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"The Broadview Road Project"

BY

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ABSTRACT

"The Broadview Road Project" is an exhibition of sixty-three black and white photographs. The photographs were taken over a period of one year and depict the people living on one block of Broadview Road. Generally speaking the project has grown out of the social-documentary tradition in photography. This paper will give a definition of "social-documentary" in terms of its historical development and main characteristics. The paper will also discuss other pertinent influences and finally give a brief description and analysis of the project itself.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Since the invention of photography people have been depicted in a variety of ways, from the traditional posed portrait to the candid snapshot to the identification These various uses of photography fulfill photograph. specific cultural functions and exist primarily in photography, often Other types of private context. referred to as "artistic" and "documentary", have less clearly defined functions. Characteristically they are initiated by the photographer rather than the subject and intended for a public rather than private context. Formally and stylistically these types of photography are readily defined. Documentary photography, instance, varies in approach from formal to candid.

inception the photographic portrait was From its the need of a burgeoning Ιt fulfilled popular. middle-class to have themselves pictured and their growing status recognized. In these early photographic portraits many conventions of the painted portrait, such as posing, were continued. composition, and lighting, relationship between photographer and sitter was based on a business transaction. The portrait was seen as a record, a memento, a keepsake intended for display in the home, or preservation in the family album.

As photography developed, faster and easier methods of making photographs were devised and within a very short time almost everyone had access to a camera and could make photographs. This brought out a true vernacular expression in what came to be called the "snapshot". Snapshots were taken to commemorate highlights in people's lives such as birthdays, weddings, family gatherings and holidays. photographer was usually a member of the family or a participant in the proceedings. Snapshooting was usually a spontaneous event with little regard for framing, lighting and other formal considerations. Yet in spite of the often naive quality of the snapshot it had a freshness and raw vitality which was recognized by "serious" photographers as being uniquely photographic and duly appropriated into their own work. Like the commercial portrait, the snapshot existed primarily in the private realm of home and family.

A more functional type of photography for the depiction of individuals is the identification photograph. Its use is purely descriptive and specific to the identification of criminals, users of driver's licenses and passports. The identification photograph's function is based on photography's capacity for verisimilitude.

Some photographers had greater aspirations for the medium. They believed photography could be used for artistic expression while others were more interested in using photography as a way of investigating and documenting life around them. These two approaches, artistic and documentary, with their differing intentions and styles, represent two distinct traditions in the history of photography. Though the concepts of art-photography and documentary photography often overlap, the discussion in this paper focusses primarily on the documentary and more specifically the social documentary tradition.

Chapter Two defines and gives an historical overview of social documentary photography. This section traces the development and changing meaning of the genre. The various types of subject matter and intention which have motivated documentary photographers are also discussed. Authenticity or truthfulness, an issue that has almost constantly come into question in regard to documentary photography, will be discussed in light of a variety of interpretations and uses of the genre.

In this discussion of documentary photography a distinction is made between "social documentary" and "human document". This distinction allows one to address a key dilemna in documentary photography: the opposition of its

obvious informational expectations and the less apparent expressive aspirations of the photographer.

The third chapter discusses specific ways in which the social documentary tradition has influenced my own work. The final chapter describes the exhibition: The Broadview Road Project. The project is discussed in terms of its initial concept, its evolution and its final form. Specific images are commented on and compared with others in an analysis of the construction of the exhibition.

Chapter Two

Social Documentary Photography

Documentary photography is a commonly understood term and represents a well-established tradition. "The making of documentary photographs is a socially and culturally patterned activity that has been variously interpreted by photographers" (Ohrn: 1980, xiv). It is a genre that is used according to certain rules and conventions, and follows certain themes, structures, and styles that are unique or characteristic to the genre.

A primary attribute of documentary photography is its inherent truthfulness. Literally every photograph could serve as a document; as David Featherstone (1984, iv) states: "the concept of documentation is inherent in the nature of photography." From the beginning, photographs accepted at face value. "Natural truth and were synonymous." (Lyons: 1966, 11). photography became Photography was accepted simply as a recording of reality. Any personal choices made by photographers was considered inconsequential and they were seen as being no more than machine-operators or technicians.

The dictionary defines "document" as a thing containing information or proof or evidence of anything.

It is what we think of when we speak of "documentary proof" "legal document". This definition implies or presentation of objective way, without facts in an editorialization or the addition of fictional matter. thought to be factual or official, as in material in a trial, and is inarquably true. evidence photography this might include identification photographs or those documenting the scene of a crime. It is on this premise, of the photograph as a truthful representation, that documentary photography is based.

Documentary photography is usually survey or project oriented. The collection of images is considered more important than the individual image. The work gets its strength and meaning through a cumulative effect as evident in work ranging from Jacob Riis' How The Other Half lives, to the Farm Security Administration's documentation of 1930's America, to Bill Owens' Suburbia.

A distinction between documentary and social documentary photography should be made. Where documentary is a general designation covering every conceivable kind of subject, social documentary concentrates on people and society. It was the various human and social aspects of society that motivated the early documentary photographers. At first many of them were motivated by the simple need for an historical record. Later photographers such as Jacob

and Lewis Hine were motivated by a strong social Riis conscience, a recognition of social ills, and the recognition of photography as a tool to initiate change. This intent was quite different from that of the commercial portrait photographer and the casual snapshooter. documentary view was usually an in-depth study and intended for a wider audience and public context. This intent was an assumption that the work would be of some based on interest to а public at large. In the case of wanting to improve social conditions the photographers audience was urged to help bring about this change.

In the social documentary genre the photographer's intent goes beyond the previously described specific functions of photography. It is more self-conscious and usually initiated by the photographer rather than the subject. The normal orientation between photographer and subject is reversed, and a particular ideological stance or attitude is implied. Thus, at least initially, the status of the photographer is that of the outsider or objective observer. The significance of the photographer as author and the nature of his or her personal expression is consequently emphasized. This personal and self-conscious approach links the documentary photographer with other personal and expressive activities of art-making.

