

The Construction of Photojournalism:
Visual Style and Branding in the Magnum Photos Agency

by

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B.A. Anthropology
University of California, Santa Cruz, 1991

SUBMITTED TO THE COMPARATIVE MEDIA STUDIES PROGRAM IN PARTIAL
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ABSTRACT

This thesis defines the visual style of photographic representation that has been developed by the Magnum Photos agency, the most prestigious international agency for photojournalists. The parameters of this visual style are delineated through a detailed visual analysis of Magnum photographs as seen in their own publications. A classic Magnum style is shown to have emerged from particular historical conditions and personalities involved in the founding of the agency in 1947. Additionally, a new postmodernist visual mode that has emerged within Magnum since the early 1980s, alongside the classic style, is described and analyzed. The classic style and the new postmodernist mode are then discussed in the context of Magnum's need to maintain a differentiated product as market conditions change over time. Magnum's actual exploitation of particular markets as well as the agency's discourse about markets are examined. While in recent years Magnum has promoted their postmodernist mode, after the events of September 11, 2001, Magnum shifted to emphasize their classic style in a book project documenting the attacks in New York city and the aftermath. This thesis contends that the classic Magnum style remains the definition of "good" photojournalism and thus has important implications for the way viewers perceive events that are mediated through photojournalism.

Thesis Supervisor: William Uricchio

Title: Professor of Comparative Media Studies

Biographical Note

My motivation to analyze visual style in photojournalism has come in part from my own brief involvement with the field and the many questions and doubts that experience produced. As a stringer photographer for the Agence France Presse in Amman, Jordan I learned first-hand about some of the constraints and difficulties of representing events through a genre of photography that requires speed, quick thinking, competition, and a final product that can be easily comprehended by viewers unfamiliar with a given region or situation. Graduate study has been one way for me to begin to come to terms with my frustration with the limits of photographic representation while also maintaining my passion for many aspects of photography, both as practice and intellectually.

I received my B.A. in anthropology from the University of California at Santa Cruz in 1991, where I also spent a year abroad at the American University of Cairo, Egypt. Over the years since then I have had my photographs of the Middle East published in various magazines and books.

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For their loving support and encouragement of all the various paths I choose to explore I thank my parents, Betty and John Woodward. Their truly generous and open-hearted embrace of life has always inspired me.

This thesis is dedicated to Waleed Hazbun, who inspires me to seek new knowledge and take unexpected paths. His adventurous and genuine search for greater understanding of the world and his place in it continue to encourage and captivate me.

Introduction

magnum is an agency, an archive, a quarrelsome family of photographers and, now that it has entered its sixth decade, a tradition. in the decisive moment that makes a photograph, instinct and tradition come together in the blink of a shutter. without instinct, no picture; without tradition, a picture which will not endure. some traditions fade and die, but this one – judging from this collection – is still alive. the old masters are present while the new masters are on show. they want to say: look at us now, look at what magnum has become.

- Michael Ignatieff, preface to his introduction in *Magnum*^{o 1}
(Only lower case letters are used throughout the book.)

While Magnum Photos Inc. *is* an agency, an archive, and a family of photographers with a tradition, this thesis seeks to show how Magnum has also become a brand. The Magnum brand has been distinguished by a particular visual style as well as through a range of other differentiation strategies used by its stockholder members from its founding in 1947 until the present day. Magnum Photos' most obvious distinguishing characteristic is its tradition of representing the super-stars of photojournalism, often at the height of their careers. The members currently include Henri Cartier-Bresson, Gilles Peress, Steve McCurry, Elliott Erwitt and Susan Meiselas, previous members include James Nachtwey, Sebastião Salgado, and Robert Capa. But Magnum Photos is not a random collection of photographers with

¹Magnum Photos and Michael Ignatieff, *Magnum*^o (London: Phaidon, 2000). p. 51.

disparate visual approaches. Admittance to this international agency is by invitation only, which allows the membership to maintain control over their visual style and reputation. While this style was slowly changing in the 1980s and 1990s, Magnum's dominant mode of representation can be characterized as dramatic, realistic, artistic, rich with narrative, and authored by a heroic, yet humanist persona.

The project undertaken by this thesis is primarily a visual analysis of the documentary photography and photojournalism produced by the Magnum Photos agency. The analysis of style is undertaken for the purpose of unpacking one of Magnum's key strategies for becoming a unique and dominant brand - the creation of a signature visual look. While I do not attempt to determine whether or not Magnum members and editors consciously orchestrate this strategy, it should become clear through my analysis that their signature visual style is constructed through particular choices, both individual and institutional.

In this thesis I am analyzing Magnum's visual style as it operates within the discourses about Magnum as an institution and about the field of photojournalism. However, these same photographs and photographers also function within other discourses that revolve around, for example, representations of the colonial and post-colonial world, or art world connoisseurship and the promotion of individual photographers' achievements. Steve McCurry's work on India, much of it published in *National Geographic* magazine, participates in a discourse about exoticism and the "other." Most Magnum photographers have also held their own solo exhibits and published books of their work, thus engaging with art worlds. It is beyond the scope

of this thesis to address how these discourses intersect with the discourse of Magnum as an institution.

Why examine the photographs produced by this particular agency, Magnum? Most importantly, Magnum Photos occupies a uniquely exalted place in the imagination of photojournalists and the public. Magnum is widely agreed to be the most prestigious, selective, and serious agency. Since Magnum is a cooperative that is owned by its member photographers, the photographers themselves control their conditions of work. In this way they give themselves unprecedented freedom to develop high profiles as individuals with personal subjects of interest and areas of expertise, they often choose their own projects, and are able to pursue subjects intensively, all unencumbered by the demands of an agency boss. The Magnum mode of work could be seen as parallel to that of an essayist rather than a daily news reporter. While their work is not published widely in newspapers, they reach a large audience with work in magazines such as *National Geographic*, *Stern*, *Geo* and *The New Yorker* and especially through their archive sales and book and exhibition projects. Magnum images are important to analyze because of their influence on both professional and casual audiences' expectations and assumptions about what makes "good" photojournalism.²

Why focus on the agency as a whole and not on individual photographers? The Magnum discourse about itself, and indeed much other writing on the agency, emphasizes the individual photographers and describes their work as the unique

visions of inspired authors. However, I believe this perspective elides the important ways in which Magnum photographers' images are actually quite stylistically similar. In analyzing the correspondences through the whole body of Magnum members' work over the fifty-four years of their existence we can gain a clearer sense of how these photographs combine to form a particular vision of the world and of history. Examining Magnum's production as an institution, not solely as that of individuals, creates new knowledge about Magnum Photos, Inc. and about the impact it has had on our perception of historical events and on modes of representation through photography.

On Style

This project uses the concept of style as a means to examine the particular ways in which photojournalistic and documentary photographs are constructed objects and specifically how Magnum has used style to create a brand. Through understanding and highlighting the existence of style in the documentary and photojournalism genres it becomes easier to critique particular photographic representations and the ideological assumptions they embody and also to imagine alternative modes of representing the world.

The International Center of Photography's *Encyclopedia of Photography* explains that "Style comprises the factors that make up a distinctive or characteristic manner of expression. In photography those factors include choice of subject, the way in which the subject is viewed, and the manner in which the print or

² I will address the issue of how Magnum work does or does not fit into the category of

transparency is made...When, for cultural or imitative reasons, many individuals adopt the same approach, a style of a given period or genre can be identified...Style is the aspect of expression that links a group of pictures."³ The study of style is important because, as David Bordwell writes, "However unaware spectators may be of it, style is working at every moment to shape their experience."⁴ Spectators are indeed often unaware of the constructed nature, and thus the style, of images in the genres of documentary photography and photojournalism. While it is commonplace now to recognize that photographs are not direct, uninflected transcriptions of the world, documentary and photojournalism (especially produced by Magnum) continues to be widely celebrated for its ability to "bear witness" and record history accurately as it unfolds, in the same way that certain classic photographs have become enduring icons for the historic event they represent. Dorothea Lange's "migrant mother," Joe Rosenthal's raising of the flag on Iwo Jima, or Nick Ut's napalmed girl running towards the camera have come to represent the American depression, WWII, and Vietnam respectively.

In reviewing the exhibit *On the Line: The New Color Photojournalism*, featuring twelve photographers (six of whom were members of Magnum at some point in their careers), Nancy Roth observed that "Journalists working today [1986] do not necessarily take the ascription of a style to their work as a compliment, and the suggestion that pictorial reportage has always had a style might well be rejected

photojournalism a little later in this chapter.

³ *The ICP Encyclopedia of Photography* (New York: Crown, 1984). p. 496.

