[Diese Transkription umfasst nur die Seiten 42–53 des Aufsatzes *Photography, Ideology and Education*, da im Fokus des Projekts „Fotomanifeste" der appellative Charakter der Texte steht, der sich in diesem ersten Teil und hier im Besonderen auf S. 51 findet.]

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Photography, Ideology and Education

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Terry Dennett and Jo Spence

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*This article describes some of the ongoing work of two practising photographers, members of the Half Moon Photography Workshop Collective, which runs an independent gallery in London's East End committed to showing social and documentary photography, linked to workshops and seminars. The Workshop also publish their own magazine, Camerawork. One of their major aims is to promote an interest in the use of photography as a critical educational tool. Anybody who would like to get involved with this work should contact the authors through Half Moon Photography Workshop, 27 Alie Street, London E1, telephone: 01-488 2595.*

It has not been until fairly recently that photography has been used in any systematic way inside the state education system expect as a recording medium, or else 'creatively' in art projects as a means of self expression. Gradually, as the power and prestige of visual media has been recognised, moves have been made by the Professional bodies representing photography in this country to incorporate photography into the curriculum which has culminated in the setting up of some O and A level examinations. Thus the seeds have been sown for the institutionalisation of photography as a subject area in its own right. (Some of the problems and dangers of this development have been discussed in earlier numbers of *Screen Education*.)[1] However what is even more important is that the institutions that validate photographic examinations have hardly touched on the medium's ideological role, or even on the inherent bias involved in the act of taking, editing and mass reproducing photographs. Generally criticism still basicaly revolves around 19th Century aesthetics, commercialism, codes of conduct and a continuing fight for professional status. The notion that photographs are 'realistic' is deeply entrenched and rarely challenged except on film and mass media courses.

The appeal of this relatively new outlet for photography inside schools can be seen in the eagerness with which many children opt for visual expression via photography, film, and video, in preference to straight language work. Visual literacy is slowly moving into the classroom, but as we know, the learning of visual syntax or 'universal' systems of decoding images, will not necessarily reveal the inherent bias of both the form and the content of any given image any more than bias in literature will be revealed through the learning of English grammar, or the superficial study of the novel. Photographs are still assumed to be evidence from which a whole range of 'universal' conclusions can be drawn, and children themselves can easily produce photographs as evidence of what they 'see'. Useful as this may be as an initial step, it cannot be emphasised enough that a photograph used alone can only surface information, and that additionally, text can drastically change such apparent meaning (figure 1).

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See *Screen Education* 15 Summer 1975

42

[Fig 1]

Even allowing for the photographer's best intentions, it must also be stated that if the operator of a camera lacks information (wilfully or not) about the social and economic organisation of the society in which they live and therefore doesn't possess a coherent political critique and understanding of the social relations of production (what is sometimes termed 'false consciousness'), then any photographs taken by that person must reflect that lack of awareness. Similarly, if when a photograph is viewed the spectator also operates from such a limited perspective, then there is no way in which they can discern the fact that they are looking at only one aspect 'reality'.

False consciousness arises from the compartmentalisation, mystification and bias of 'knowledge' and as such encourages the inculcation of dominant values which places one area of experience in superiority to all others, thereby invalidating the experience of oppressed groups, bringing about a resultant lack of motivation on their part of redress the balance. These feelings we see as reflecting a society that encourages the cult of individual achievement, competition and hierarchies. One example of the way dominant values can be institutionalised by the examination system and compounded by the mass media through illustration can be seen in figure 2. The inculcation of such values relies on the use of sexist, racist and culturally biased Standard English[2] in the teaching of literacy, linked to stereotyped imagery which claims to present 'universal' view of the world. Seen in

this context it immediately becomes vital to understand who controls who, and which social group one seems to be assigned to in this process. But for children this is no simple matter. To start with they have very few 'rights' and those they do have are usually founded on their immediate needs e.g. adequate housing, living with 'caring adults', and on the long term needs of the state, eg compulsory education and health care. The quality or quantity they receive of any these will depend on their social class, sex and race. The right to have their own culture, history language and social customs re-

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2 See the Feminist Writers Workshop *Vol 1 of The Feminist English Dictionary: An Intelligent Women's Guide to Dirty Words* Loop Centre YWCA 1973 and *Ten Quick Ways to Analyse Children's Books For Racism and Sexism* The Council of Interracial Books for Children, New York.