William Stott (1973: 4) calls "documentary" a complex and contradictory word with two meanings, only one of which can be found in the dictionary. The dictionary meaning has been previously noted. In the second meaning Stott refers to documentary as a "human document". Its characteristics those of autobiography or personal narrative, and as such reflect an individual's personality and point of view. basis is human interest, implying a preference for human subject matter because of its emotional content. Thus, its subject is not only information but feeling as "The importance of these photographs lies in their only to inform us, but to move us." not power (Newhall: 1964, 137). Stott goes on to describe a human document as the opposite of the official kind seen in government publications and public relations campaigns (1973, 6). Its uniqueness lies in the glimpse it offers of an inner experience or private self, an experience or event the viewer can relate to and identify with. Implicit in the human document's meaning is its authenticity as personal expression.

Further on, Stott distinguishes between a "human document" and "social documentary". In his definition, human documents deal with natural phenomena; man's universal experience of life, death, work and play. Social documentary on the other hand deals with man-made

conditions of a particular place and time such as the Depression, unemployment, racial discrimination and terrorism. One can distinguish further between particular and representative (universal/generic) experience; and that which is particular but unique (situated in a particular place and time).

interesting to note that as the representative arts developed, depiction evolved from generalized figures more specific individually to ones that were and the 1800s, when Millet and Courbet recognzable. In introduced the new subject matter of the working-class into their paintings, they were depicted as types rather than individuals. Similarly, the subjects of early documentary photographers like the French photographer, Charles Negre and the Englishman, John Thomson were also generalized. The role or status of these early documentary photographers not unlike that of their subjects in that they were largely anonymous. It was only in the later work of Riis and Hine that the subjects were identified. It was later photographers like still when Riis and Hine were acknowledged as the makers of the photographs.

A more suitable distinction between human document and social documentary is possible. The human document with its autobiographical bias emphasizes the author's sensibility. It identifies the work in terms of why a

particular subject was chosen, how it was defined and the way the medium was used. The social documentary with its descriptive focus leans toward the empirical, dealing with the subject in a more analytical and comparative manner. This distinction, commonly noted in photographic literature and criticism, separates the subject from the way in which it is depicted.

It is not really surprising that the majority of documentary photographers were interested in subject matter outside of their own realm of experience. Since most of these photographers were from the middle or upper class, this interest translated into photographic studies of the lower classes, people of other cultures, and faraway places. Of course, the ruling or upper classes were also potentially interesting subjects and some photographers began documenting this aspect of society as well. Susan Sontag has commented on this tendency in social documentary photography: "Photography has always been fascinated by social heights and lower depths. Documentarists ... prefer the latter." (Sontag; 1977: 55).

In the late 1880s the photographer, Jacob Riis gave social documentary a new meaning. Riis was a newspaper reporter who took up photography in order to show the miserable living conditions and the poverty-stricken inhabitants of the slums of New York. His primary

objective was to help improve the living conditions of the poor and he was successful in having some of the run-down tenements demolished and replaced with improved housing. Riis' that extent photographs were informational and therefore communicated his message In spite of his obvious and effectively. clearly indifference to artistic considerations he made many great and compelling photographs. "Perhaps it would be closer to the truth to say that Riis was intuitively interested in problems of form without identifying these as artistic problems" (Szarkowski: 1973, 48). This is significant because Riis was not just making objective records but personally motivated pleas for change. Though he had no artistic training, he had the practical sense to know exactly how to make a photograph that would communicate his message.

Lewis Hine worked in a similar way, continuing where Riis had left off. Hine had been trained as a sociologist and used photography to record subjects such as immigrants arriving in America and child-labourers in industry. Like Riis, Hine wanted to help improve living conditions for these people through enhanced public awareness. Both Riis and Hine used photography as the means to an end; not as an end in itself as it was to those practising photography as an art form.

It is not clear when photography's claim to objective truth was first questioned. Likely it was about the same time that it was beginning to be accepted as an art-form. Peter Henry Emerson, a leading exponent of photography as pictorial work should become more wrote that naturalistic. To Emerson, naturalistic photography was an emphasizing the "illusion αf truth" expression (Lyons: 1966, 12). Lewis Hine also understood that photographs could falsify. His answer to this was simply a matter of integrity:

While photographs may not lie, liars may photograph. It becomes necessary, then, in our revelation of the truth to see to it that the camera we depend on contracts no bad habits. (Trachtenberg: 1980, 111).

Though photographs gave a limited depiction, the onus was on the photographer's sense of integrity in giving a truthful account. Only rarely did this come into question.

A.D. Coleman, in an article about "directorial" photography, differentiates between the photographer who presumes not to interfere with whatever he is photographing and the photographer who "consciously and intentionally creates events for the express purpose of making images thereof." (1979: 250). Coleman focusses on work that is obviously fabricated, like that of Reijlander, Krims and Uelsman. He also discusses work that is more subtly

directorial, citing examples such as Alexander Gardner's "Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter" in which the photographer re-arranged the dead body for compositional effect; and Arthur Rothstein's famous dust bowl photograph in which the photographer apparently asked the young boy to drop back behind his father. Both of these photographs were presented as being truthful. Coleman continues:

... the substantial distinction, then, is between treating the external world as a given, to be altered only through photographic means ... or as raw material, to be itself manipulated as much as desired.

He concludes: "the difference between the passive approach and a more aggressive, initiatory participation is still only one of degree." (252). As Rudolph Arnheim stated: "photography reaches into the world as an intruder and therefore creates a disturbance... inevitably the photographer is a part of the situation he depicts". (1974: 151). The obvious manipulation of re-arranging a dead body is essentially not much different than the more subtle manipulation of changing camera angle, varying the lighting or posing someone.

Some appropriate questions at this point are: what is the photographer's relation to the subject and what kind of interaction .do the photographs suggest? Tod Papageorge writes: "What is interesting about photographers is the nature of the balance they create: the place where they draw that line between their own presence and the mindless memory of their cameras." (1981, 10).