⁴ David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). "Introduction," unpaginated. Bordwell is specifically writing about cinema. However, his description of style is applicable to photography, minus the elements of sound and movement through time.

outright."⁵ Over the past sixteen years, ascribing style to photojournalistic work has become more common and has produced debates over the ethics of "aestheticizing" war and poverty. However, the most prevalent perspective still relies on an understanding of the mechanism of the camera to be an objective recording instrument.

Even when photojournalism or documentary photography is recognized by audiences to be a selective interpretation by the photographer, it is rare to come across any actual analysis of how a sense of straight documented reality is achieved visually.⁶ Whether it is recognized or not, the elements that make up style (choices in lighting, depth of field or focus, and composition) act as a filter that shapes which particular meanings about the recorded subject are communicated. Since it is through style that we must try to understand the world when we look at photographs, it's important to determine what that style is and how its practices influence the content and meaning of the photograph. Understanding style in genres of photography that are generally thought to have none is a powerful tool for comprehending the specific ways in which photographic representation is constructed to attain the look of transparent reality.

A particular style can belong to an individual, a group, or a period of history.

Although Magnum is a business institution, it can also be considered a group in the

⁵ Nancy Roth, "The Elements of Style," *Afterimage* vol. 14, no. 3 (1986). p. 6.

⁶ Lutz and Collins' examination of *National Geographic* photography is a good example of a work that has taken on this type of analysis within a study on how photographs are read by audiences. See Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

sense of a self-defined community because it regulates its own membership. Not just any qualified photographer can work for Magnum, one must be invited to join by a majority vote of the current members. While each Magnum photographer certainly has their more or less unique personal style, what is being delineated in this thesis is a meta-style of the group that permeates these individual expressions and is also gradually influenced by them.⁷ (The variations and changes within the style will be historicized in Chapters Two and Three.) There is no single photographer that completely embodies the Magnum style. However, a majority of Magnum photography showcased in their own publications makes use of enough of the characteristics of the style to make it identifiable as such.

On Branding

In a recent article in the magazine *Advertising Age*, on the value of appointing Charlotte Beers to the US State Department to use branding precepts to promote the United States to a foreign audience, branding was described this way:

Branding is based on the notion that promoting a specific relationship between a product and its user creates psychological value for the product in addition to the benefit of its actual performance. This means creating a relevant linkage, both rational and emotional, between the product and the lives of the people you hope will use it.⁸

For Magnum Photos, the "actual performance" of their product is the news-value or the informational value of the photographs. Their products' "psychological value" is produced by the Magnum style itself and lies in its ability to catch viewers eyes with

⁷ Throughout this essay I use the term "Magnum style" to refer to this meta-style of the Magnum group.

dramatic, emotional, and artistic renditions of compelling world events. Employing the concept of branding allows for an analysis of how Magnum's style is related to their marketing efforts and institutional strategies for differentiating themselves from other image providers. Creating and maintaining the right kind of brand image for changing market conditions and public taste over time has been essential for Magnum's economic well-being.

Another agency that provides news photographs (along with much other information), the Reuters Group, made it into the news in 2001 when it was deemed by Interbrand to be the most valuable brand in the United Kingdom, valued at \$4.9bn.⁹ Reuters has been making a conscious effort to increase its profile among consumers, to create its own unique image and move away from its traditional role as a wholesale provider of information that gets variously repackaged by their clients. Magnum does not need to make this sort of move since the agency has from the beginning insisted on its uniqueness and maintained editorial control over its products. Magnum's emphasis on their individual photographers as inspired authors has been a major source of prestige and has provided the agency with an identity. I argue in this thesis that branding for Magnum serves as a way to maintain and consolidate their image and as a way to create a broader desire for their products. I argue that they do this through their promotion of a signature visual style, as well as through their discourse about their relationship to markets and their actual choices in how they engage with particular markets.

⁸ Allen Rosenshine, "Now a Word from America," *Advertising Age*, February 18 2002.

Terminology

Before moving into a discussion of methodology and theoretical concerns, it's necessary to first define some of the terms used in this thesis. For the purposes of this project I am attempting below to draw clear distinctions between the terms documentary, photojournalism, press photography, and art. However, these categories bleed into each other and individual photographs may belong to more than one category.¹⁰ Additionally, photographs often move from one category to another over time, especially into the category of art in the context of the museum. Wegee's sensational press photography of crime in the 1940s has migrated to the museum and art book, as have Robert Capa's photojournalistic war photographs and Dorothea Lange's documentary images of depression-era migrants. Therefore, the following definitions are schematic and only meant to be helpful descriptions.

For the purposes of this thesis, I take documentary photography to be a mode which emphasizes the long-term, in-depth pursuit of an ongoing story.

Documentary projects typically go on for years, often focus on social issues rather than news events, and are usually independently conceived and financed by the photographer, rather than commissioned by a publication. Documentary is often assumed to be subjective, to have a point of view on the subject being investigated, but it is also presumed to be honest reporting and photographers in

⁹ Poppy Brech, "Delivering Reuters to the Public," *Marketing*, January 18, 2001.

¹⁰ For a good discussion of definitions of press photography, documentary, and photojournalism, along with an interesting argument about how Susan Meiselas' work has been reduced to press photography by the mass media when it should really be shown as photojournalism, see A. D. Coleman, "Documentary, Photojournalism, and Press

this mode do not generally resort to setting up shots. These sort of projects are sometimes sold in pieces to magazines but with the decline of mass circulation magazines like *Life*, the usual goal has become to publish the whole project in book form.¹¹ Some Magnum photographers work in this genre while others work more clearly in the photojournalism form.¹²

Photojournalism is used here to refer to the coverage of current news events in an extended format, both in the investigation and shooting stage and in the final story product which normally consists of more than one photograph. Because these projects are time-sensitive, they may take months but not years to complete.

Photojournalism is usually commissioned by a publication, such as a magazine or newspaper, but will sometimes later appear in book form as well. While documentary projects are usually driven by the personal interests or convictions of the photographer, photojournalism's subject matter is generally determined by what is deemed news-worthy by the media. Agencies such as Magnum, Black Star, and Gamma, as well as certain newspaper photographers have traditionally been strong providers in this field. The wire services, such as Associated Press, Reuters,

Photography Now," in *Depth of Field: Essays on Photography, Mass Media, and Lens Culture* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

¹¹ For more information on documentary photography and interviews with five photographers who have been members of Magnum, see Ken Light, *Witness in Our Time: Working Lives of Documentary Photographers* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000).

¹² See Fred Ritchin, "What Is Magnum?," in *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers*, ed. William Manchester (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989). p. 439.

and Agence France Presse, are moving more and more into this realm although their traditional strength is in press photography.¹³

Press photographers or news photographers cover spot news - events that need quick coverage, usually through the use of a single image, for immediate publication - as well as sports, portraits of people in the news, and editorial shots that illustrate articles. This genre is considered the most impersonal, is geared towards use in newspapers or news magazines, and follows a cycle of daily assignments handed out by photo editors. Press photography describes the work of most wire service and newspaper photographers, though, a newspaper photographer may do press photography in daily assignments but also be working intermittently on a longer term project that is photojournalistic (i.e. more in-depth, longer in published format).

Art photography can be defined as work that is created to express personal points of view and with the purpose of hanging in art galleries and museums, being sold as art objects, and equally important, to appear in art books. Some art photography may deal with issues that are usually covered by photojournalism and documentary photography, such as war and famine.

There are many overlaps and slippages between the definitions offered above.

Photographs produced by Magnum may fall into any of these categories at different

¹³ My observation on wire services comes from my own experience with AFP as well as from an interview with Bill Greene, staff photographer at the *Boston Globe*, conducted on March 20, 2001.

moments in time, depending on how they are used. Currently there is no term to describe broadly all the work that Magnum produces that disregards how it is used and where it is published. Since this thesis focuses on Magnum photographs as representation, rather than examining their reception, I found a need for a term that broadly defines a type of photography by the motivations and goals of the photographer. Therefore, in this project I use the term “photo-commentator” to refer to those photographers who deliberately interpret and comment on their subjects, whether it is through the genre of photojournalism, documentary, press photography, or art.¹⁴ A crucial aspect of the Magnum mythos is that their photographers are not simply reporters, but are interpreters who are commenting on the state of the world. In Cornell Capa’s definition of a “concerned photographer” (which he has applied to the early Magnum photographers such as his brother Robert Capa, David Seymour, and Werner Bischof) he emphasizes that each individual “witness-artist” is making a “personal contribution to history and art.”¹⁵ Of course all photography is an interpretation of what is in front of the camera, however, photo-commentators are open about, and indeed celebrate, their role in the creative process in a way that many photojournalists often deny. Throughout this thesis I will at times compare Magnum photography to the work of other photographers who work under similar assumptions, most importantly that they are interpreters of the world not just recorders of it. In other words, I will only compare Magnum photography to the work of others within the photo-commentators category.

