never asked to adopt a certain pose, or to sit or stand in a particular position.

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[173]Robert Ezra Park. Race and Culture. (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1950), p.249, in Goffman, p.30.



28. Bekkeradal. 1990.



29. Farm worker and his wife. 1990.

Resistance to any preconceptions as to what the photograph should look like were thereby minimised. The movements of subjects, their gestures, and the momentary releasing of the shutter, transfers what is viewed momentarily in a multiple play of shifting perspectives, and light. This process is also the result of an intuitive response to the situation. The photographer employs strategies for seeing, aimed at what is vital to a perception of the subject, whether or not it was based on a conscious realisation at the moment the photograph was taken. The photographer cannot predict events, or direct actions, although experience can allow a perception of probabilities. A photograph is particular in the way that it is a moment in time, a specific place, including certain people. In addition, however, dexterity with the camera and an instinctive response to the reactions of the subject, are most useful attributes. British photographer Denis Doran affirms, 'You have to react quickly because it's the unexpected moment that yields the most telling picture'.[174]

The decision making practice surrounding issues such as selection of elements, composition, lighting, tonal range and pictorial quality as evidenced in the grain structure, movement of subjects, texture and size of the image, are significant elements in the depiction of the subject. They are directed in order to represent the subject in accordance with the photographers' attitudes and perceptions of the subject. Camera position, framing and selection of elements, form part of this process of image construction and in this respect are significant to the depiction of the scene. 'Actually the photographer endows his picture with structure and meaning to the extent to which he makes deliberate choices. His pictures record nature and at the same time reflect his attempt to assimilate and decipher it'.[175]

In Farm worker and his wife [figure 29], Klipriviersberg, 1990, a man and his wife are depicted in their living room in which a table, corner cabinet and two religious pictures are included. The living room is regarded by the candidate as

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[174]Denis Doran. 'Denis Doran'. British Journal of Photography, Vol 138, 21 November 1991, p.13.

[175]Siegfried Kracauer, 'Photography', in Trachtenberg. (ed) Class. Essays on Photography, p.265.

an area in which the subjects identify themselves. It is an area in which guests are entertained and is decorated according to this function. The furniture has a utilitarian function and objects and pictures are selected and displayed in a manner that reflects something of the subject's taste and values. For example, the corner cabinet with plates arranged vertically behind glass draws attention to the subject's decoration of their environment. The empty table, and the rudimentary furnishings implies the subject's spartan existence, thus the lack of objects is also significant. These objects are not necessarily inherently meaningful, but are invested with meaning both by the individuals concerned, and by the interpretive process of the photographer. This has an effect on how the object will be perceived. Possessions may be bought, received as gifts or they may be found objects. While their meaning may be elusive, their presence is considered significant in the manner in which they are arranged within the interior. '...the very physicality of the object which makes it appear so immediate, sensual and assimilable belies its actual nature ... material culture is one of the most resistant forms of cultural expression in terms of our attempts to comprehend it'.[176]

The subjects are positioned in the corner of the room; the converging walls and the diagonal created by the table in front of them serve to direct the viewer's attention towards them. The asymmetrical composition implies an uneasiness and tension which coincides with the figure's facial expressions. The eye-level positioning of the camera maintains the natural scale of the subjects without any attempt at dramatisation by making the subject appear either monumental or diminutive. It also sustains a deliberately frontal observation of the figures. They do not interact with one another, but rather stare directly at the camera, and therefore by implication, the viewer. The light source is soft and diffused, illuminating them in a manner which reveals the texture of skin and clothing, and allows objects in the room to be depicted with a certain clarity. The process of photography indicates a kind of exactitude, a scrutiny which these people are not normally subjected to, often revealing the self-conscious uneasiness of the subject in the presence of the camera. The pose and facial expressions register this. In

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[176] Miller. Material Culture and Mass Consumption. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p.3.

so doing, a conflict is implied: that of wanting a photograph of themselves taken, and what transpires when the photograph is taken. Through their self-consciousness, and the stillness of their poses, a sombre mood is evoked.

Since photographs appear to be 'truthful' depictions of the real world, the pictorial construction of the image may appear secondary to the subject matter. This is John Berger's contention.[177] He states that painting is an art of arrangement: and that it is reasonable to demand that there is some kind of order in what is arranged, which he claims is not the case in photography. 'A painter has a million ways of putting one colour next to another; he can hide behind the richness of the painting process. But not the photographer'.[178]

However, the contrary argument seems equally applicable: the composition of the photograph, the manner in which elements are framed by the camera, the position of objects within the format, indeed how the edges frame objects in the picture plane, is a primary tool of the photographic procedure. In documentary photography, choice, not only in the subject matter but in the arrangement of the subject matter, is not primarily achieved by directing the subject, but is determined by the photographer's position in the making of the picture. The point of view of the photographer and the framing of the picture are intimately linked to the composition of it. By framing, tilting and the selection of the aperture of the camera, compositional issues are addressed. Intervention in the documentary genre is reduced to a minimum; but at the same time the photographer is forced to reflect on the scene before him. How the photographer constructs the image reveals the selection which took place. A low camera angle may cause a figure to look monumental within an environment. Conversely, the high positioning of the camera can cause a subject to appear small. "The problem of producing a likeness is that of working out what one has to put down in two dimensions that will produce a sense of equivalence to what one has observed in the scene... This

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[177] Berger. 'Understanding a Photograph', in Trachtenberg, (ed) Classic Essays on Photography, p.291.