[Fig 2]

spected and revealed, the right validated, is in no way the concern of a state agency like the educational establishment.

Most schooling is still largely concerned with the teaching of history and science as the deeds of 'Great Men', and the wonders of industry and technology; with biology that describes the functions of the body in a perfunctory and mechanistic fashion – sexual needs or 'norms' are rarely explained and explored; a geography that celebrates the 'discovery' of rivers, lands and resources thereby ignoring the existence of those natural features for the indigenous peoples long before 'explorers' (colonialists) so flagrantly renamed and commandeered everything, cataloguing whole continents and their peoples for our ease of learning. Children's text books and reading materials are not concerned with the work and social experience of the mass

of the people, but only with the experience and customs of those who have enough leisure, time, power, and wealth to prescribe what is culturally acceptable. Where the experience of working class life is shown it is usually negatively stereotyped view which only reinforces existing social divisions.[3] The dominant class views itself, via its art forms, as the purveyors of good taste.

We believe that many of these attitudes and values in our society come about because of the following interlocking structures of oppression:

PATRIARCHY (systematic discrimination on the grounds of sex – ie racism)

CAPITALISM (systematic discrimination on the grounds of class – ie classism)

IMPERIALISM (systematic discrimination on the grounds of race – ie racism).

That is to say that oppression is not simply a matter of class discrimination between groups, or sex or race discrimination between others. It is a mixture of all three, the balance of which is constantly shifting. However, the fundamental oppression still remains a matter of one's class.

If we take these three structures as a starting point, any teaching must examine their historical roots, relating them to the inherent bias in language, illustrations, views of history and science. We can then move on to secondary complexities like the various theories about 'human nature', which (according to the particular mixture of personal beliefs we hold, or to the dominant theories is favour at any given period of history) will further influence our view of the word.

In most social and economic relationships there is a basic antagonism between those who have the *power* to make decisions and have them carried out, linked to those who have the *authority* to carry out such decisions – and methods of socialisation and control is the use of archetypes/ stereotypes (both positive and negative) as a means of conveying information from one group to another, often mediated by a middle group. Some stereotypes have become so systematised and well established that they now appear to reflect 'reality'. In a later article[3] we will discuss in more detail the use of archetypes and stereotypes and their ideological function, but meanwhile it is sufficient to say that an archetype is representation of a unique, original idea or value. A stereotype is a reproduction of an original which becomes more and more diluted, distorted or fragmented the further removed it is from the archetype or original. But archetypes/ stereotypes are not just things by themselves, like everything else, they only exist within relationships between each other, and between the 'manufacturer'/'distributor' and the 'consumer' (or that is to say between the capitalist mass media and various art forms, and the audience), and will vary from culture to culture. The type of stereotype used will, of course, depend on who is sending and who is receiving the message. G Allport writes:

> ' . . . stereotyping is a form of biased presentation. . . . A stereotype is an exaggerated belief, associated with a category. Its function is to justify . . . our conduct in relation to the category. . . . It is sustained by selective perseption and selective forgetting, and is socially supported, continually revived and hammered in, by the our media of mass communication.'[4]

New archetypes are gradually developed in the course of the struggle of

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3 Jo Spence and Terry Dennett *Class Bias in Children's Picture Books* unpublished mss 1976.