¹⁴ Thanks to Michael M.J. Fischer for suggesting this unique, and useful, term.

Methodology

Three primary methods are used in this project to understand the Magnum style and the agency's construction of a brand image. The most important method is a visual analysis of Magnum photographs (Chapter Two). I am examining how these photographs make use of elements such as lighting, composition, depth of field, selective focus, angle of view, framing, and space. The consistent employment of certain techniques in relation to these elements provides the definition of the Magnum style. The sources of these images are the various book projects edited by the Magnum agency of their photographers' work from 1947 until 2002, especially compilation books. By analyzing book projects under the control of the agency rather than images as they appeared individually in magazines, the style constructed by Magnum as well as their own discourse about the photographs can be more easily read. I will also contrast Magnum work with that of other well-known photo-commentators as seen in books of their work. The comparisons will be made primarily on the level of the visual style, as a strategy to make Magnum's particular constructed style more visible. Because it is beyond the scope of a master's thesis, the important issue of audience reception of Magnum images is not addressed here and thus this project does not need to analyze the specific contexts within which each photograph was originally published.

¹⁵ Robert Sagalyn et al., *The Concerned Photographer: The Photographs of Werner Bischof, Robert Capa, David Seymour ("Chim"), Andre Kertesz, Leonard Freed, Dan Weiner*, ed. Cornell Capa (New York, Grossman Publishers, 1968). "Introduction," unpaginated.

The second type of methodology used in this project is an analysis of how Magnum's interaction with markets have been implicated in the style's emergence, branding, and change over time (Chapter Three). I examine how Magnum constructs its relationship to the marketplace both through its own discourse and through its actual financial needs and ties with various markets. The material consulted for this chapter is made up of secondary sources, mostly accounts of Magnum as an institution and of the magazine publishing world (clients which Magnum has traditionally relied on heavily), descriptions of new trends in Magnum projects, published interviews, and press reports.

The third method in this project is to situate Magnum in context (Chapter One). I examine the ways in which Magnum has been constructed as the pre-eminent photography agency through various differentiation strategies that set it apart from other agencies and photo-commentators. I also locate Magnum within the historical circumstances of its founding in 1947.

Between Formalism and Postmodernism

Within photographic history, criticism, and theory, debates rage over the merits and disadvantages of various approaches to analyzing photography. Since the 1970s, many of the positions taken by scholars fall into one of two dominant camps. On one side are the "postmodernists" or "poststructuralists" and on the other are the "formalists." In the poststructuralist view photography has no intrinsic identity of its own, photographs have no fixed meaning in themselves. The meaning and significance of the image is to be found outside of it – in its social context, in the

relations of power and the discursive formations that put it to use. The poststructuralists pay little attention to the photographer as an individual actor.¹⁶

The formalists' work often participates in the project of seeking photography's fundamental essence and identity. They usually find it within the photographic image itself. Art photography is judged by formalists on the basis of how well it makes use of photography's "inherent" characteristics and syntax. Formalists also emphasize the individual identities and "genius" of the photographer as an artist, whether the photographs were originally produced for display in an art museum or were created for some functional purpose such as the work done for the US government Farm Security Administration archive. Most histories of photography have been written by formalists who are also curators at art museums.¹⁷

Although I am focusing on stylistic analysis, which is a method of art history used most often by formalists, I am situated between the two dominant camps described above. I am not delineating the Magnum style for the sake of art connoisseurship, the creation of a canon, the formation of a teleological argument about the linear development of photography, or to make judgements of good or bad photography, as many art historians would do. Rather, I wish to show that the significance and meaning in photography resides both within the image itself and in its context.¹⁸

¹⁶ See the work of John Tagg, Victor Burgin, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, and, to a certain degree, Allan Sekula.

¹⁷ See the work of Beaumont Newhall, John Szarkowski, and Peter Galassi.

¹⁸ See Batchen's work, *Burning With Desire*, for a good synthesis of the debates and for research that walks the line between the essentializing forces of both formalists and postmodernists.

Additionally, this project does not seek to explain the Magnum style in order to claim documentary photography and photojournalism for the museum. Douglas Crimp responds to this sort of realignment in his essay "The Museum's Old, The Library's New Subject." He writes that "Whereas we may formerly have looked at Cartier-Bresson's photographs for the information they conveyed about the revolution in China or the Civil War in Spain, we will now look at them for what they tell us about the artist's style of expression. ...in order for this new aesthetic understanding [of photographs] to occur, other ways of understanding photography must be dismantled and destroyed."¹⁹ Crimp's essay critiques the museum and now also the library's insistence on seeing the aesthetics of photographs to the exclusion of photography's other practices such as communicating information, documenting, or providing evidence. The approach of this thesis is to understand all photography as stylized whether it was created as art or information or for a combination of purposes. However, a focus on style here does not mean throwing out the content and meaning of a photograph. In order to evaluate what Henri Cartier-Bresson's photos are conveying to viewers about China or Spain, we have to be able to understand how his style has interceded to arrange elements in a particular way. It is through his style that he conveyed specific notions about his subjects. A productive way to analyze his work would be to examine how his visual style and the information he provides about real world subjects interact with each other, rather than categorizing his work as either art or document.²⁰

¹⁹ Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall, *Visual Culture: The Reader* (London; Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications in association with the Open University, 1999). p. 218-219.

²⁰ See Allan Sekula's essay "Reading an Archive: Photography Between Labour and Capital " for an excellent discussion of the problems with presenting archival photographs uncritically as either historical documents or aesthetic objects. He also issues a convincing call for critics to write materialist cultural histories of photography instead of art histories. Published

Working with the methods used by both formalists and postmodernists, this thesis project examines style through visual analysis of photographs as well as through a reading of an important aspect of context: the pressures of markets and institutional priorities for creating a distinctly branded product. Incorporating both formalist and postmodernist insights, photographs are here assumed to offer knowledge about the world (mediated through aesthetic practices) and also to participate in ideological frameworks and relations of power. Certain postmodern criticism, by insisting that there is no relation between the representation itself and the subject before representation, has needlessly discounted the realist or naturalistic image by rendering subject and content invisible.²¹

Existing Studies

Since formalists rarely examine contemporary photojournalism and because postmodernists tend to dismiss the subject and content of images in favor of other modes of critique, there is a gap in the literature where critical analysis of photojournalism and Magnum photography should reside. Most of the work written on Magnum Photos, Inc. is either published in cooperation with Magnum itself in the form of coffee table books and exhibit catalogs (and thus is part of its branding efforts) or is celebratory of the Magnum photographer's heroic role as "witness-

in P. Holland, J. Spence, and S. Watney, eds., *Photography/Politics Two* (London: Photography Workshop/Comedia, 1986). For a good critique of how art history has treated the 19th century photographic archive that complements Sekula's essay, see Rosalind Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces," in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

²¹ For example see John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation* (London: Macmillan, 1987). For a good counter-argument see John Roberts, *The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography, and the Everyday* (Manchester [England]: Manchester University Press, 1998).

artist," as Cornell Capa described it. Critical writing on Magnum often takes the form of journalistic pieces that question the morality of "aestheticizing" famine, war, and suffering or of even taking photographs at all in those situations. Some photography critics like Andy Grundberg and Max Kozloff have written illuminating short essays on particular Magnum photographers' work, but have not written on the Magnum group as a whole in any extended way. The only non-picture book devoted to Magnum, *Fifty Years at the Front Line of History: Magnum, The Story of the Legendary Photo Agency* by Russell Miller, is a gossipy tale of adventures and exploits. However, as the only detailed historical account available it is a reasonably good source of information about the agency's history. Fred Ritchin, former photo editor at the *New York Times Magazine*, is another good source of historical information; however his essays are usually written for books produced by the agency itself.

This thesis project differs from most work on Magnum in that it focuses on the agency as a group and as an institution, rather than on the individual photographer members. But, most importantly, it is unique in that I take the style of Magnum photographs to be an important way to begin an analysis of photojournalism that enables an understanding of how photographic conventions are used and can be deciphered. I also aim to show how the dominant mode of photojournalism, which I contend is now the Magnum style, was constructed in a certain period of time and has been modified in particular ways and for particular reasons since then.

Chapter One

Magnum's Early History

What distinguishes a Magnum photographer from any other photojournalist? From the perspective of a casual present day observer, the distinction seems to come from the prestige of being a member of a small, well-respected cooperative that has almost legendary status in popular discourse about photography. But how was this distinction initially created and then maintained? The answer, I argue, lies in Magnum's construction of a particular Magnum persona, set of aspirations, and visual style. This chapter explores the strategies Magnum used to set itself apart as unique from the circumstances of its founding in 1947 through its first decade, while visual style is addressed in the following chapter.