[178] Bosworth, p.150.

problem cannot be resolved without resorting to invention'.[179] In Braamfontein 1989 [figure 30] a low camera angle was utilised in order to depict the tin bath strung from the ceiling, and jackets hanging from a nail on the wall. Emphasising the cramped living conditions, and clutter of possessions, which are a consequence of the size of the room.

Photography has a special relationship with reality - the environment, people and places. It relies on those aspects which are before the camera, rather than those imagined or in memory. It is this which is photography's point of departure. The tilting of the camera can be awkward and mannered, but may be utilized in certain instances to communicate a sense of disorder within the image. For example, Bekkersdal (1990). In so doing, horizontals and verticals in the image are 'rearranged', the floor may slope, the doorways take on a distorted quality. In some of the photographs taken for this submission, such tilting of the camera was intended to heighten the perception of instability and dilapidation in certain interiors which were encountered. Materials, such as corrugated iron, and wooden poles, used by the occupants in the construction of their houses, often seemed to be precarious in their construction. Roofs and walls would vibrate in a strong wind. Thus, by tilting the camera a quality of instability, perceived to be significant of the houses, was conveyed. This technique permitted a more expressive way of communicating the photographer's attitude to these environments. It also allowed for more extensive inclusion of objects, and wall decorations within the interiors, which a horizontal placement of the camera would have excluded. In this way certain objects particular to the subject could be included, for example, Skipper Nkosi, 1991. [figure 31].

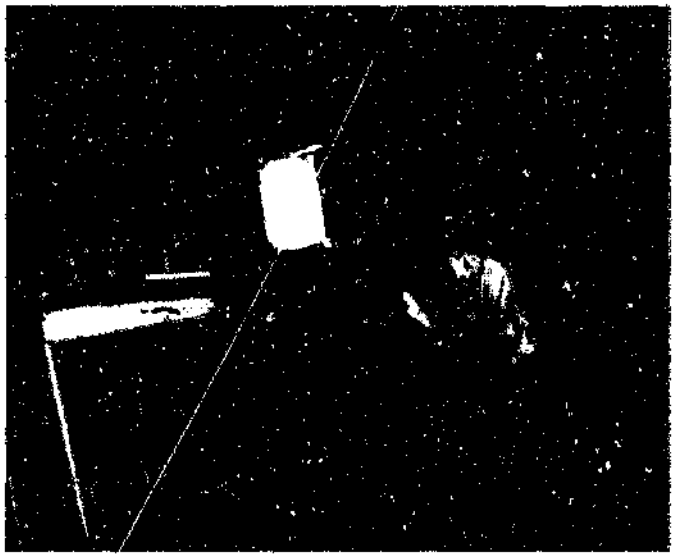
The selection of the lens aperture is another signifying factor in the construction of the image. It can be used to direct the viewer's attention towards certain areas

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[179] R Taylor. Art, an Enemy of the People. (London: Harvester Press, 1978), p.85, in C Harrison, (ed) Modernism, Criticism, Realism. (London: Art and Language, 1984), p.149.



30. Braamfontein. 1989.

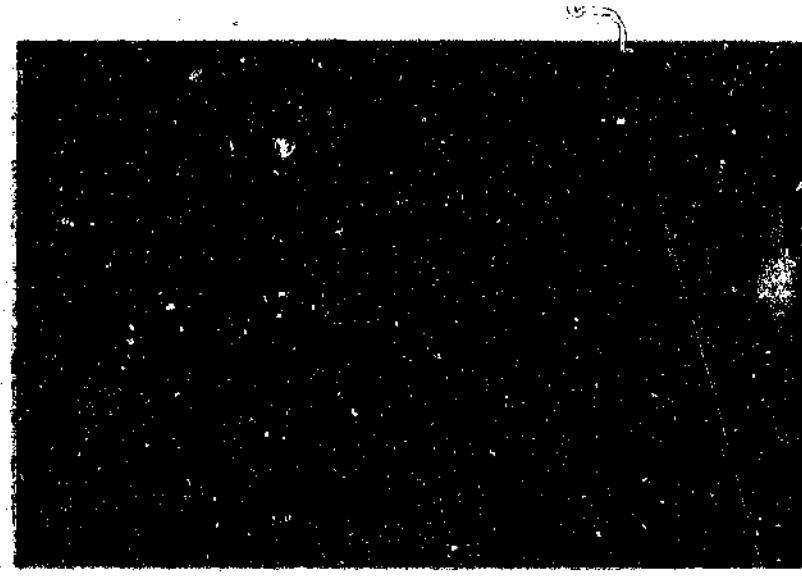


31. Skipper Nkosi. 1991.

and features of the photograph. In the photographs taken for this dissertation the lighting conditions in the interiors were often extremely low. The aperture of the camera was therefore correspondingly wide, resulting in shallow depth of field. The resultant effect is one where only a small area of the photograph is sharply focused, and a lack of detail exists in the remainder of the image. In instances like this, the sharper areas are emphasised, while the remainder recede, assuming secondary importance within the image. Thus a certain hierarchy in the construction of the image is achieved. For example, Dancing, Klipriviersberg, (1991). [figure 25].