During the 1930s when the Farm Security Administration (FSA) photographers were documenting various aspects of the Depression, there was a controversy in regard to "truth" in photography. One of the photographers, Arthur Rothstein, in recording the drought, had moved a cow's skull and it against two different backgrounds. photographed (Hurley: 1972, 86-92). Moving the skull was seen violation of the integrity of the documentary genre. average documentary photographer was not beyond using a bit "artistic" license. Documentary photography implies that no professional actors are used but does not deny the possibility of dramatic re-enactments staged for the Strict truth to appearances isn't an absolute camera. necessity though perhaps creating that impression is. any case the nature of photography could not guarantee it.

Truth in photography came to be seen as conditional and dependent on the moral inclinations of the photographer. Robert Adams attempts to explain it this way. "The point of art has never been to make something synonymous with life, however, but to make something of reduced complexity that is nonetheless analogous to life."

(Adams: 1981, 68). This is a re-stating of Emerson's

"illusion of truth" and clearly indicates a process of interpretation and transformation as opposed to straight-forward recording. A personal style on the part of the photographer is implied.

Rudolph Arnheim has suggested that style in photography is not just evident in the formal qualities of a photograph. It is also evident in the implied attitude of the photographer which he calls "form of action" (Arnheim: 1974, 153). In this definition the work must be looked at not only in terms of technique but also in how successfully the photographer has manipulated the medium to express his feelings and personal attitude. The work should reflect the photographer's intent.

In the 1930's the concept of documentation was no longer seen as being unproblematic. Natural truth and photography were no longer accepted as being synonymous.

The problem is sharpest with photography: re-analysis of how pictures were selected, how people were posed, ... the way images were cropped, all reveal the subtle or not so subtle, manipulations of reality and viewer's impressions. (Marcus & Fischer: 1986, 127).

Consequently the traditional meaning of documentary photography underwent some changes. Documentary of themselves photographers became more aware an they recorded. This influential factor in what

self-consciousness is evident in the personal and expressive work of Robert Frank, which in turn influenced others like Garry Winogrand and Lee Friedlander who extended the genre toward "the personalizing of the documentary aesthetic, the shifting of the delicate balance between record and interpretation toward expression." (Green: 1984, 106).

This shifting or re-defining was most evident in the photographer's choice of subject. Less emphasis was placed on reporting particular subjects or events and more emphasis placed on the reportage of general social issues and descriptions of the culture at large. This approach like Friedlander and typical of photographers was Their work was not intended to effect social Winogrand. change. Rather, it was personal commentary, non-judgemental, consciously exploratory and questioning. These photographers were equally interested in exploring new formal possibilities and subject matter.

Today the social documentary tradition in photography is less well-defined. Many of its traditional functions have been taken over by film and television. Its formal and stylistic characteristics have been appropriated for a variety of uses from art to fashion photography. The continual questioning of the documentary genre revolves around the dilemma of truth in photography which seems to

be the genre's most consistent motif. It is this questioning that has freed documentary photography from its limited role as objective recorder and thereby made the subjective response of the photographer an integral component of the work.

The social documentary genre fits into that tradition in art, which attempts to distance itself from "art". It seeks the seeming greater legitimization of the everyday world and has become a well-used strategy. Beaumont Newhall terms this characteristic "anti-aesthetic". (Newhall: 1964, 144). This approach is invoked whenever there is a perceived need for a re-assessment of the boundaries of art. Photography is uniquely appropriate to this task because it so easily serves both fact and fantasy. Arnold Hauser writes:

This tendency to the factual and the authentic - to the "document" ... which is tied up, in the documentary film, with an escape from the professional actor, again signifies not only the desire that is always recurring in the history of art, to show the plain reality, unvarnished truth, the unadulterated facts, that is, "life as is", but very often a really renunciation of art altogether. (1951, 257).

Photographers today are very conscious of the effects of shifting contexts on the interpretation of a photograph. Like art, the definition of social documentary photography

must be seen as being open-ended. Social documentary photography is understood in a general way but its more subtle meanings and uses are constantly shifted and The continuing flow of life, new subjects, new situations and contexts keeps the genre Simultaneously there is an ongoing re-examination of documentation in general, and in photography in particular. combination of а distinct tradition with the The possibility of new forms of expression gives the social a continual sense of renewal and documentary genre vitality. It is out of these continuing possibilitites that my own work has grown.

Chapter Three

Influences

Initially I was interested in photography as a way of certain things, people, and events that recording Photographs were like mementos, interested me. them was like keeping a visual diary. collecting Photographs could capture and hold special moments and also seemed more dependable than memory. They were analogous to experience and looking at them was like re-living those moments.

Later I was able to recognize the fine distinction between the photograph and the memories and associations it could trigger. Photographs were powerful vehicles for escape into a dream-world and some images were certain to bring on a flood of memories. The re-lived experience through the photograph seemed almost as strong as the original one. The experience of looking at a photograph had its own unique characteristics as well; it could be looked at in a way that the real world could not.

A fascinating aspect of photography is that in addition to picturing what one wants, it often also includes what one does not want or expect. These unwanted elements are a nuisance as one tries to gain total control

over the medium. There are always elements, beyond one's control, which appear in the photograph. However, these unforseen objects and juxtapositions can suggest new ways of thinking about and using photography, as one becomes conscious of the difference between intention and result, what Diane Arbus called: "the intention gap" (Arbus: 1972, 12). Photograpy has the ability to reveal aspects of reality in ways one does not always expect or think possible, through these unexpected transformations.

This more complete understanding of photography enables one to use the medium in a more controlled and therefore personal way. Essentially it entails a process of learning to see "photographically" and, of understanding how a photograph transforms its subject. Fortuitous photographic accidents always seem to happen in an inexplicable way. I devised all kinds of strategies to encourage these types of occurrences often working in a round-about or haphazard way.