The Founders of Magnum

Magnum Photos, Inc. was founded at the urging of Robert Capa in the spring of 1947 over lunch at the restaurant of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The original founders of Magnum, not all at the meeting however, were the photographers Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson, George Rodger, David "Chim" Seymour, and William Vandivert. Rita Vandivert and Maria Eisner took the jobs of running the New York and Paris offices, respectively. The Vandiverts were the only Americans in this group of Europeans and left the agency a year later.

The founding photographers were already known internationally, especially through their photojournalistic work in the mass circulation picture magazines of the 1930s and 1940s, and in Henri Cartier-Bresson's case, through art exhibits. For example, in 1938 the British magazine *Picture Post* declared Capa to be the "greatest war photographer in the world," based on his work in the Spanish Civil War and on the war in China. Cartier-Bresson held a solo exhibition of photographs in New York in 1933, and in 1947 another exhibition of his work at the Museum of Modern Art was travelling to museums throughout the US. He was hailed in the *Saturday Review of Literature* in 1947 as a "new vision" in photography and visual art, an inspiration to Walker Evans, Helen Levitt, and Lisette Model.²² George Rodger was working for the Black Star Agency during World War II when he photographed the experience of Londoners during the German Blitz, which was published over eight pages in *Picture Post*.²³ He next spent two years on a roving assignment for *Life* magazine where he covered fighting on fronts between Morocco and China. In 1942, *Life* published 76 of Rodger's photos in one issue, as testament to his travelling more miles (75,000) than any other reporter on the war.²⁴ David Seymour gained international acclaim for his reportage on Barcelona's civilians under fire during the Spanish Civil War, which was published in 1938 in *Life* magazine.²⁵ His focus on the effect of war on civilians was unusual among photojournalists, who at that time were primarily concerned with soldiers and battles.

²² James Thrall Soby, "The Fine Arts: A New Vision in Photography," *Saturday Review of Literature*, April 5, 1947.

²³ Russell Miller, *Magnum: Fifty Years at the Front Line of History* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1997). p. 34 - 35.

²⁴ *Life*, August 10, 1942.

The international prestige of the founding photographers of Magnum certainly helped set them apart from many other photojournalists. However, there were other "photo-reporters," as they were called then, who were also celebrated but who never became members of Magnum, such as Margaret Bourke-White, Carl Mydans, and Alfred Eisenstaedt (all of whom were published extensively in *Life* magazine). What distinguished the Magnum group from the others? There are four elements that I believe are most important in understanding how Magnum set its photographers apart from others. First is the ethos of the group: their political aspirations to make positive change in the post-war world, their emphasis on individual expression, and their commitment to photojournalism as a lifestyle, not just a job, along with their pioneering insistence on the right of the photographer to control his own work. Second, their effective use of new miniature camera technology and involvement with the earliest iterations of the new photo-essay form in Europe. Third, an emphasis on the importance of the photographer as an individual author, and fourth, the development of a unique style of photographic representation. The last point has been particularly underexplored by scholars and will be taken up in Chapter Two.

The Magnum Photos, Inc. Ethos and Photographers Rights

As an agency, Magnum pioneered policies that reconfigured the relationship between photographer, editor and publisher. Magnum was founded by photojournalists for the purpose of protecting their interests and freeing them from the editorial control of the magazines. The founders of Magnum all had experience

²⁵ Judith Friedberg, "Chim: A Man of Peace," in *David Seymour - "Chim"* (New York:

with editors like Wilson Hicks at *Life* magazine who had highly specific notions of what photographs he needed, what stories should be covered, and how photographs should be captioned. Most editors treated photographers as providers of raw material that needed to be molded into shape through editing, cropping, layout and captioning. According to Hicks, photographers weren't supposed to express opinions through their photographs, it was up to the editors to impose meaning on the images.²⁶

The Magnum founders' experiences with photo editors and their own aspirations for affecting change in the world, led to the founding of the agency and their insistence on certain policies. Before the existence of Magnum the founders' work had at times been deliberately misused for right-wing political purposes that went directly against the grain of the photographer's personal beliefs in socialist politics.²⁷

Magnum's members have, since the beginning, insisted on the integrity of their work and of the photographer himself and maintained the belief that the photographs have to be viewed the way the creator intended, as personal expression of an individual witness. Only in this way could the photographer hope to truly communicate with his audience. After recording the destructive results of fascist politics in the Spanish Civil War and WWII firsthand, the politically engaged Magnum photographers believed they were in a unique position to attempt to effect

Grossman Publishers, Inc., 1966).

²⁶ Rudolf Janssens and Gertjan Kalff, "Time Incorporated Stink Club: The Influence of *Life* on the Founding of Magnum Photos," in *American Photographs in Europe*, ed. David E. Nye and Mick Gidley, *European Contributions to American Studies* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994). p. 224. For more on how *Life* used photographs see Carol Squiers, "Looking at *Life*," in *Illuminations: Women Writing on Photography from the 1850s to the Present*, ed. Liz Heron and Val Williams (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

²⁷ Ritchin, "What Is Magnum?." p. 421.

change in society. Photography was understood at that time, more strongly than it is now, as a reliable and truthful medium for recording reality, giving Magnum photographers confidence in their abilities to directly influence millions of readers through their work for the magazines.

Philosophically the photographers in Magnum shared a belief in the dignity of humanity and a compassion for the individual, manifested in work like Magnum's first group project, in 1947, "People are People the World Over" for *Ladies Home Journal*. They also shared a belief in the importance of being personally invested in their subjects, and a firm commitment to raising the standards of photojournalism through a rejection of sensationalism. Magnum members proclaimed a commitment to photojournalism beyond just fulfilling the duties of a job as they believed many other photographers who held staff positions on magazines and newspapers were doing. Michelle Vignes, who worked for Magnum's Paris office in the early 1950s, says that "Magnum taught photographers to think in a way that they didn't before. They shot a bit straighter, and it suggested to photographers that you have to have a style, and you have to create an image from life. They taught how to believe in what you do and to live fully, live fully with your little camera. Don't do it just to record."²⁸ Their intense personal involvement and devotion to personal expression helped set them apart; as Cartier-Bresson said of Magnum, "we were not mercenaries."²⁹

²⁸ Light, *Witness in Our Time: Working Lives of Documentary Photographers*. p. 43.

²⁹ Janssens and Kalff, "Time Incorporated Stink Club: The Influence of *Life* on the Founding of Magnum Photos." p. 233.

In order to maintain their independent voice, Magnum insisted on three core policies: the photographer maintained the copyright over his own images, photographs were not to be cropped unless permitted by the photographer, and photographs could only be published with the caption written by Magnum. These were previously unheard of demands and created difficulties for Magnum in securing assignments. However, the photographers represented by Magnum were sufficiently in demand that many publications agreed to their terms. Magnum benefited financially from these policies, especially through retaining ownership of negatives (previously owned by the magazine employer) which became part of an increasingly valuable archive of images that could be sold repeatedly to different publications or used in book projects. These policies institutionalized a greater respect for the work of photojournalists in Magnum and helped set the standard for later agencies. In this way Magnum also differentiated their members from other photojournalists who had much less control over their assignments and the use of their photographs.

Membership and Royalties

The history of Magnum is often presented as a constant struggle both to survive financially and to balance the wills of strong egos.³⁰ As a member-owned cooperative, they are both a self-selecting and self-governing group of photographers. The three-stage selection process was codified in 1955 and stipulates that a photographer must present a portfolio of work to the current

³⁰ The only complete history of Magnum available is Russell Miller's *Magnum: Fifty Years at the Front Line of History*. Fred Ritchin's "What is Magnum" in *In Our Time* is much shorter

members and can only be accepted into the first stage of membership as a nominee by a majority vote. Nominees have no voting rights or commitments but may use the Magnum name. The nominee must present a further, more extensive, portfolio two years later at which time a majority of the members elect to accept the photographer as an associate, again with no voting rights, but now with access to the facilities of Magnum's offices and with a responsibility towards the rules of the agency. After another two years a final portfolio is presented and, if the majority of members agree, the photographer is accepted as a full member for life and a Director of the Company.³¹

One effect of this rigorous system for admitting members is to add to the prestige of Magnum photographers. No other agency has such stringent rules for membership and no other agency has as high a profile as Magnum. Russell Miller summarizes what Magnum means to many photographers, though probably overstating it somewhat:

It is hardly surprising that every young, ambitious photographer dreams of joining Magnum because it remains, despite its problems, the world's pre-eminent photographic agency. To be able to add 'Magnum' after your name on a picture credit signifies not only that you have been accepted into an exclusive club, but that the existing members of that club have approved your entry. It means, as a photographer, that you have submitted your work to the critical scrutiny of the finest photographers in the world and they have found it of sufficient quality to admit you to their illustrious ranks... It means

but also good (although supposedly Magnum interfered and insisted on certain changes in the text - for more on the publishing of that essay, see Miller's account).