4 G Allport *The Nature of Prejudice* Doubleday Anchor 1954.

groups to become dominant and will contain a combination of those elements of the existing archetypes/stereotypes which can usefully be assimilated and used plus fundamentally new

elements which are unique to the rising social group. Figure 3 offers an interesting example of an incorporation of symbols and arche/stereotypes of the dominant group by a group engaged in the early stages of a struggle. Representations of labour, in this case the National Amalgamated Sailors' and Firemans' Unions (1891), are crowned by a mystical religious symbol. Often, in the course of further development, such a group will, as a result of a careful and thorough analysis of their situation, develop a more coherent position and identity enabling them to throw away the crutch of outdated symbolism and role reversals thus achieving a greater political awareness. During this process they may also have negatively stereotyped and invalidated the existing dominant ideology. One interesting example of this process can be illustrated through the work of the photomontagist John Heartfield (figure 4).

[Fig 3 Trade Union Certificate]


46


[Fig 4 John Heartfield Poster]

With the development of mass communication, the mechanics of this process have become better understood and there is now the potential for concious commercial exploitation of this phenomena as can for instance be seen in many contemporary children's books with their increasing depiction of women and girls in traditionally bourgeois white male roles. Ex-


47


ploitation can however be recuperated as instanced in the expanding number of role reversals of Blacks in popular cinema. These do not represent the *archetypes* of actual Black struggle, but rather creates 'new' Black stereotypes invested with the properties of the more decadent aspects of white culture.


*Stereotyping in childrens' books and cartoons*

Long before photography and film had established a hold on our minds, cartoonists, illustrators etc had developed a highly evolved method of conveying stereotyped information. Figure 5 presents a positive stereotype which has been filtered down to us through myth and fairy tale, through various stages of historical development. As seen here in mass circulation children's book, the *Sleeping*

*Beauty* epitomises the good fairy, the virgin and fertility, merging the princess with the bride, signifying the validity of woman as the central pillar of the nuclear family, perpetuator of patriarchal capitalism's values of wealth, purity, beauty, attainment, power etc. The bride, through instantly recognisable in a twentieth century depiction, is surrounded by medieval trappings and costumes.

[Fig 5 'Sleeping Beauty' Ladybird Books]

On the other hand, the cartoons illustrated base their stereotyping on 'reality', showing us (like the photograph) one aspect which we are encouraged to accept as the whole story. Figure 6 presents a typical negative example of the stereotyped view of the British male working class. Published in *The Sun,* a mass circulation newspaper *aimed at a working class audience*, it offers a negative and devalued view of industrial workers, not only with their beds on the production line, but up to their eyes in all the fruits and joys of capitalism as seen through the illustrator's eyes. This is one of the recurring myths of the mass media and is part of the process of mystification which prevents many workers from understanding the value of their labour. In a situation of class struggle in which the working class had access to the mass media this cartoon might show class role reversals in which would be

48

[Fig 6 Sun]

revealed the owners of industry lazing about on the fruits of the surplus value extracted from the so-called lazy working class.

Examples of cartoons aimed at *Punch's* audience which rely on ageist and racist attitudes for their humour are offered in figures 7 and 8. Figure 9 is a seaside postcard and speaks for itself. All these cartoons use humour in an insulting way and the use of this form of negative stereotyping subtly helps to reinforce peoples commonsense understanding of what is 'normal' and 'real' whilst they are laughing. For a progressive political use of cartoons a useful book is *The Cartoon as an Instrument of Political Education.*[5] One interesting point to note is that figure 5 (which operates very much on the fantasy level) conveys most of its information visually – the caption simply reinforces the 'message' – whilst the next three cartoons rely very heavily on the caption for their impact, and could in fact have been represented photograpically.

We think that the cartoon medium, if used in conjunction with images from children's picture books and comics, provides a useful way of introducing the concepts of stereotyping, bias and visual coding, before leading into work on the analysis of the 'realist' media of photography and film.