Due to the low lighting in these interiors, a slow shutter speed is unavoidable in exposing the film adequately. Thus the time taken to expose the film is slow, and any movement of the subject results in blurring of that part of the photograph. Such movement is therefore not necessarily controlled by the photographer in the making of the image. Occasionally a figures movement is anticipated by the photographer, and contrasts with figures which remained still. The resultant impression implies an action within the scene. The clarity of the figure is forfeited, in favour of evoking activity or heightened actuality. For example, Dancing, Klipriviersberg. [figure 25].

Framing of images is dictated by the structure perceived to be the most pertinent to the situation. Certain elements or figures may be included partially rather than in their entirety. In so doing, their existence is implied rather than explicitly stated. Those shapes at the edges of the image are elements which can reveal evidence of the selection which took place. The process of selection may be determined by compositional dictates, and conversely, it may be governed by the need to preserve direct references to the subject. One may question how important an object itself is, as opposed to its shape and position within the photograph. The manner in which they are contained by the frame is the result of the photographer's construction of the image. For example, Painted door, Klipriviersberg, (1991), [figure 32], the figure in the foreground appears large,



32. Painted door, Klipriviersberg. 1991.

partly due to his proximity to the camera since only a fragment of him is included. Conversely, the figure in the background appears small, thus the illusion of space between the figures is heightened. Their stances imply differing kinds of behaviour elicited by the camera.

While a photograph might seem to represent the subject, the framing of the image isolates it, decontextualizing it through the camera's characteristic framing of an event. It has, as Siegfried Kracauer observes, a predisposition for 'unstaged reality'.[180]

Yet it uses the event to explain its recording. At every stage, chance effects, purposeful interventions, choices and variations produce meaning in the picture. 'In pictures of this type the balance between empathy and spontaneity is rather fragile. The photographer producing them does not subordinate his formative impulses to his realistic intentions but seems eager to manifest both of them with equal vigour. He is animated, perhaps without being aware of it, by two conflicting desires - the desire to externalise his inner images and the desire to render outer shapes. However, in order to reconcile them, he relies on occasional coincidences between those shapes and images'.[181]

The lighting conditions utilised performs a significant expressive function in the interpretation of the subject. By varying the lighting conditions, for example in photographing at differing times of day, a particular mood may be conveyed in the image. Harsh or soft lighting conditions will affect the result of the image, and are deployed consciously by the photographer in order to achieve a particular result. Diane Arbus used a flash in order to heighten the impression of an uncompromising harshness in the gaze directed at her subject matter. David Goldblatt photographed Boksburg during winter, recognising that the highveld light at that time of year was at its most harsh. Due to these lighting conditions,

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[180] Kracauer, in Trachtenberg, (ed) Classic Essays on Photography, p.263.

[181] Kracauer, in Trachtenberg, (ed) Classic Essays on Photography, p.262.

the interiors are evenly illuminated and the resultant impression is one of greyness; an effect utilised by Goldblatt to imply his perception of the subjects' homes, for example, A girl and her mother at home [figure 22]. The lighting in many of Walker Evans's photographs is such that the surface and texture of objects is emphasised.

In the initial photographs investigating the topic of this dissertation, the subjects are illuminated by light from windows and doors. Their position in the interiors is such that they face the source of light. Light from windows and doorways, particularly early in the morning, was utilised since it is then particularly soft, illuminating the subject in a manner which models form and reveals the texture of the subject's skin and clothing. Therefore the position adopted was from doorways, and in front of windows inside the interiors. The position of the camera often determined the subject's position, facing the window, which allowed the maximum available light to illuminate facial features. This also allowed for a more even distribution of light in the interior. Textures of walls, furniture and objects could therefore be revealed with a certain clarity. However, the later photographs adopt a contrary approach.

Due to the extreme constraints of space and lighting in the urban areas, selectivity was restricted and figures appear to be enveloped by objects. For example, Braamfontein, [figure 30].

In the rural areas, the houses comprised a number of rooms, unlike the townships and urban areas where subjects mostly occupied only one room. Therefore it became possible to reveal the transition from one room to another. The spaces were also larger and lighter; spatial and lighting conditions altered as a result, and a difference of approach was precipitated by this. The position adopted for photographing was through doorways from inside the house. One of the reasons for this is to indicate something of the interface between interior and exterior. Thresholds of doors and apertures of windows are also linked to the framing of the image. A doorway is a space to move through, designating a transition from one space to another. It forms a parallel to the rectangular or square framing

which characterises the photographic image. Doors and windows define and limit observation in much the same way that the boundaries of the photograph operate as a threshold for the gaze of the spectator.

By photographing subjects against the light, figures are silhouetted in the photograph. Facial features are diffused and even lost as a result of this, since high contrast in the printing is unavoidable when photographing into the light. While subjects and their furniture are indicated as shapes within the image, the environment and events which take place outside the house are often incorporated. In Midwinter's Day, 1991, [figure 33], a thin white line outlines the central figure of a woman, illuminating her shape and also communicating a graphic quality in the photograph. This approach is much like that created in Robert Frank's photographs. Minute details in texture and facial expressions are subordinated to shapes within the image. Relationships of figures, and interior to exterior are heightened. Thus a certain ambiguity takes precedence in the photographic image. The woman looks out of the open door, and in so doing turns her back to the camera. In a sense, she turns her back on the photographer; implying an assertion of her own sense of place within that environment.