³¹ Magnum website (<http://www.magnumphotos.com>) and Miller, *Magnum: Fifty Years at the Front Line of History*..

you are no longer just another photographer, you are a *Magnum* photographer.

The original founders' intention was for the photographers to run the organization rather than the other way around. Therefore, many of the agency's problems have been attributed to the fact that the photographers are not fully competent to properly run a business. The royalties system in place at Magnum has also been problematic. Members pay the agency 35% of all their assignment fees, whether the assignment was originally secured by Magnum staff or by the photographer. The agency also keeps 55% of archival sales, and is allowed to borrow from member accounts to keep itself afloat. In this way, the more successful members carry more of the financial burden, which has been cited as the reason that recent photographers such as Sebastião Salgado, Eugene Richards, and James Nachtwey have all quit the agency to manage their own businesses.³²

Exploiting New Trends in Photojournalism

Up through the 1950's the prototypical press camera was the Speed Graphic, which had replaced the Graflex in the 1920's. While the Graflex could weigh up to 70 pounds when fitted with a telephoto lens, the Speed Graphic weighed only about 9 pounds. Both cameras used glass plates to produce negatives, which were bulky and had to be loaded one at a time. These technical aspects contributed to the staged appearance of much press photography before 1920, an effect heightened by the use of flash to overcome the low sensitivity of the glass plates' emulsion. While there were some improvements made to the Speed Graphic in terms of

developing flexible film and holders that allowed quick advancement from one frame to the next for at least six sheets, the introduction of the compact Ermanox small plate camera and its fast lens in 1924 was a major step towards a candid style in photography because it was now possible to photograph unobtrusively and indoors without flash.

At the same time, the German-made Leica camera was introduced, which pioneered the use of 35mm film in strips of thirty-six frames that could be rapidly advanced. The Leica also used a fast lens that allowed the photographer to avoid the frozen look of flash, to use light to create a sense of volume and depth, and to suggest a sense of motion by allowing some blur. Many press photographers derided the new cameras as toys and thought the decreased sharpness and detail of the smaller format film wasn't worth the new mobility. It wasn't until the 1950's that the Speed Graphic began to lose out to the 35mm camera. The photojournalists of Magnum were among those who first switched to the Leica in the late 1930s and were able to exploit its qualities to produce a spontaneous new look, typically called "candid camera" photography for its unposed appearance. The use of the 35mm camera is one way in which Magnum photographers distinguished themselves from most other photo-reporters.

The founding members of Magnum were all involved in work for the mass-circulation picture magazines even before they founded their own agency in 1947. The earliest German picture magazines, established during the Weimar Republic

³² David Walker, "Nachtwey Puts Magnum on Notice," *Photo District News*, June 2001.

such as *Muncher Illustrierte Press* (founded in 1923) and *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, had developed the genre of the photo-essay that the French magazine *Vu* (1928) and *Regards*, American magazines *Life* (1936) and *Look* (1937), and the British *Illustrated Weekly* and *Picture Post* (1938) quickly adopted, although each in their own way.³³ Robert Capa began his photographic career at the Dephot News Service in Berlin (founded in 1928) whose photographers worked closely with the illustrated magazines and with Stefan Lorant, the editor at *Muncher Illustrierte Press* who is credited with developing the use of photographs in sequence - the photo-essay.³⁴ When the Dephot photographers and illustrated magazine editors fled Nazi Germany they took their experience with the photo-essay format with them. Former Dephot photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt became one of *Life* magazines first staff photographers, Stefan Lorant went to London and established *Illustrated Weekly* and *Picture Post* which would later publish numerous Magnum photographs. The founders of Magnum, whether working in Germany or other parts of Europe, were part of this new class of photo-reporters. Historian and photographer Gisèle Freund described the new breed of photographers in late 1920s and early 1930's Germany as:

free-lancers, independent photographers who often proposed their own stories. Each of their photographs was signed, indicating the attention that was now being paid to the photographer's personality. ... they were not only photographers, but also editors of their own texts

³³ For a description of the rise of the various picture magazines, their editors, and photographers, see Gisèle Freund, *Photography and Society* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1980). Also, Ute Eskildsen, "Germany: The Weimar Republic," in *Illuminations: Women Writing on Photography from the 1850s to the Present*, ed. Liz Heron and Val Williams (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

³⁴ Freund, *Photography and Society*. p. 124 - 125.

and captions. The majority of them were middle class, [and] had university educations.³⁵

Those in this new class of photo-reporters often started out in other professions, and were not trained as traditional press photographers. It seems that it is this emerging persona of the independent, educated, cosmopolitan photographer that Magnum's founders were drawing on when they established their agency. The promotion of this new persona, along with their personal involvement with new European camera technology and the genre of the photo-essay, set them apart from most other photo-reporters in the late 1940s.

The Mythos of the Magnum Author

Magnum, perhaps drawing on the founders' experiences with the early European picture magazines and their unique treatment of photographers as authors as noted above, made recognition of the individual photographer a central tenet of their philosophy. Current member photographer Paul Lowe asserts Magnum's discourse about its distinctiveness this way:

The only way to survive as an agency is to be individual, to be a group who, like novelists, are authors who create their own view of the world. Corbis, Sygma, Reuters are producing the everyday news image, so what we have to do is be much more discriminating than that, and to say this is what our view of the world is, and if you are interested come with us: if not, and you want a general overview, go with anybody else. But we have to assert that we are authors as much

³⁵ Ibid. p. 125.

as anything else. We are distinctive, we have our own vision of the world.³⁶

This emphasis on the author can be seen as an effort by Magnum to endow photojournalism with what Michel Foucault calls the "author-function."³⁷ Foucault describes the author-function as belonging to some discourses in society but not others, for example, to the discourse of literature but not to the discourse of legal contracts or private letters. The author-function does not refer simply to a real individual, but to a constructed being called "author." Photojournalism did not have a strong tradition of authorship before the illustrated magazines in Europe, and later Magnum, began to endow their photo-reporters with certain traits of independence, personal expression, heroism, honesty, and dedication. Early in the history of news photography it was thought that it did not matter who took the photograph, it was considered a mechanical process achieved by the camera. Magnum worked to elevate the status of the photographer, to promote the individual's relevance.

Magnum's emphasis on the individual author resonates with larger cultural trends in the post-war Western world. John Roberts, in a discussion of photographic modernism in the US, argues that the

post-war development of bourgeois humanism into a cross-class liberal humanism...placed the rights of the individual and humanity above those of 'narrow' social interests such as class. ... Both existentialism

³⁶ Peter Hamilton, "Magnum Opus," *British Journal of Photography*, 15 December 1999. p. 15.

³⁷ Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (Essex: Longman Group UK Limited, 1988).

and liberal humanism saw the individual as able to define his or her own destiny. The effect of this on art is obvious. Existentialism and liberal humanism allowed art to fashion the reconstruction of pre-avant-garde notions of the artist's 'specialness'.³⁸

Roberts also points out that a celebration of the male artist as hero was dominant across the arts during this post-war period. Magnum's promotion of the photographer as individual author and as heroic adventurer participate in these cultural discourses, while at the same time their identity as a cooperative with socialist leanings went against the grain of the dominant anti-communal spirit of the times.

Magnum's ability to differentiate itself from other photo-reporters in its first decade came from a variety of factors. As discussed above, these included the founders' aspirations to make a difference both in society and in what they saw as the poor treatment of photographers as simply providers of raw material for magazine photo editors. Also important were their effective use of new European camera technology and their early exposure to the genre of the photo-essay, along with the prestige they earned individually through their work for the magazines during WWII. Magnum's promotion of their members as part of a new class of independent authors, rather than employees in the service of someone else's vision, rounded out their profile as unique.

³⁸ Roberts, *The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography, and the Everyday*. p. 116.

Chapter Two

Magnum's Visual Style

In addition to the prestige of being members of a small, well-respected group with an illustrious past, Magnum photographers distinguish or brand themselves as a unique group through their visual style, particularly through the high degree to which they combine the reportorial function of photojournalism with an artistic sensibility. As the photography critic Andy Grundberg has noted, Magnum "has nourished ...`personal' points of view, idiosyncrasy, and the possibility that art and politics could be made to coincide. It also has emphasized the purely visual component of photography, giving Magnum claim to photojournalism's aesthetic high ground."³⁹ Magnum's heavy emphasis on the individual photographer as author is one strategy by which they set themselves apart from other agencies. Max Kozloff, also a photography critic, has noted that "the agency's members have led in producing photojournalism that speaks in the first-person singular and has a place beyond the pages of a magazine."⁴⁰ The agency has used the media of books and gallery and museum exhibits to further brand their images as a unique product, a strategy which will be addressed more fully in Chapter Three.