Some photographers have found it necessary to use various manipulations, extended techniques and alternative processes for self-expression. I was content to continue using photography in the "straight" approach utilizing its strength for realistic description. Regardless of photography's limitations in this regard, the believability of the photographic image, the illusion, always seemed

complete. Paul Strand defined the "straight" approach this way:

Photography, ... finds its d'etre, like all media in a complete uniqueness of means. This is an absolute unqualified objectivity. ... The full potential power of every medium is dependent on the purity of its use. ... The photographer's problem see clearly the therefore, is to limitations and at the same time the potential qualities of his medium, for it is precisely here that honesty, no less than intensity of vision is the prerequisite of a living expression. This means a real respect for the thing him, ... the fullest front of realization of this is accomplished of without tricks process of manipulation, through the use straight photographic methods. It is in the organization of this objectivity that the photographer's point of view towards Life enters in. (Lyons: 1966, 136).

Every artist or photographer has his or her own strategy to investigate reality or "truth". The one expressed by Strand was the basis for my strategy. I limit my tools, materials and means to the bare essentials and make my approach as simple and straight-forward as possible. The tonal rendition of the scene depicted should be as naturalistic as possible. Conversely, the technique or means to achieve this should not be apparent. This approach is designed so that the "realism" of the picture can be taken for granted. It should be as realistic as

possible, that is give the impression of realism, the "illusion of truth".

My work has grown out of the social documentary tradition and the "straight" approach. It acknowledges the work of photographers like Lewis Hine, Paul Strand and This influence is most evident Walker Evans. technique, or the way I use the medium, and the particular way in which I have chosen to approach the act of photographing. My particular choice of subject, the middle-class, is somewhat different from the conventional choice of social documentary in that the subject is not extraordinary nor are the photographs intended as social critique. My approch is similar to other documentary photographers in that it is project-oriented and intended for a wider audience beyond the immediate audience of the subjects photographed.

This particular methodology has evolved over a number of years. The choices of camera-format, lens, film, exposure, development, printing and presentation were made separately and intuitively. Many of these decisions appear to be made for simple practical reasons. Taken together they add up to a particular and personal approach. My intention is that the total effect of these choices and considerations should add up to a photograph that is as direct and transparent as possible.

My choice of the middle-class as a subject was taken for several reasons. The choice was initially intuitive, but over a period of time I realized that this was a subject closest to my own experience; one with which I could strongly relate and call my own. This was partially response to the stereotypical view of documentary photography as the depiction of the extremes of society. This conventional understanding of documentary became apparent in a number of ways. People I was interested in photographing would often be surprised and ask questions "why us?" or "wouldn't it be more interesting to photograph hookers and drug addicts?" In most cases they did not think they were special and could not imagine why anyone would want to photograph them. Also with few such as Bill Owens and Roslyn Banish, exceptions, photographers have overlooked the middle-class as potential subject. I was interested in depicting a segment of society that is often referred to as "the silent majority" or represented by "the ordinary man in the street".

Like much of the common-place throughout history, this is a subject that is largely invisible and anonymous. This anonymity or generalized concept changes when one takes a closer look. The undifferentiated surface begins to take on detail. In this closer view one meets individuals who

are unique and special and almost never match one's expectations or pre-conceived notions. These people live relatively quiet lives, don't generally like to draw attention to themselves and seem to want to retain their anonymity.

This choice of subject is also based on a seemingly simple philosophical concept. In our search for meaning or "truth" we often overlook the obvious. Ludwig Wittgenstein expresses the point in this way:

The aspect of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. One is unable to notice something - because it is always before one's eyes. We fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and powerful. (1974, 50).

This attitude proposes a greater awareness of the simple everyday occurrences of our lives. It is also compatible with the "straight" approach in photography. Most significantly this attitude proposes looking at the world in a fresh way.

One of the main problems in photography, as in the other creative arts, is that of translation or representation; the communication of one's ideas and intentions. "The question is always to find the sole translation that will be valid in another language." (Brassai quoted in Newhall: 1980, 279). As Robert Adams

suggested, it is a matter of making the translation analogous. This question is more acute in photography because of its special or priveleged relationship to the world of appearances. It is an intractable medium.

photographer though the acknowledges the properties of medium rarely, if ever, shows his ever, shows the emotional detachment which Proust ascribes to him (that of complete alienation) he cannot freely his vision either. externalize Trachtenberg: (Kracauer quoted in 1980, 260).

is a peculiarly photographic problem. Two basic One treats the ways of looking at it are apparent. photograph as fact, the other as artifact. As fact it is part of the world; as artifact it stands apart. The fact is taken for granted and anonymous. The artifact draws attention to itself and is special. One is authorless and objective; the other expressive and subjective. This dichotomy has been discussed by a variety of writers on John Szarkowski (1978) calls them "mirrors photography. Coleman (1979, 250) differentiates and windows". A.D. between "informational" and "contemplative". Bill Jay (1978, 649) complicates it slightly with his designations of "naturalistic" and "humanistic". This dualistic model is used both to describe the nature of photography and to compare various individual uses of the medium.

convenient model for discussion but often tends to polarize rather than integrate the dual meaning of photography.

This dual meaning is dealt with in numerous ways. Siegfried Kracauer writes: "What counts is the right mixture of his (the photographer's) realist loyalties and endeavors." (quoted Trachtenberg: formative in 1980, 260). Henry Holmes Smith describes "a special equilibrium between the world of objects ... and the intensely felt subjective image." (Lyons: 1966, 102). Jonathan Green extends this by describing an interaction between photographer, camera and subject. The goal is to keep a balance or tension between form and content.

If the form becomes too mannered or stylized, the photograph will lose its authenticity as representation. ... On the other hand, if the content becomes too provocative, too dramatic, it tends to draw the viewer away from the photograph's subtleties as form. (Green: 1984, 100).

Historically we can trace a changing understanding of photography. "The emphasis of meaning was shifted from what the world looks like to what we feel about the world and what we want the world to mean." (Aaron Siskind quoted in Lyons: 1966, 96). For the first part of photography's development (roughly from 1839 to 1885), the emphasis was on the subject depicted. (Lyons: 1966, 86). Only later, when photography's transformational possibilities were

discovered, did it come to be seen as a medium capable of conveying meaning and expression. Its status as art was continually debated. Significantly, the very qualities that made photography's status as truthful document questionable, made it acceptable as a medium for artistic expression.