The title of this photograph is intended to heighten this lack of interaction between the subject and the photographer. In part, the clarity and individuality of the subjects and their houses which existed in the previous images is relinquished. The silhouetted figures are observed as shapes, and in some instances imply a certain mood in the photograph. They are intended to stand for the general rather than the particular. Individual facial characteristics which would identify the subject are thereby subverted in order to convey a broader meaning. The shape of a silhouette can imply a sombre mood, whereas a particular facial expression which communicates sadness can cause the image to become sentimental.

By photographing into the light, the grain structure of the photograph is heightened. This renders large prints inappropriate, since it detracts from the



33. Midwinter's Day. 1991.

pictorial quality of the picture. While this might be considered a disadvantage, the presentation of smaller photographs precipitates a more intimate engagement of the image by the spectator. Large images can tend to overwhelm the viewer, and afford any number of people the opportunity to experience it simultaneously, whereas a smaller work insists on a one on one interaction, pertaining to a more intimate relationship, such as reading a book. A sense to privacy is communicated in this interplay, intending to parallel the seclusion experienced in the home.

The use of lighting employed in the latter part of the dissertation is intended as a more expressive vehicle for communicating the intentions of the photographer. Robert Frank's approach, discussed in chapter 2, is recognised as an influence in this approach. Although his images are considered gloomy and despairing, his style of photography is impassioned, even romantic. His use of strong lighting conditions and characteristic pictorial construction of the image, in tilting the camera, and cleaving the figure in the framing of his composition are similar to the candidate's work. While Robert Frank's photographs communicate a disenchantment of American culture and values, it is the candidate's intention to assert an aspect of South African culture, capturing gestures which mirror aspects of people's lives. The reactions of subject to the camera ranged from aggression', an unguarded moment, and self-conscious displays in the presence of the camera.

To conclude, the difference in photographic expression, or what may be loosely called 'style', results in different renderings of similar themes.[182] To distinguish a particular photographer's work requires careful scrutiny and evaluation. The decisions the photographer makes, rest on certain chosen ordering principles. As fictions, as stories, photographs show us that versions of the past are indeed made up. There is no fixed portrayal of representation, but rather an expression of the photographer's perception. Explicit interpretation therefore is determined principally by the discourse that surrounds them. 'The final danger' Alan

[182]This assertion is made with specific reference to the documentary genre.

Trachtenberg claims, 'is to see any photograph as fixed and final, either in order, meaning or time and place'.[183]

[183] Alan Trachtenberg. 'Documenting America, 1935-1943', in Carl Fleishauer and Beverly W Brannan. From Image to Story. Reading the File. (California: University of California Press, 1988), p.70.

CHAPTER 5
IMAGE/TEXT RELATIONSHIPS

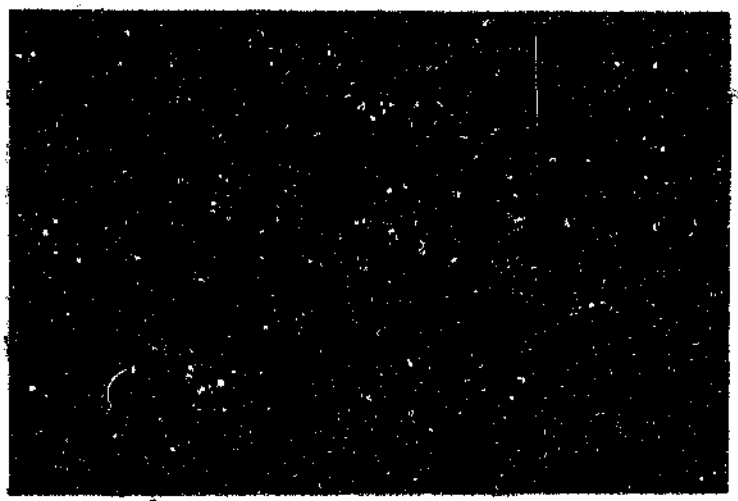
The analysis of the role and intentions of documentary photographers in this dissertation has focused primarily on the visual construction of images. It is therefore appropriate to examine the titles or captions which are combined with such photographs. The belief that language, combined with visual imagery, expresses its message more forcefully than visual imagery alone, might be considered the reason for such a practice. Therefore the choice of words and images and their subsequent combinations in particular contexts must display the author's deliberate and purposeful intentions. In so doing nuances of meaning in the interpretation of the image might therefore be deemed apt.

The linguistic caption or title functions on varying levels, and the context in which they are placed is a determining factor in this relationship. Titles occur in monographs, magazines, newspapers and exhibition spaces. They may describe that which the photograph depicts, for example, A girl and her mother at home,[184] [figure 22], or they may refer to an event which gave rise to the making of the photograph, for example, After the Raid, (1940).[185] [figure 34]. Much documentary photography is titled simply with the location of the image, indicating where and when the photograph was taken. Images in newspapers or magazines signify a cumulative record of social observation; their usage is intended to convey informational value, complying with documentary modes of photography. In contrast, photographs exhibited in a gallery function in the same manner as paintings and sculptures. Accompanying text in this context often serves to explicate or extend the viewer's interpretation of the represented image.

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[184]Photograph by David Goldblatt.

[185]Photograph by Cecil Beaton.



34. Cecil Beaton. After the Raid. 1940.[186]

[186]Webster, p.159.

Thus another dimension may be added to the image by investing the photograph with connoted meaning.