³⁹ Andy Grundberg, *Crisis of the Real: Writings on Photography since 1974*, 2nd ed., *Writers and Artists on Photography* (New York, NY: Aperture, 1999). p. 191.

⁴⁰Max Kozloff, *Lone Visions, Crowded Frames: Essays on Photography*, 1st ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994). p. 183.

This chapter focuses on defining the Magnum style in visual terms. While the style has changed in response to historical and cultural shifts, I argue that there is a recognizable "classic" Magnum style that dominated the agency's output from the founding years through the early 1980s. Although a new visual mode has emerged in Magnum, the classic style has remained a prominent trend within the agency. It is this classic Magnum style that I am delineating; recent changes will be addressed at the end of this chapter.

Each section addresses a set of characteristics that taken together define the Magnum style. These characteristics, or elements, of the style, which are derived from an analysis of Magnum photographs, can be summarized as: (1) drama, (2) documentary realism, (3) narrativity, and (4) artistic expression. These terms describe general themes conveyed by the photographs through distinct choices in photographic technique and manner of expression. These elements are interconnected in that a sense of drama may be created by the use of narrativity, through techniques such as juxtaposing certain subjects to convey a startling paradox. Drama may also be created through the use of a wide-angle lens that puts the viewer and photographer in the midst of the action; the resulting image may or may not imply a narrative. Due to the interrelated nature of the elements of the Magnum style, each of the four sections noted above weave in references to the elements that are described fully in other sections.

My project here is somewhat similar to Susan Sontag's when she defined the "fascist aesthetics" that Leni Riefenstahl's films and photography participated in.

The aesthetics that she delineated consists of a number of distinctive themes, such as "a preoccupation with situations of control...the massing of groups of people; the turning of people into things; the multiplication or replication of things; and the grouping of people/things around an all-powerful, hypnotic leader-figure or force." These aesthetics were not used only by fascists, but aptly described fascist preoccupations. In a similar way, I am describing the visual style (or aesthetics) of Magnum and how it is achieved through certain techniques. It is Magnum's preoccupations that have brought these themes together in a particular way, but they are not the only photographers to participate in this style.⁴¹

Drama

Robert Capa begins and ends his book *Slightly Out of Focus* with this sentence: "There was absolutely no reason to get up in the mornings anymore."⁴² At the time the book begins, in 1942, Magnum was still just a dream and Capa was waiting in New York for any assignment that would get him back on his feet and into the field. In *Slightly Out of Focus* he chronicles his adventures photographing WWII after receiving an assignment from *Collier's* magazine. Besides his often self-deprecating comments, the text is filled with dramatic stories of getting the picture despite all the episodes of getting drunk, playing poker, and flirting with the girls. Capa's photographs that accompany the stories have a parallel with his writing. They are dramatic and depict Capa himself as macho and heroic, like his friend Ernest Hemingway, but with a measure of humility that makes them engaging

⁴¹ Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," in *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980). p. 91.

⁴² Robert Capa, *Slightly out of Focus* (New York: H. Holt, 1947)., p. 1 and p. 243.

rather than boastful. The humility in his photographs comes from not only publishing dramatic images of death, invasion, and sorrow, but also including photographs of bored sailors reading magazines on a Navy ship or soldiers waiting quietly in rows on the plane from which they will parachute into Germany. (Figure 1) These images are taken from a medium distance with flat light or flash and lack the drama provided by revealing expressions, gestures or action, or of sophisticated pictorial composition.

These quieter, more banal images of the tedium behind the drama have generally been left behind as Capa's bolder, more graphic photographs have been reprinted over and over again. (Figure 2) By selecting particular types of photographs through the process of editing for book projects and exhibits, Magnum shapes the group style and increases their brand recognition. Those Capa images that have been chosen by his brother Cornell Capa and by Magnum to represent his life's work emphasize the qualities of drama and heroism and thus have had a crucial role in sustaining the Robert Capa legend.

Robert Capa's saying, often quoted, that "If your pictures aren't good enough, you're not close enough," has helped reinforce the important elements of drama and the heroic photographer that have been emphasized in the Magnum style. Capa's most famous photograph, "Death of a Loyalist Soldier, Spain 1936," (Figure 3) often celebrated as the greatest war photograph of all time, creates drama with a close-up depiction of the moment of death and conveys a macho persona with the clear implication of Capa's decision to place himself in close proximity to danger.



Figure 1



Figure 2



ROBERT CAPA

Figure 3

His choice of a type of lens that closely resembles normal human vision, probably around 50 mm, gives the feeling that we are right next to the soldier as he falls. The fact that the viewer can see the landscape around and behind him indicates that Capa is clearly not hidden safely far away with a telephoto lens (which would compress and narrow our view of the background), but is closely engaged with the action.⁴³ Capa's photographs of D-Day where he is obviously in the surf with the advancing troops has a similar effect of dramatizing events by being as close as possible to the action, and thereby also endowing the photographer with even more daring and courage than the heroes of the moment, the invading soldiers, since he had a choice that the soldiers did not: to photograph from up close or from afar.

While many of Robert Capa's photographs of war, such as "Death of a Loyalist Soldier, Spain 1936," do not seem particularly dramatic viewed now, in the 1930s they were hailed as "the finest pictures of front-line action ever taken."⁴⁴ Certainly, this kind of close-up view of war was relatively new to viewers who were more used to images of fighting's aftermath. However, captions applied by the picture magazines certainly played an important role in the creation of Capa's images as dramatic. As Fred Ritchin notes, Capa's Spanish Civil War photographs were often accompanied by captions such as "In the Heart of the Battle: The Most Amazing

⁴³ While there have been accusations that this photograph was faked, Richard Whelan, Robert Capa's biographer, seems to have found convincing evidence that it is authentically a depiction of a soldier's moment of death. See Richard Whelan, "Robert Capa's Falling Soldier: A Detective Story," *Aperture*, no. 166 (2002): 48 - 55.

⁴⁴ Ritchin, "What Is Magnum?."

War Picture Ever Taken," and "You can almost smell the [gun] powder in this picture," and the most famous, "This is War!" in the British magazine *Picture Post*.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Ibid. An interesting line of inquiry would be to study the relationship between captions and the Magnum visual style.