A common criticism in the still contentious debate about photography's status as art, has been photography's perceived limitations in regard to personal expression. The "simple" act of recording is observed condescendingly. This view fails to recognize:

... the photographer's peculiar and truly formative effort to represent significant aspects of physical reality without trying to overwhelm that reality [and] ... No doubt this effort carries aesthetic implications. (Kracauer quoted in Trachtenberg: 1980, 268).

Despite photography's objectivity a subjective expression is irrepressible. Kracauer continues: "the formative tendency, then, does not have to conflict with the realistic tendency. Quite the contrary, it can help to substantiate and fulfill it." (260). The aim, then, is not simply a balancing of the two tendencies but one that is mutually supportive. Successful examples of this would include the work of photographers like Lewis Hine, Paul Strand and Walker Evans.



Fig. 3-1. Lewis Hine. Doffer girl, 1909. Courtesy of George Eastman House.



Fig. 3-2. Walker Evans. Sharecropper family, 1936.



Fig. 3-3. Paul Strand. Young Boy, Gondeville, France, 1951. Courtesy of Aperture.

The problem is often compounded by an incomplete reading of the photograph. As viewers we are diverted by the photograph's realism and drawn into its illusion, to its seeming content. We are pushed off balance and become wrapped up in "the thing itself". It takes a peculiar and conscious concentration to recognize the photographer's handiwork, expression and intent.

representation in photography The problem of complex and varied. It becomes more so when the subject is another human being. Obviously one treats a human subject differently from an inanimate one. A human being must be Some kind of social interaction must be responded to. initiated; a social contract struck. The photographic act a mental tug-of-war between photographer and subject: the photographer tries to get the "best" picture possible while the subjects try to present or compose themselves in "best" appropriate. that seems or considerations are some of the aesthetic implications that in general. and social to photography are unique documentary in particular, and demand what Arnheim calls a "form of action".

Essentially the photographer holds the balance of power in such an interaction. Photographers have used this power in many different ways. Some photographers such as Lewis Hine and Walker Evans tried to minimize this power by

letting their subjects pose as they liked. Photographers like Weegee and Diane Arbus took full advantage of this power and depicted their subjects with seemingly little regard for their feelings. Paul Strand's almost excessive respect for his subjects resulted in portraits that bordered on the idealistic. One photographer, David Attie, avoided this altogether by allowing his subjects to control the moment of exposure by letting them release the shutter when they were ready and composed.

approached his subject in Lewis Hine straight-forward and matter-of-fact way. He was primarily interested in photography's descriptive function and its ability to clearly represent his subject. Since his intentions were based on a desire to help his subjects, his approach was generally sympathetic. Hine's pictures were simply records but also showed a strong personal sensibility. His work is characteristically functional or utilitarian and simply constructed. He seems photographed his subjects where he found them and simply had to make the most of what were often difficult photographic situations. Most notable in Hine's work is the characteristic frontal pose of his subjects and the eye-lens contact that makes them appear to be looking out the picture. This characteristic is similar to the identification photograph mentioned earlier. It has the effect of establishing a connection between the viewer and the photograph. (fig. 3-1). In comparison to other portrait work of the time, Hine's seems crude and almost too realistic.

One of the most interesting aspects of Hine's work is the implied relationship between photographer and subject.

> learned how to achieve a certain physical distance, corresponding to a psychological distance, that allowed for a free interaction between the eyes of the subject and the camera eye. Put another way, he allowed his subjects room for their self-expression. Hine's own character expresses itself in where he places himself vis-a-vis. subject. spatial. the his . . . boundaries, the solicited pose, are signs of the photographer's gentlest of interventions, not an imposition but a subtle collaboration. (Trachtenberg: 1977, 124-5).

Stated simply, Hine made photographs that not only gave a clear and accurate description of his subject, thereby serving a practical function, but did so in a way that clearly described his own sensibility and particular form of empathy.

Walker Evans' approach is formally similar to Hine's but somewhat different in intent. Where Hine's intentions were socially or politically motivated, Evans' intentions were artistically inclined and not intended to fulfill a practical function. Echoing William Stott, Evans observed that documentary is:

... a very sophisticated and misleading word. And not very clear. ... The term should be documentary style.
... You see, a document has use, whereas art is really useless. ...
I'm sometimes called a "documentary photographer", but that supposes quite a subtle knowledge of the distinction I've just made. A man operating under that definition could take a certain sly pleasure in the disguise. (Katz: 1971, 87).

Thus, even though Evans' intentions were artistically motivated, he nonetheless had a very straight and purist approach to photography. To him the idea of manipulating anything in the photograph the way Rothstein had done with the cow's skull was antithetical. Evans wanted pure unadulterated facts. Consequently his method of photography, like Hine's, emphasized a clear representation of the subject and minimized a subjective response.

Though Evans was opposed to manipulation, his famous photograph of the share-cropper family (fig. 3-2) is obviously posed. It is also interesting to note that Evans photographed the same family dressed in their Sunday clothes but never included this photograph in any of his books or exhibitions. As A.D. Coleman pointed out, any manipulation on the part of the photographer is simply a matter of degree. And it is exactly these manipulations, no matter how subtle, that reveal the photographer's personality.

Paul Strand once lived in an Italian village for one year to get to know the people before starting to photograph. His strong "respect for the thing in front of him" was uncommon, almost extreme, but it was the very basis of his attitude when photographing people. Strand's portraits often portray his subjects as being larger than life. (fig. 3-3). Strand used the transformational power of photography to create a highly refined and idealized vision. It was a classical vision where the ordinary man was elevated to a heroic stature. Jonathan Green writes: "Strand's art is not the discovery of a new truth, but the elaboration of an accepted doctrine: the doctrine of the nobility and dignity of man." (1984, 20).

Garry Winogrand extended Strand's statement in regard to respect for the subject:

I like to think of photography as a two-way act of respect. Respect for the medium, by letting it do what it does best, describe. And respect for the subject by describing it as it is. A photographer must be responsible to both. (Hume/Manchester/Metz: 1978, 17).