The combination of words and language in the art of the Twentieth Century indicates multiple implications, ...'the surety of the old conscriptive or narrative approach was challenged, as were so many other notions about the reality of representation.'[187] The inclusion of words in both painting and photography has become commonplace, dating from Dada and Surrealism, for example Andre Breton, 'Poeme-objet' 1941, assemblage mounted on drawing board, and utilized more recently in the work of Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger, highlighting the contemporary obsession with the media. Indicating the belief that information is more accessible through words, or that the combination of words and images may convey multilayered messages more readily than visual imagery alone.

Given the differing structures of language and images it is necessary to examine this relationship; after which certain perceptions about the role played by text in the work of Walker Evans, Robert Frank, David Goldblatt and Bob Gosani will be analyzed.

The writings of Roland Barthes and Alan Trachtenberg reflect conflicting positions about the use of linguistic captions in photography. Roland Barthes states that the original function of the image was to reinforce or illustrate the text; now, there has been a reversal, the image no longer illustrates the word, 'it is now the words which structurally are parasitic on the image'.[188] The text identifies the elements of the scene by means of a description of the image, - which coheres with the documentary convention of titling. This, Barthes believes, anchors the image's meaning directing the viewer towards a meaning, already determined in advance. He states, 'the linguistic message no longer guides identification but interpretation, constituting a kind of vice which holds the connoted meanings from proliferating,

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[187] Russell Bowman. 'Images: A Persistent Paradox'. Art Journal, Vol 45, Winter 1985, p.335.

[188] Barthes, Barthes: Selected Writings, p.204.

whether towards expressively individual regions (it limits, that is to say, the projective power of the image) or towards dysphoric values'.[189]

Alternatively, Alan Trachtenberg argues that the linguistic caption assists in conferring specific meaning on the image, since the nature of photographs may arouse varying interpretations. He states, '...unless an editor anchors the image in an unambiguous caption, its meaning is too open and indeterminate to provide a reliably secure point of view'.[190] This ambiguity, however, might at times be desirable, and serve the photographer's purposes. The anthropologist Barfield takes an even more extreme view of the superiority of language over image in conveying meaning. He states, 'the photograph conveys to the viewer a vivid sense of direct experience. ...certain photographs have a dazzling visual richness that may surpass verbal description in its sensory impact, although photography can never supplant the written word in terms of explicating meaning'.[191]

What Barthes does not acknowledge is the deliberate ambiguity of a combination of words and images, which generate multiple implications. Andres Serrano's photographs are contentious because of their titles, as David Lee observes, 'If it wasn't for the work's title no offence would be caused...'.[192] It could be argued that Serrano's use of words serve to increase the image's potential for meaning; rather than anchoring the image. New associations, hitherto absent, provoke new meanings through the combination of words and images. Barthes seems to imply that photographs should remain uncaptioned, believing that the power of the photographic image lies in that which it depicts, despite its inability to convey specific meaning. For example, Ansel Adams's photographs of landscapes, frequently untitled, point to his pantheistic view of the world, rather than a

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[189]Roland Barthes. 'Rhetoric of the Image'. Image Music Text. (Great Britain: Fontana, 1977), p.39.

[190]Trachtenberg. Reading American Photographs. p.251.

[191] Barfield. 'Social and Cultural Anthropology: Responses and Responsibility in the photographic Encounter', in Melissa Banta and Curtis M Hinsley. From Site to Sight. Anthropology, Photography, and the Power of Imagery. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Peabody Museum Press, 1986), p.118.

[192]David Lee. 'Urine Test'. British Journal of Photography. Vol 138, 14 November 1991, p.16.

specific place. Herein lies a paradox, the image is precise in a way that language is not, and yet its meaning is vague, where language is capable of conveying specific meaning. John Fowles's view about the difference between language and photographs would seem to endorse this, 'The effect is gained not just because the writing is sequential, describing a series of events, thoughts, reactions, but above all because it is so vague in its general detail that no reader will envision the place in the same way... The passage is imprecise in almost all the ways where a photograph must be precise.'[193]

This discussion by Barthes and Trachtenberg has tended to concentrate on text and image as separate vehicles for communicating meaning. What is omitted by them is the visual impact which words and images create when combined. Previously an analogy between poetry and photography was made in Evans's reference to the lyrical in photography,[194] it is therefore appropriate to enlarge on this here. The stanzas in poetry are shaped and structured visually as well as verbally, their form and the actual choice of words are combined in order to enhance the written word. This arrangement may allow for further inflection of meaning to be incorporated into the image. Text and image may therefore be utilized visually, capitals and the selection of typography are shaped and structured, in order that their combination with the image might add to the initial form given to the photograph. The publication Land of the Free by MacLeish and the FSA photographers is about the dubiousness of the American Dream in the context of the Depression. On the facing page of each image is a short poem relating to the book's theme. The accreditation of particular photographs occurs at the end of the book, opposite a page of text. While the effect and informational value of each page may differ, their visual form to each other is accorded a certain significance within the book. In this way the photographs operate closely with the textual passages in the book, rather than individually, or as personal distinctions of each photographers' style.

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[193] Fay Godwin. Land. (London: Heinemann, 1985), p.xi.

[194] cf. Chapter 2, p.29. above.