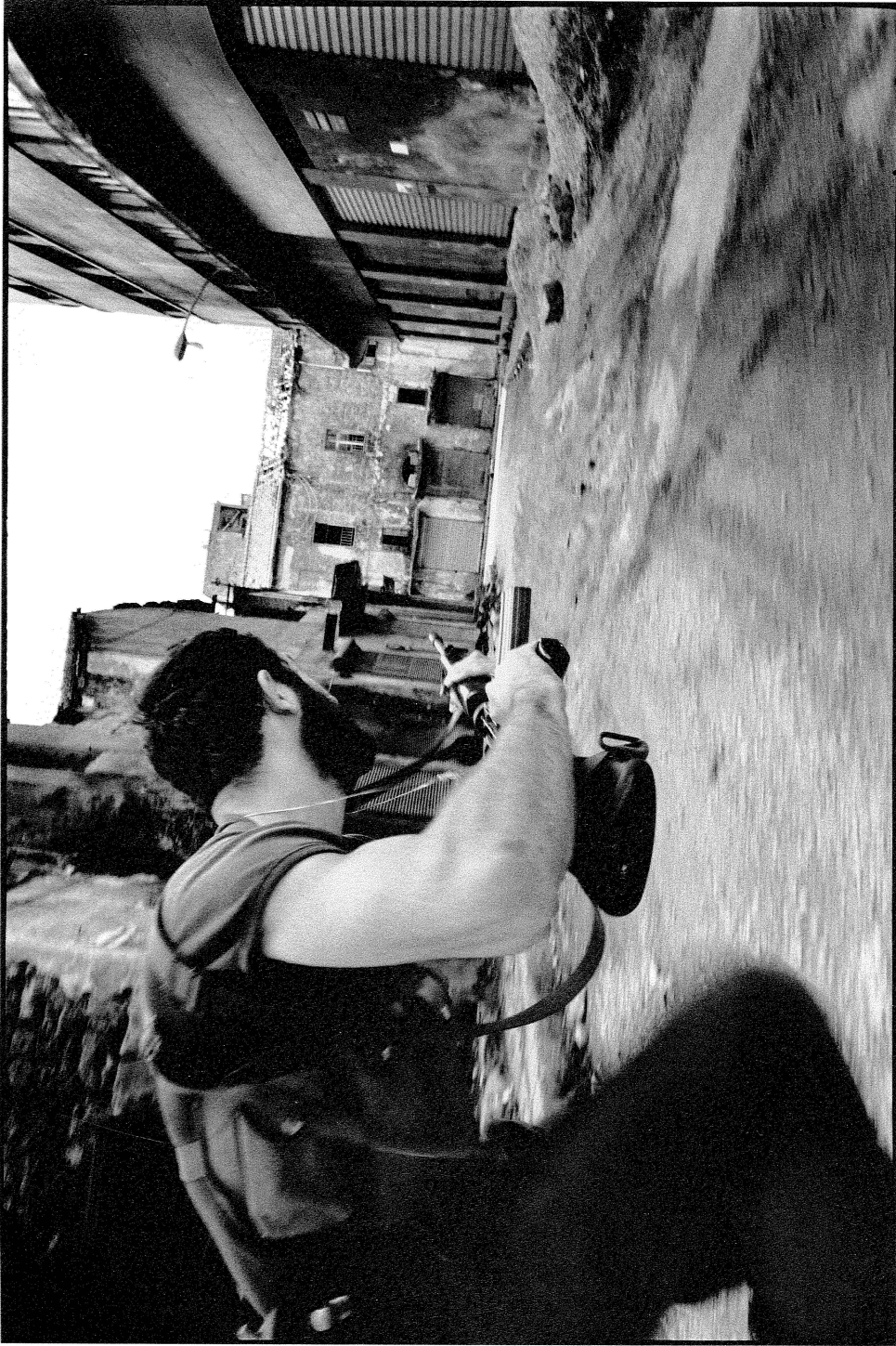
Dramatic, close-up photographs of war, suffering and disaster emphasize the photographer's bravery in the face of horror, and is an assertion of the macho persona common to the Magnum style, and common to both male and (the historically later) female photographers. Robert Capa, David Seymour, and George Rodger had helped pioneer a new kind of war photography during the Spanish Civil War and WWII, before they founded Magnum, which sought out close-up shots of action as well as sympathetic images of civilians suffering on the sidelines. Previously, war had been photographed at a relatively safe, and visually dull, distance (that is, when censorship rules allowed). This more engaged style for photographing war has become the norm in photojournalism, but it is Magnum photographers who most often make a name for themselves by pushing the limits and getting dangerously close. A number of Magnum members, such as Susan Meiselas, Raymond Depardon, and James Nachtwey have won the prestigious Robert Capa Gold Medal, awarded for "best published photographic reporting from abroad requiring exceptional courage and enterprise" by the Overseas Press Club (sponsored by *Time* and *Life* Magazine). Nachtwey, who left Magnum in 2001 to form his own agency named VII, has said that "The risk of getting killed in journalism is simply part of the job. ...I have taken a lot of risks, I have had a lot of close calls, but I have never gone out there with sheer abandon and put myself in danger for the sake of it. It was always for the sake of trying to communicate something."⁴⁶ This effort to bring back the pictures that will tell the real story of war to those safe at home is the parallel element that justifies the macho risk-taking and makes it heroic.

⁴⁶ Miller, *Magnum: Fifty Years at the Front Line of History.*, p. 266.

The heroic photographer's effort to depict war action close-up is personified in Raymond Depardon's photograph "Christian Falangist fighter, Beirut, Lebanon, 1978." (Figure 4) In this image Depardon creates an incredible sense of the risks he faced in Lebanon. The impression given by the photograph is that he is photographing while crouching immediately behind the fighter who has his gun at the ready as they run together across an open, battle-scarred and deserted street. The fighter's legs are a blur and the street tilts ominously down to the right as we hold our breath waiting for a sniper to fire.

The sense of drama in Magnum photographs is often created by the use of medium to wide angle lenses that demand that the photographer be close and involved with the subject, like in the Depardon image discussed above. Another example of this is a Philip Jones-Griffiths photograph taken during the Vietnam war of a boy crying over the body of a girl lying in the bed of a truck. (Figure 5) The sense of immediacy is created by using a wide angle that makes it necessary to stand almost directly over the dead body, pulling the viewer up close.

Bold, graphic design and composition are another technique used regularly to heighten drama. Jones-Griffiths uses a strong, simple composition to dramatically highlight the scene. While the girl's body dominates the photograph left to right, framed by the parallel lines of the truck, the boy's gaze cuts across these lines and



RAYMOND DEPARDON

Figure 4



Figure 5

connects his anguished face in the upper right diagonally with hers in the lower left. Depardon's "Christian Falangist fighter" creates a bold composition that makes it immediately readable as a war zone. Few details distract from the basic elements of man, gun, road, and building. All angles and the man's gun and gaze lead the viewer's eye to the wall with three closed shop doors at the end of the road, pulling the viewer into the image along with the fighter.

A common rhetorical trope used to create a sense of the dramatic is to juxtapose supposedly opposing elements. Jean Gaumy's photograph "Women training northeast of Tehran, Iran, 1986" combines a strong graphic composition with a supposed social contradiction. (Figure 6) The image is of a line of women wearing the enveloping black chador holding guns raised as if getting ready to fire. The photographer has positioned himself so that the first woman in line with a gun fills the middle of the frame and the viewer looks slightly up at her. The women behind her and those in the line with her taper off in the distance to left and right, creating a dramatic pyramid of black columns on the picture plane. The supposed contradiction comes in the form of veiled women (usually assumed by Western viewers to be oppressed and passive) wielding guns (symbols of power and control).

An alternative style to depicting the horrors of war that lacks the implied heroism and even the drama of the Magnum style can be seen in the work of other, non-Magnum, photo-commentators. Michael Griffin, writing about war photojournalism notes that "The 'great pictures,' those customarily included in histories of war