Winogrand's notions of describing the subject "as it is" seem to disregard or fail to recognize the particular influence the photographer can have on the subject. "Photography reaches into the world and creates a disturbance, ... inevitably the photographer is a part of

the situation he depicts." (Arnheim: 1974, 151/2). Winogrand's statement also does not acknowledge the influence of the photographer's manipulation of the medium on the perception of the image.

The recognition of the implied relationship between photographer and subject and the often subtle manipulations of the medium requires a thorough reading of the image. The combination of photographer, camera and subject comes together in a variety of ways. The photographer's implied presence varies from a nominal one in the case of Walker Evans, to an almost overwhelming one in Arbus' case. It is the particular attitude of the photographer that is apparent in the photographs and which is a distinctive signature. Siegfried Kracauer defines this, similar to Arnheim's "form of action", as being a particular "form of empathy". (quoted in Trachtenberg: 1980, 260).

Interaction between people is a common and universal The various forms these interactions take, make them continually interesting. interaction is Each different and presents new possibilities. Photographing people depends on some form of interaction and sets up a contrast of intentions between photographer and subject. Both the photographer and the subject have their separate resulting photograph preconceptions. The is rarely successful to both sets of It is usually a eyes.

compromise. But the photograph always records this interaction and suggests a certain contrast of wills. This is the most interesting aspect of photographing people and perhaps its essential subject.

These moments are captured in a split second. The photographing occurs in a suspended present, a time of heightened awareness for both photographer and subject. The photograph is a record of that time, that moment. Like memory, the photograph is selective. It represents a moment separated from the passage of time. A definite mental re-positioning occurs - a particular concentration by the photographer juggling the various technical details, light, watching the subject's pose judging the expression, composition and formal relationships, and by the subject trying to look a certain way, projecting a mental idea to a physical expression. Both photographer and subject concentrate on the camera where the eyes meet.

When photographing people, I try to make the actual picture-taking as brief and informal as possible. I explain briefly what I am doing and try to maintain a relaxed atmosphere. In most cases I photograph my subjects in their home environment where they will feel most comfortable. But regardless of how unassuming the whole procedure seems, most people still feel nervous or at a loss as to how they would like to present themselves.

People's varied reactions come through photographs. Some are awkward and shy, some are open and relaxed, others strike stiff poses and forced smiles. I watch for poses or interactions that are expressive or characteristic. Often it is the eyes that are the most expressive so my attention is usually focussed on them. The particular pose, or body language, or interaction (between subjects or between photographer and subject) can quite expressive or representative. When be also photographing I watch for a moment of connection self-consciousness or curiosity; a moment when there is some form of communication or interaction.

Generally my photographs fall into two categories: those that are formal and posed and those that are more informal or candid. In a formal situation I usually have to take control of where people pose, choice of background and so on. I offer to let them choose where they would like to stand, but in most cases they would rather leave this to me. Within a chosen setting I leave the subjects to pose as they like. The composition is simple, with the subject centered in the picture as in the portraits of Hine and Strand, in which the frontality of the pose focusses attention on the subject rather than on how it is represented. The distance between photographer and subject is usually a comfortable social one, and the framing of the

photograph is a a direct consequence of this. This way of working is part of my strategy to make the photographs appear as natural or realistic as possible. At the same time I try to make photographs that will depict my subjects in a dignified way and acknowledge some form of interaction between photographer and subject.

Chapter Four

The Exhibition

The exhibition, <u>The Broadview Road Project</u>, is a collection of sixty-three black and white photographs depicting the people that live in one block of Broadview Road in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. The photographs were taken over a period of one year from January 18, 1986 to January 18, 1987. More accurately the photographs depict the people who were willing to be photographed and willing to be part of my project.

On the surface Broadview Road is an ordinary residential street like thousands of others. It is the kind of street where nothing much ever seems to happen. The overall impression is one of calm and quiet, comfort and security.

I chose this particular block for a number of reasons. It is well-defined in terms of area, bordered by the two back-lanes on the north and south, 16th Street on the west and the 14th Street Bridge on the east. The block also seemed manageable in terms of the number of households and people living there. When I started photographing, there were about seventy-five people living there and when I finished, that number had grown to over ninety. During the

year one house was moved away and three new ones were built. A number of people moved out, new people moved in The block is also close to where I and one baby was born. live and therefore easily accessible. In a way it was an arbitrary choice but no more so than choosing to live in choice particular neighbourhood. The this inexplicable as the way James West, the author of a sociological study entitled: Plainville, U.S.A., found his He wrote that he found Plainville by accident subiect. when his car broke down and stranded him there for two This particular block of Broadview Road also felt comfortable and seemed to have the potential for making the kind of photographs I was after. Finally, a motivating force was the desire to depict a place that was reminiscent of the neighbourhood I had grown up in.

When I started the project I wanted to photograph every square inch of the block and find out everything about it — when it was built, its history, the type of zoning, etc. The idea about exploring a small defined area had occurred to me some time ago while reading an article about perception. In this article the author (Ted Relph; 1979) wrote: "John Ruskin maintained that there was always more in the world than men could see, walked they ever so slowly." (28). Relph continues:

One could spend a lifetime trying to come to terms with a few square miles

of the earth's surface, to understand why it appears as it does, to appreciate its histories and meanings, to grasp the patterns and associations that constitute the character of this region." (33).

Or to put it in a slightly different light, Bob Lynd, the author of Middletown, asked: "I wonder how many people know what's even down their own street?" (quoted in Goldberg: 1981, 352). Many documentary projects like Bill Owens' Suburbia, Paul Strand's Italian town and James Agee's and Walker Evans' Let Us Now Praise Famous Men have grown out of a similar motivation.