Four documentary collaborations relevant to the discussion in this dissertation were produced during the thirties, and were directly inspired by depression politics and the FSA particularly. They were: Bourke White and Erskine Caldwell's You Have Seen Their Faces, 1937, MacLeish and The FSA photographers' Land of the Free, 1938, Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor's An American Exodus, 1939, and James Agee and Walker Evens's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, 1941. The images are motivated by reflecting aspects of the Depression era, but the differences in the text/image relationships reveal distinct differences of approach and intention. The meaning of the images is affected by the varying relationships between text and photograph. In Bourke White and Erskine Caldwell's publication You Have Seen Their Faces, the use of fictional captions were utilized in order to elicit the reader's pity. In contrast Dorothea Lange states that the textual passages in An American Exodus are, 'quotations from the subjects, rather than what we might think might be their unspoken thoughts.'[195] The implication here is that there is a direct relationship between the images and the text, in which the photographer attempts to utilise both the verbal and visual depictions in order to render as intensive an interpretation as possible of the subject. However it may be argued that these captions might have been edited and certain statements selected in preference to others, in order to coincide with her intentions.

The final point to be made about the title, as it exists in combination with images, is the manner in which it acts as a voice overlaying the image. The visual image is ostensibly a silent one; although certain terminology in the criticism and assessment of images refers to its metaphoric voice. Since words are audible, the title may be seen to operate as a voice which augments the image. The selection of particular words in the title of a photograph may be ordered, structured and selected according to poetic models, or arranged to emphasise their sonorous resonance, thereby serving to amplify the images' potential for meaning. James Agee's words in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men are utilized in such a manner, evoking his personal attitude towards the subjects.

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[195] Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor. An American Exodus. p.8.

In Let Us Now Praise Famous Men the text and pictures are intended to be 'coequal, mutually independent and fully collaborative.'[196] The image/text relationships differ from the other FSA collaborations in that the photographs are uncaptioned, and therefore their significance within the book is purely visual, ensuring their independence from the text.

Certain of Agee's descriptions like 'order the facade' (referring to the exterior of a Sharecropper's house) is given expression in Evans's photographs. In this way the text and images could be said to complement one another. The expanded text, which includes explanations of the floor plans of the houses, the clothing of the subjects, and objects within the houses, is more heavily weighted in terms of volume than the photographs. Only 62 photographs are printed in the book, while 471 pages of text exist. At times Agee desists from describing every detail in a room, stating that those elements may be seen in the photographs. For instance, 'In the opposite side of the kitchen is a small bare table from which they eat; and on the walls, what you may see in one of the photographs.'[197]

Occasionally the text and images tend to reinforce one another. A photograph of the Rickett's fireplace[198] is described in minute detail by Agee, indicating a coherence of perception. In addition a further parallel between text and images is indicated here. Images by Evans frequently include signs and words. Above the Rickett's fireplace is a sign taken from a church, with the words, 'Pleas be quite, everybody is welcome.' [sic]. Here the photographic image includes verbal notations intended to be read by the viewer. Evans thereby refers to the text in the book, drawing attention to it as a visual element, in much the same way that Agee refers to the pictures, evoking images through his prose. In a way the authors of the book switch roles, reinforcing their notion, that images and text can be interchangeable. A broader impression of the houses is created by Agee

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[196] James Agee and Walker Evans. Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, (London: Pan Books, 1988), p.xv.

[197] Agee and Evans, p.192.

[198] Agee and Evans, p.197.

through the use of occasional analogies, '...the house is rudimentary as a child's drawing',[199] and comments about the odours in the houses, 'musk melon, wood and sack cloth', he states, gives them the impression of tombs. [200]

Neither display a chronological order in their work, but rather emphasise aspects of the sharecroppers existence by pertinent juxtapositions, applicable to the motives of the photographer and author. The order of the photographs is reflected in the text. The arrangement of images reveals differing camera angles, and the position of the camera, from close ups to middle distance views, creates further contrasts which are heightened by the sequence of images. Juxtapositions of interiors and exteriors, single portraits, tightly cropped with group portraits, and street scenes with facades of buildings are intended to have a cumulative effect, creating an impression of the community. In much the same way Agee's prose describes the general and the particular. The book is divided into three parts. In the first Agee creates a general impression of the way of life and people of Alabama - the setting of the book. The subsequent parts are divided into sections, designated by headings such as: Money, Shelter, and The Gudger house, with subheadings such as: its general structure, furniture, facade, the front bedroom, the mantel, the closet etc. In this way the structure of text and images is synchronic rather than chronological, the arrangement of which implies the close collaboration which took place in the making of the book.

The approach adopted in Lifetimes: Under Apartheid, by Goldblatt and Gordimer, resembles that of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Goldblatt and Gordimer also state that the text and images are intended to be co-equal, although the correlation between words and images, is more ambiguous. While Gordimer's words echo similarities in the images, they are extracts taken from her novels and stories, and were therefore not written with specific reference to the events and

[199] Agee and Evans, p.144.

[200] Agee and Evans, p.185.

situations which Goldblatt's images depict.[201] Unlike Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, where Agee and Evans worked together with specific families, Lifetimes is unspecific, implying a broader dimension of South African society. They state, 'the image and word give back what is behind the face and place. For us, the images and words in this book move with what they depict, to an end that was always present'.[202]

Many of Goldblatt's photographs, printed in Lifetimes: Under Apartheid, occur in his publications, In Idolsburg, On the Mines, The Transported of KwaNdebele and Some Afrikaners Photographed. The titles of each photograph are consistent with the original publication, denoting the subject, place and date of the photograph. In this way, the photographs parallel Gordimer's text, as Goldblatt too is extracting or quoting from previous work.