[Fig 7 Punch]

[Fig 8 Punch]

[Fig 9 Seaside postcard]

*But the photograph never lies!*

How does one show the believer in the unbiased photography that they are mistaken? We have approached the problem by listing various stages at which manipulation and bias in the production of photographs can occur:

1   In the conciousness of the photographer, and thence in their use of the camera;

2   In the darkroom;

3   In the editorial process of choosing from a range of pictures;

4   By the juxtaposition of different pictures during layout;

5   By the addition of text;

6   By considering the context in which it appears (i.e. is it a magazine, a political leaflet, company report, government handout, etc.?)

This last point raises a whole range of questions that need to be asked. For example is the image:

a   for public or for private consumption (i.e. to be looked at in the street, transmitted to the home, stood on the piano?);

b   for distribution as a part of the mass media or through 'alternative' channels, government bodies;

c   aimed at a particular group? (e.g. mothers, teenagers, army recruits);

d   aimed at a particular social group or class?:

e   free, inexpensive, exclusive (i.e. how accessible is it? For example state run baby clinics provide advertising material from large companies concerned with the 'baby industry', all of which purport to give objective advice on health to parents and babies);

f   and it is important to establish who owns the means of producing and reproducing the image (i.e. do they have a vested interest in propagating certain images and not others?)

Finally it is crucial to raise the question of the position of the beholder. What bias might they inflect, and what might be the possible responses of a person who is excluded from the group an

image is explicitly directed at?

All photographers must codify 'reality' in a number of ways, at both the shooting and production stages of their work. Firstly their own class, sex,

age and race are factors that are usually ignored, and yet these are crucial when one is concerned to understand more clearly the problems of viewing, selecting and evaluating a potential subject for a photograph. Such factors will influence, however unconsciously, the technical choices that have to be made for the actual taking of the picture, and the subsequent processes it undergoes in the developing and printing stages of production. The dominant codes that inform all stages of the processs and which combine to form the biased view of the world that helps to preserve the status quo and are becoming more and more part of the learned professional practice within colleges, universities and professional institutions. The problem is, that the whole set of processes involved in the production and reception of even one photograph are so complex, and the modes of stereotypical depiction have become such a 'fine art' that it becomes very confusing and difficult to unravel what is happening. Compare for example the 'girl next door' image of Princess Anne in figure 9 with the 'queen-like' treatment of the girl in figure 2.

[Fig 10 postcard with montage]

Photography has also played a large part in the presentation of dominant views of history, where there is often a heavy reliance upon the 'realistic' quality of the image to authenticate the text (as also there is in the presentation of news and documentary information). Examples of this can easily be seen if readers look at any collections of photographs and anthropological data collected and presented at the beginning of this century. Many people from 'alien' cultures were photographed like specimens, with cryptic and derogatory remarks accompanying their photographs, in which their cultural habits and customs were described as quaint, bizarre or even downright 'evil'. Photographs taken of cultural allies were posed in traditionally aesthetic ways and accompanied by adulatory texts. A particularly revealing example of this is the first edition of *Living Races of Mankind* produced by Hutchinson in the early 1900s, as an introduction to other cultures. The introduction states

'... the most promising fields of enterprise for our ever-increasing community, the most profitable markets for our wares, may some day be found in places which are now the darkest corner of the early; and … the half-clothed savage, just emerging from the brute condition, is a human being

capable of being educated, in the near future into a customer for British trade.'

The blatant expression of the reasons for the production of such books became muted further into this century (later editions were far less explicit), but it is helpful to remind ourselves that these attitudes underlie much of the printed matter that we see today. The passing of legislation like the Race Discrimination Act does not remove such bias; it only drives it underground, to emerge in a more sophisticated and subtle forms. Similarly the recently passed Sex Discrimination Act will in no way remove the root cause of sexual oppression. Much work is being done on the subject of ideological bias; not within photographic institutions, but in the field of mass communications is very much reliant upon the work of independent groups not always working in conjunction with each other, or having compatible aims.