When starting a project of this nature the aim is to make as complete a statement as possible. The sense of what is complete is usually based on certain preconceptions There were certain realities and idealizations. changed these considerations that soon practical preconceptions. I realized I would have to focus on one particular aspect out of a wide range of possibilities. The idea of re-creating the whole place just did not make sense to say nothing of being impossible. Since it was the people living on Broadview Road who animated the place and gave it meaning, they became the main subject and I intended to photograph everyone of them. This also became impossible as some people declined to be photographed and others moved away. It became clear to me that the photographs would not give a complete or definitive picture. As my initial preconceptions and expectations changed, I accepted these factors that were beyond my control as part of the fabric of life on this street, and also part of the ongoing process of the project.

I began with the idea of doing the project over a period of one year so I would have enough time to get to know the people and establish some kind of rapport. Over such an extended period of time I would also be able to photograph the people at various times and in a variety of situations and combinations. If it was simply a matter of documenting, in the most literal sense, I would have kept better statistics and could have arranged to photograph everyone in a day or two. An extended period of time would allow me to get a feel for the life of the place and the people. I also wanted a feeling of community to be evident in the photographs which would only be possible over a period of time.

The first thing I did was go door to door, introduce myself to the people that lived there and discuss my project. This was the most difficult part since I was an outsider. People's reactions were initially mixed. Some were immediately interested and willing to become involved. Some were totally uninterested. Most were skeptical and suspicious. As I met more of the people, took, and

delivered some photographs, they became friendlier and I was able to gain their trust. After the initial strangeness of my request wore off and they became accustomed to seeing me around, they began to take me more seriously.

Since most of the people worked during the week, I was generally limited to photographing on weekends. I could have photographed some of the people at their jobs or in other situations but I was most interested in showing them in their home environment. Since I prefer to use natural light, I was limited to the daylight hours.

The process of walking over to "my" block became a weekly ritual. As I was photographing, I kept a mental checklist of who I had photographed and who I had missed. I wanted to photograph as many people as possible. I got to know some of them better than others. Some of them were difficult to catch at home. There were a wide variety of situations and responses. As a result I photographed some of them many times, others only a few times, and some not at all.

The photographs in the exhibition have been selected and organized to reflect my ideas about the project as well as the process of getting to know and photograph these people. The main criteria was to choose images that were individually strong in terms of composition and visual

interest; and characteristic in terms of giving a fair representation of the people depicted. An exhibition of pictures naturally gives a sense of completeness. I wanted this fact to have its full meaning by including everyone I photographed. I also wanted to reflect some aspect of the process. Therefore the photographs have been arranged chronologically to establish a sense of flow and the passage of time. Since the first and last photographs were taken on the same day, one year apart, there is a definite beginning and end and the sense of a completed cycle.

The inclusion of everyone I photographed and their chronological arrangement define the basic structure or plot-line of the exhibition. Within that basic structure I found it necessary to establish a sub-text or secondary narrative. This sub-text was obvious to me but would be less so to the viewer. It establishes a sense of transition, through repetition continuity and comparison, by depicting the people in different situations and combinations as well as at different times. extended view makes reference to another level of meaning or reality which is less obvious, and gives a more complete picture of life on this block. The view is limited but hints at a larger reality. Susan Sontag writes that a photograph tells one: "There is the surface. Now think -



Fig. 4-1. The Shaws, January 18, 1986.



Fig. 4-2. The Shaws, January 18, 1987.



Fig. 4-3. Elroy, February 1.



Fig. 4-4. Elroy, December 6.



Fig. 4-5. Michael and Joanne, April 5.



Fig. 4-6. Michael and Joanne, October 5.



Fig. 4-7. Garry and Micky, March 1.



Fig. 4-8. Blaise and Lyn, March 22.

or rather feel, intuit - what is beyond it, what the reality must be like if it looks this way." (1973, 23).

The sub-text becomes visible in a variety of ways. The exhibition begins with a photograph of the Shaw family (fig. 4-1). This is significant not only because they were the first ones I photographed but also because they play a major role. Various members of the family appear in a variety of situations and combinations throughout the exhibition as well as in the final photograph, (fig. 4-2) thereby playing an important role of providing continuity.

Another main character in the project is Elroy (fig. 4-3).Не appears near the beginning of the exhibition by himself, again with Jack, with the Shaws, with Roy and finally by himself near the end of the exhibition in a near identical pose as in the first photograph. (fig. 4-4). A similar comparison can be made photographs of Michael and Joanne between the two (figs. 4-5 & 4-6) taken six months apart.

Comparisons can also be made between similar poses, especially the ones that make reference to Grant Wood's "American Gothic". This can be seen in some variation in the photographs of Micky and Garry (fig. 4-7), Lyn and Blaise (fig. 4-8) and Tim and Heather. In itself this is an interesting comparison. It is even more interesting

because it was a pose they deemed appropriate for a documentary project.

other made Many comparisons can be between individuals, couples, families, etc. It is the variety of these comparisons and inter-connections that re-create the richness and diversity of the street. Part of this underlying text is the re-occurrence of similar motifs, which would include secondary or background elements such as the houses, steps, doorways, foliage and light. It also seemed necessary to include posed and unposed views. posed views acknowledge the presence of camera and The unposed photographer and by extension the viewer. pictures illustrate a less self-conscious aspect. the photographs show both aspects. Neither view is more accurate but taken together they give one that is more truthful.

Consequently the photographs are able to function both as "social documentary" and "human document" in the sense that I defined these terms in Chapter Two. That is, they function both in an informational and expressive way. Discussing Walker Evans' work, John Szarkowski asks whether his photographs described his subject or invented it. (1971, 20). Alan Trachtenberg extends this by asking: "Is there a discernible line marking a boundary between the real and the imagined?" (quoted in Featherstone: 1984,

59). Robert Frank suggests that: "the truth is somewhere between the documentary and the fictional. ... What is real one moment has become imaginary the next." (quoted in Tucker: 1986, 90).

The strength of the exhibition lies in its comparative aspect. Comparing one person with another, one time with the next, the posed with the unposed. It contrasts similarity and difference, generalized pre-conceptions and specific facts. In the context of the documentary genre the work derives its meaning from a comparison between its general concept and its specific application.