The titles of photographs in American Photographs are listed at the end of each of the two sections of the book; denoting the place and year they were taken. In this way the images and text are kept separate, implying Evans' concern with the sequence of images, rather than connotations which the titles might elicit. 'The photographs are uncaptioned yet arranged to be looked at in order'.[203] Indeed, the photographs' priority over text is also emphasised by the position of Lincoln Kirstein's essay, which occurs at the end of the book. In this essay Kirstein comments on the order of pictures, the sequence of which creates a discourse of images rather than simply a compilation of individual photographs. '...of necessity seen singly, are not conceived as isolated pictures made by the camera,

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[201] Gordimer's prose in Lifetimes: Under Apartheid is from the following publications: Burger's Daughter, (Great Britain: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1979). The Conservationist, (Great Britain: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1962), July's People, (Great Britain: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1981), The Late Bourgeois World, (Great Britain: Jonathan Cape 1966). Occasion for Loving, (Great Britain: Jonathan Cape 1960), Something Out There, (Great Britain: Jonathan Cape 1979), and The Soft Voice of the Serpent, (Victor Gollancz 1953). Selections from 'Good Climate, Friendly Inhabitants', 'The Last Kiss', 'The Life of the Imaginations', 'Something for the Time Being', 'Which New Era Would That Be', and 'Ah, Woe is Me' are from Selected Stories, (Great Britain: Jonathan Cape, 1942).

[202] David Goldblatt and Nadine Gordimer. Lifetimes: Under Apartheid, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986), unpaginated.

[203] Unsigned review in Time, (thought to be by James Agee) in Alan Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs, p.241.

but exist as a collection of statements derived from his presentation of a consistent attitude'.[204]He claims that Evans' photographs deserve the 'intention, logic, continuity, climax sense and perfection of a reading of poetry or fine fiction.' Indeed, the use of words incorporated in his images of sign boards and bill boards make allusion to poetry. The caption 'Hurry up please, its time', is a reference to T S Eliot's The Waste Land (1922), and 'S S Leviathan' echoes Melville's whale hunt in Moby Dick. The words, in Evans' pictures, draw attention to their linguistic and visual role in his images. Their inclusion within the photograph also designates a broader context in his photographs. The letters SA in Torn Movie Poster, (1930) refer to the USA, the geographical context in which the photograph was taken, thus relating to the theme of the book. A search for what was distinctively American was indeed the keynote of the thirties.[205] Evans' recognition of this is implied both in his pictures, and in the title of the book, posing the question what an American Photograph might be. 'Photographs made in and of America, or expressive of America'? Alan Trachtenberg questions whether they depict self evident facts, or whether their meanings have to be pursued or imagined.[206]The words or portions of words operate as pictorial devices within the picture, as well as referents to the 'real world'. Their use may be analogous to the words in Cubism, for instance, 'Journal' and 'Bass' which refer to the newspaper and popular drinks of everyday life, similarly the photo-studio operates as a sign for popular photography.

The caption may alter the significance of the image, and the viewer's perception of it. As in publications like Life and Drum, editorial attitudes may be communicated by the captions, and the text may thereby influence the reader's perception of the pictures. Indeed Life's editorial decisions, which gave rise to the photo-essay, seem to imply a parallel between text and image.

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[204]Walker Evans, American Photographs, pp.192-3.

[205]Warren Susman. Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century, (New York: 1984), p.157, in Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs, p.247.

[206]Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs, p.240.

Publications such as Life, Look and Fortune made frequent use of the FSA material, including Walker Evans' photographs. The manner in which these photographs were subordinated to editorial decisions is pertinent to the manner in which their meaning has altered over time. The photo-essay was Life Magazine's way of bringing together a sequence of pictures and captions for the purpose of telling a story. Pictures in Life were arranged in a series, much like a cartoon strip, using words and images which focused on a current event or a topical issue. This new relationship of images, therefore, takes precedence over the original intentions of each photographer, altering the significance of individual images. 'Life had become acquainted with the fact that when a picture story is being composed, pictures though not a discursive medium, lend themselves to something of the same manipulation as words'.[207]

Every edition of Life lists a 'photographic essay' in the contents, ranging from issues such as Bowling, [208] to Trial by Jury.[209] The latter, an article with photographs by W Eugene Smith, depicts an account of a trial. Some 40 pictures are included, revealing the proceedings, exhibits used as evidence, members of the jury engaged in a variety of activities at home and the events determined by their decision. Below each photograph is a caption naming each person and the events surrounding the proceedings. What is apparent in this sequence of photographs is the chronology of events, emphasised by the cartoon strip arrangement of photographs and text, creating a narrative which Life presumably desired.

In American Photographs Evans negates the methods and styles of journalism by removing them entirely from the normal context of chronological or spatial order. The book disrupts any expectations that its pictures must be 'news'. His sequences have nothing to do with chronology or place, the inclusion of a date with each title and the juxtaposition of images made in different locations defies

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[207] Wilson Hicks. Words and Pictures, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), p.42.

[208] Life, April 12, 1948.

[209] Life, May 17 1948.

the expectations of popular journalism. The sequence of photographs at the beginning of the book draws attention to the medium of photography through the content, for example, Licence-Photo Studio, New York, (1934) [figure 6], and Penny Picture Display, Savannah, (1936), indicate the theme of picture making. The images are concerned explicitly with photography, and subsequent images like, Sidewalk and Shop Front, New Orleans, (1933), [figure 7], and Negro Barber Shop Interior, Atlanta, (1936), expand it.