The title of the exhibition: The Broadview of also suggests two levels meaning. Road Project "Broadview Road" simply suggests a general street name like thousands of others. And "Project" implies an educational association which is appropriate in light of doing this project in an educational context. In a way, the title embodies these two meanings.

In retrospect it seems obvious that what I was looking for on this particular street was a sense of community. I knew that in most places a sense of community did not exist and that if it did it was frail and transient. In that sense the photographs are an idealization. Showing all of these people together gives the impression of a sense of community and is also therefore somewhat of an

idealization. In fact, this particular block was quite special and did have a feeling of community. But that was simply the result of a fortuitous set of circumstances. If I had not found it I probably would have fabricated it: and that is the truth.

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Appendix 1

Comments included in the exhibition

Its a nice place to live. A community in transition, it seems to blend the old with the new, resulting in a very unique place to live. Its the kind of place you wish you'd grown up in, just an ordinary working-class area - nice little homes, nothing fancy but well-kept.

- Margaret Tanko, from Hillhurst/Sunnyside Remembers

Neighbourhoods don't seem as neighbourly as they used to be. Maybe I'm just as much at fault for not making the effort to get to know my neighbours.

- Shane Whitman

I don't know many people on the block but it feels like a nice place to live.

- Marianne Taylor

We've lived here since 1939 and have seen a lot of changes. - Jack and Iva Dingle

I worked for the Singer Sewing Machine Company all over Alberta and the West. When I was transferred to Calgary I told the company I had taken the wheels off of my furniture and I've been here ever since.

- E. Elroy Beach

We moved here from Montreal. At first it was a shock but we've grown to like it.

- Barb and Roy Kaufman

We were happy to be back enjoying the leaves and sun after being away for a year. Your photos have captured the joy we felt at being back on our street.

- Jane Reid and Kurt Moench

I like this neighbourhood because it has lots of trees. In the late summer the streets are very fragrant with the luscious smell of plums and crab-apples. This year I am going to attempt to make some jam.

- Kimberly Tucker

What are the people on Broadview like? I haven't met many of them. How have they been reacting to your project?

- Lucy Bach

This project is a good way to case everybody's houses. - Blaise McNeil

Wouldn't it be more interesting to photograph hookers and drug addicts?

- Robert Goldsmith

Why me? Why us? Why do you want to photograph us? I'm not photogenic. I don't take a very good picture.

I don't want to break your camera

- almost everybody on the block

Why are you taking so many pictures? - Owen Shaw

I'm not really interested in photography but I wish you all the best in your endeavor.

- Mrs. Cook

I really don't like getting my picture taken.
- Mrs. Dingle

I like getting my picture taken.
- Doug Gould

We just want to look human.
- Phil Shaw

Black and white photos are so unkind.
- Lyn Feist

Its odd that as an outsider you are finding out more about the people and the street than the people that live here. You're helping us get to know each other better.

- Roy Kaufman

Our street really is a neighbourhood. We have all the usual hassles of a neighbourhood - our pets fight, we have some disagreements, we park in the wrong spots - but it seems to me there's a lot of love and friendship in this neighbourhood, and I really hope that it comes through on film.

- Brian Ball

There's never been a street like Broadview. Its special and we miss it.

- The Knights (who moved to another neighbourhood)

- The "Hopquists" (Karen Youngquist, Bill Hopson and Jim)

Slide list for 'The Broadview Road Project'

- 1. Phil, Owen, Lace and Kate January 18, 1986
- 2. Roy, Talia and Barb January 25
- 3. Elroy
 February 1
- 4. Terry Willard February 2
- 5. Len Lewis February 2
- 6. Bill, Karen and Jim February 8
- 7. Robert, Suzanne and Arthur February 16
- 8. Arthur February 16
- 9. Lucy February 19
- 10. Elroy and Jack February 19
- 11. Roy on his birthday February 22
- 12-- Gordon-and-Sherill McOuatt--February 22
- 13. Blaise, Leslie and Lyn February 23
- 14. Brian and Sheila February 23.
- 15. Garry and Micky
 March 1
- 16. Olive and Paul and Chem-Choi March 2
- 17. Lace and Kate March 2

- 18. Mr. Myrthen March 12
- 19. Blaise and Lyn March 22
- 20. Jack and Iva March 22
- 21. King Kyle March 22
- 22. Owen, Lace and Phil March 23
- 23. Bill and Colleen April 5
- 24. Michael and Joanne April 5
- 25. Brian April 6
- 26. Lee and Audrey Wark April 13
- 27. Darin and Andrea April 19_
- 28. Paula, Kyle, Woody and Buck April 19
- 29. Phil, Elroy and Kate April 19
- 30. Scott and Sandra April 20
- 31. Darla Lowe April 26
- 32. Roy and Elroy talking politics April 26
- 33. Nelson ... May 31
- 34. Mrs. Peterson May 31
- 35. Dave and Pip May 31

- 36. Blaise June 14
- 37. Owen and the animal tree June 15
- 38. Tim and Heather
 June 21 summer solstice
- 39. Jack June 28
- 40. Mary Romaniuk July 19
- 41. Shane in his garden July 30
- 42. Jim chasing bubbles August 9
- 43. Kimberly September 20
- 44. Dan and Lori . September 21
- 45. Doug Gould September-21--
- 46. Marianne and Micky September 21
- 47. Elroy, Lyn and Blaise September 21
- 48. Lace, Owen and Katherine September 21
- 49. Owen, Allison, Jane, Kurt, Katherine and Lace September 28
- 50. Michael and Joanne October 5
- 51. Pat October 6
- 52. Ken McLeod October 12
- 53. Mr. and Mrs. Passey October 19

- 54. Talia and Stevie October 25
- 55. Beth, John and Fiona October 26
- 56. Bill and Stephie November 2
- 57. Owen and Lace and Frosty the snowman November 23
- 58. Clay and Ann November 23
- 59. Karen and Nelson November 29
- 60. Elroy
 December 6
- 61. Tim and Heather and Stevie December 14
- 62. Tracy and Bill January 11, 1987
- 63. Phil, Owen, Lace, Kate and Caitlin January 18