Text in journalism is intended to be informative. Evans's form accomplishes a removal from their immediate contexts.[210] The disjointedness of time and place prevents the reader from taking the pictures as a simple story told through the images. The layering of points of view as well as objects, faces, signs and all the details that designate place and time challenges the reader to participate in that fabricating process.[211]

In Robert Frank's, The Americans, the captions of each photograph are placed on the facing page, and similar to the location. However, Jack Kerouac's introduction is unlike Kirstein's in that the interpretation and reception of images is left to the viewer. His text does not attempt to explain the photographs, and his comments about them may be considered rather oblique. A parallel between the pictures and text exists in this publication because of the way in which both subvert conventional forms of photography and language. Jack Kerouac's text is deliberately misspelt, appropriating American slang, for example, '...doesnt like these pitchers dont like potry', and, 'That little ole lonely elevator girl'.[212] Similarly, Frank's photographs appear to be quite accidental, almost artless, emphasising the grain, and forfeiting the clarity characteristic of photographic practice for blurred silhouettes. The effect of their combination in The Americans

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[210] Szarkowski, American Photographs, p.149.

[211] Alan Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs, p.258.

[212] Frank, The Americans, p.9.

indicates a compatibility between their vehicles of expression. Both emphasise an idiosyncratic rather than conventional interpretation of America.

A preference for laconic titles indicating location pervades in much documentary photography. The strongly denotative quality of photography might be the reason for this predilection in titling. There is in this kind of titling a sense of the photographer remaining faithful to the 'facts' which were before the camera at the time the photograph was taken. Since documentary photography is concerned with documents observed from actual existence it would seem apt to utilize this kind of text: and has become a somewhat accepted convention for titling in documentary photography. In much of Goldblatt's work a preference for terse captions pervades, particularly in exhibitions since he believes that the spectator is less inclined to read text in that context. He states, 'But again, I am biased, perhaps too strongly, in favour of the view that the viewer must work'.[213]

While the structures of language and photography are dissimilar, the effect of this kind of caption forces the spectator to direct their attention towards the image; in a sense implying that the informational value lies within the image itself rather than the title. As Fay Godwin states, 'I'm a documentary photographer, my work is about reality, but that shouldn't mean it can't be creative'.[214]

Despite the apparent irreconcilability between the structures of language and visual imagery, their constant combinations have become an accepted convention. However, what must be asserted, is that photography is primarily a visual medium, relying principally on a way of seeing. Therefore the image itself must convey the intentions of the photographer, and have primacy over words, in order to preclude its redundancy in such collaborations.

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[213]Candidate's interview with David Goldblatt, April 1990.

[214]Godwin, p.xii.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, documentary photography comprises a broad spectrum of approaches which are not contained within very clear boundaries. This research has attempted to indicate some of those parameters which are conventional to the approach as exemplified in the work of the photographers selected, and the two organisations examined. The approaches adopted by the selected photographers indicate not only how they adhere to the documentary genre, but also the divergent procedures which constitute it.

Another aspect that has become apparent, is the manner in which parallel approaches in the construction of images elicit differing meanings, i.e., the approach adopted by Walker Evans and David Goldblatt resemble one another in a number of ways. However, the resultant impression their images effect is most dissimilar.

By examining the precedents of the FSA and Drum as catalysts of the documentary genre, the scope of the genre, in its application and its means of expression, has become apparent. It is the expressive qualities of photography which have interested the candidate and provoked further areas for extended study. Initially the area of investigation focused on the living spaces of South African domestic workers; but this proved too restrictive an area for researching the subject fully. The transience of this group and the divergent constraints of space and light reflected in the various environments required a more extensive investigation in order to depict that which was found most salient of the subject. Consequently the subject matter researched was enlarged to incorporate rural dwellings. In this way it was intended that the photographs might complement one another, drawing parallels between urban and rural environments. The interface between interior and exterior became an important aspect in the construction of these photographs, and is attributable to this decision.

Through the examination of the selected photographer's work, certain influences exerted on the candidate became apparent. The earlier photographs depict verticals and horizontals parallel to the picture plane in order to heighten the feeling of stillness which was encountered. An approach which is linked to that of Evans and Goldblatt. In the later pictures the tilting of the camera, and photographing into the light, resembles the approach utilized by Robert Frank. An awareness of the limits of the frame; the shaping of the image itself, the inclusion of objects for their shape as well as indexes of meaning have, subsequently, become more consciously employed.

Differences between the candidate's work and that of the photographers examined are, however, observed in the construction of images, i.e., the composition. Emphasis on the fragmentary quality of the photograph; deliberate omissions or the cleaving of objects and subjects, determined by the framing particular to photographic construction, have been accorded increasing consideration, defining in part, an individual approach.

The interaction which the research facilitated, the variety of reactions elicited by subjects, and the range of interiors encountered prohibited a predetermined modus operandi; rather the photographic practice adopted, demanded a somewhat intuitive response. When looking at a photograph, what is perceived is not only the object photographed, but the photograph itself. It is unlike our perception of things because it is contained in a frame. A fundamental point about photography is that it engages a way of looking at something which is meant to be resolved in some particular way, while there is no special way things themselves are meant to look. Part of the response in depicting certain objects and subjects may be to exercise potentialities of the depicting procedure in such a way that the image of the subject may resolve in a multiplicity of ways. The belief that a particular way of recording a subject might cohere with the photographer's intentions, and manifest each with equal vigour, is a condition which has become more conscious as a result of this research.

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