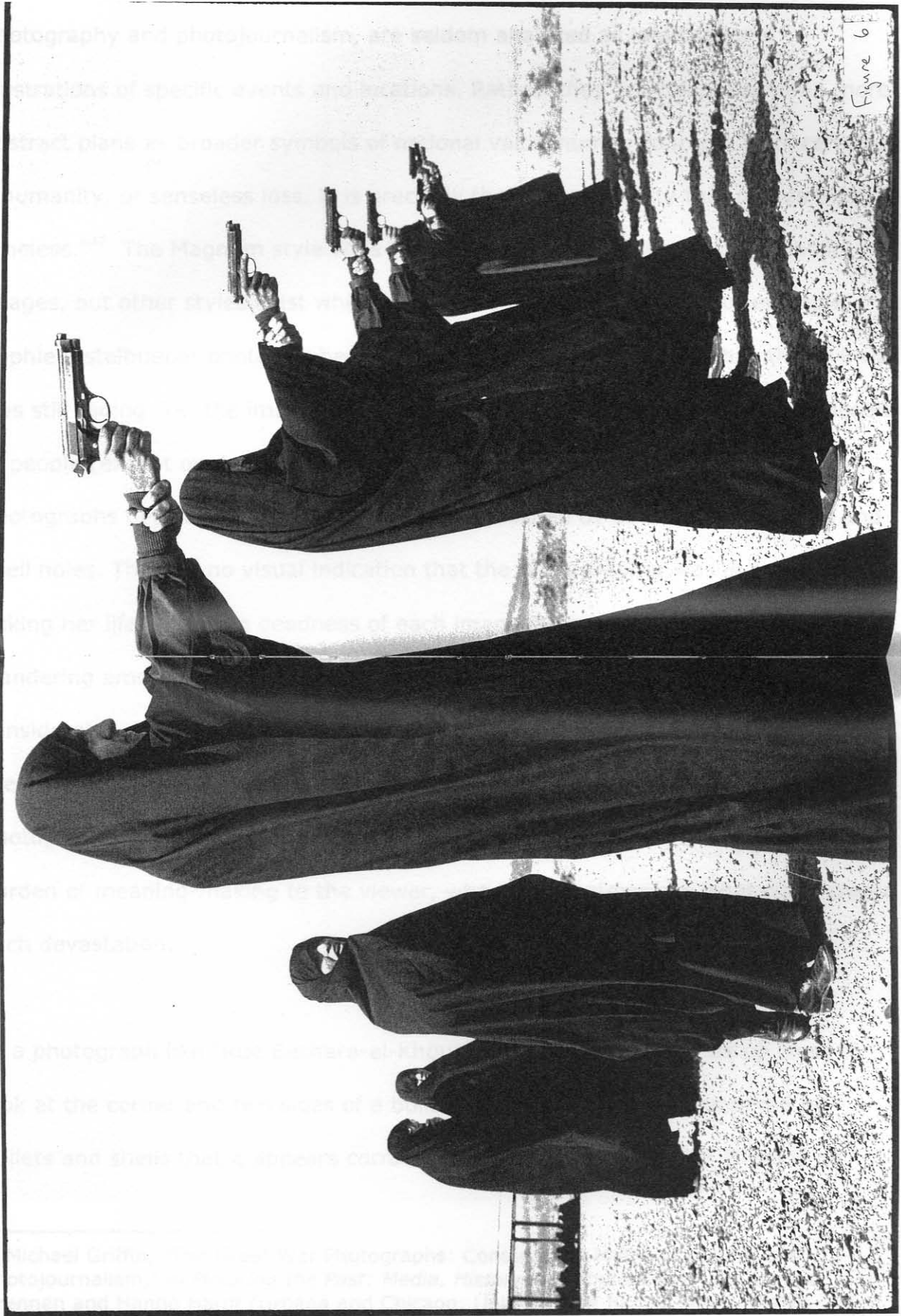


Figure 6

photography and photojournalism, are seldom analyzed as informational illustrations of specific events and locations. Rather, they are celebrated on a more abstract plane as broader symbols of national valor, human courage, inconceivable inhumanity, or senseless loss. It is precisely their nonspecificity that makes them timeless."⁴⁷ The Magnum style aims to produce these more abstract, symbolic images, but other styles exist which emphasize the informational. For example, Sophie Ristelhueber photographed in Beirut in the winter of 1982 while the civil war was still raging. Yet the images she published in her book *Beirut* are notably absent of people (except one) and lack an explicit photographer's persona. All the photographs depict the wreckage of buildings crushed by years of bullet scars and shell holes. There is no visual indication that the photographer was in any way risking her life; the calm deadness of each image suggests she was casually wandering amongst abandoned ruins, while she may actually have been in some considerable danger. Although this work is a personal vision of war's destruction, the photographer's persona stays further in the background than in Magnum photographs. This shifts the focus of the image to the subject depicted, and the burden of meaning-making to the viewer, who must contemplate what could create such devastation.

In a photograph like "Rue Bechara-el-Khoury," Ristelhueber takes us up close to look at the corner and two sides of a building that is so badly pockmarked by bullets and shells that it appears corroded, as if by acid. (Figure 7) There is no

⁴⁷ Michael Griffin, "The Great War Photographs: Constructing Myths of History and Photojournalism," in *Picturing the Past: Media, History and Photography*, ed. Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

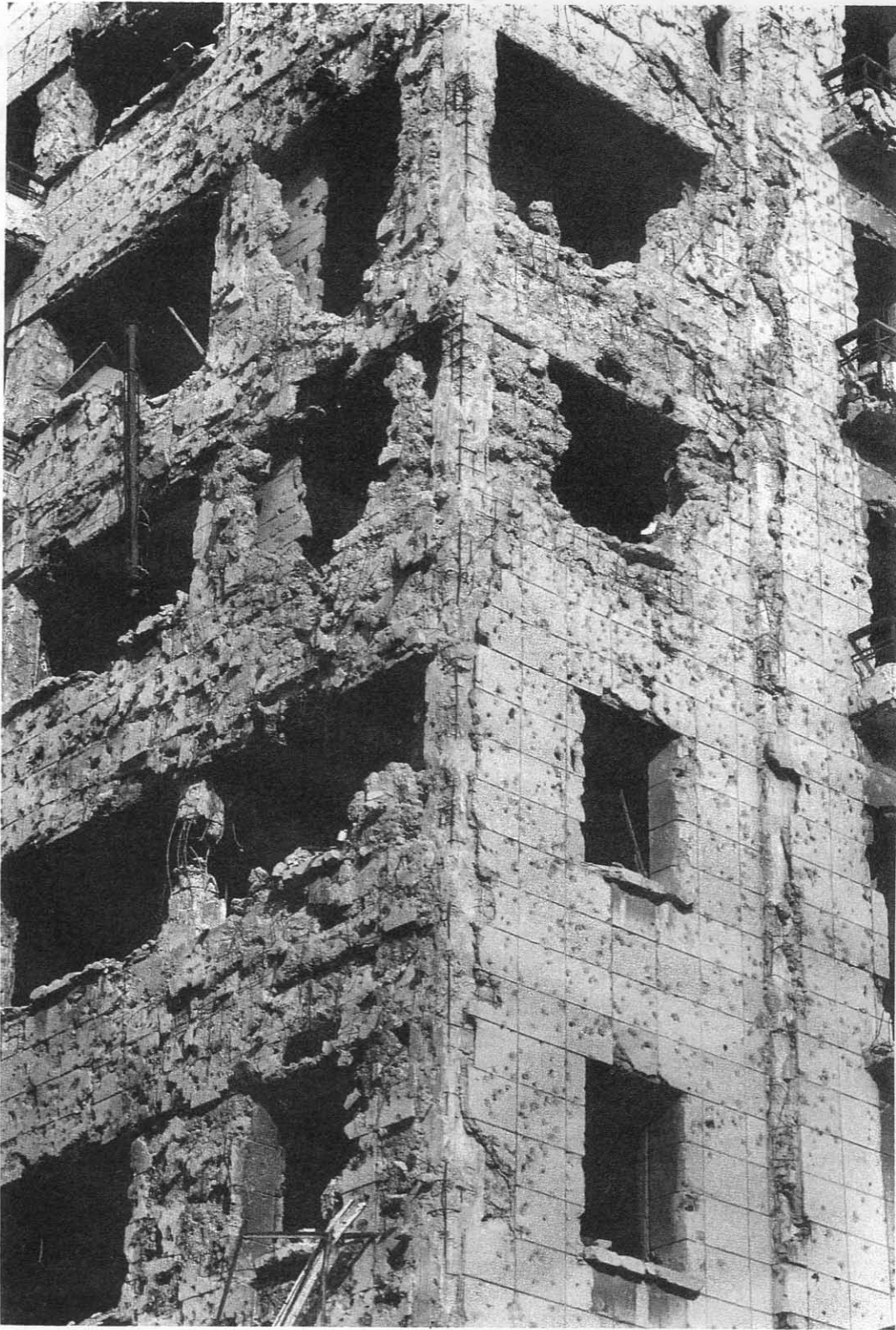


Figure 7

implied narrative here about the building or about the photographer. In "Rue Patriarche Hoyek," she widens her view and we see whole blocks of ruined buildings, bushes already growing on top of rubble. (Figure 8) By excluding people from her frame (the lone distant man in the second photograph is only just barely there) she denies us the chance to wonder about particular individuals and instead provokes us to think about the conflict as a whole and its effects on the social fabric.

Looking again at Raymond Depardon's photograph of the fighter in Beirut it is clear how much the power of that image depends on the dramatic moment created by the photographer's position, the fighter's movement, and the tilted frame. The effect is to convey some of the intense bravado and personal fear combatants (and photographers) must face in war. The drama and heroism conveyed by photographs like this are typical of the Magnum style.



Figure 8

Documentary Realism

Typical praise of Magnum photography runs something like this:

This stirring volume of extraordinary photographs, presenting our times in all their elegance, squalor, heroism, and majesty is as unsparing of its audience as it was unsparing of its photographers - brave, talented men and women, all of them Magnum members. ... The photographers whose triumphs are represented on these pages need no advocates, no champions, not even an introduction. Their work stands proudly alone. Created in fractions of a second, it stands here, enshrined in time. Nevertheless, readers living in a society harried by the hawkers of dubious products and unimaginative pictures may be unaware of Magnum and its high seriousness. ... *In Our Time* is a tribute to their genius, their versatility, and their devotion to their profession.⁴⁸

To be taken seriously and to be celebrated as witnesses to history, as in the quote above, the Magnum style cultivates a realistic look, an illusion that the viewer might merely be looking through a window onto a scene. However, what I'm calling "documentary realism" is as much a constructed style as, for example, Man Ray's surrealism or Richard Avedon's fashion photography.⁴⁹ The type of realism constructed by Magnum is marked by a sense that the photograph is candid, that this scene is what you would have seen had you been there yourself, that nothing is posed for the camera. As Terry Lovell has noted in discussing the conventions of realism, "All realisms share, then, firstly the claim that the business of art is to show things as they really are, and secondly, some theory of the nature of the

⁴⁸ Willam Manchester, "Images: A Wide Angle," in Magnum Photos et al., *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers* (London: American Federation of Arts in Association with A. Deutsch, 1989). p. 18 - 19.

reality to be shown and the methods which must be used to show it."⁵⁰ The discourse about Magnum fits this model for realist movements well. As Michael Ignatieff wrote in the introduction to a recent Magnum compilation book, "if one were to hazard a definition of the central commitment of magnum [sic], it would be to document the world as it really is." Ignatieff goes on to reveal something of the theory about reality that lies behind their realism: "but to document is to subvert, since reality is the least obvious thing there is. to approach it one has to strip away the clichés that keep it hidden from our sight. each of the photographers in this collection gives a different account of what reality is for them."⁵¹ Reality is here understood to be something that these talented photographers are uniquely able to present to those who cannot see clearly for all the clichés crowding their vision. At the same time, this discourse is able to maintain the primacy of the individual authors by referring to their diverse visions of this reality.

Magnum's type of realism is based on the philosophy of humanism, a method of presenting reality which is evident in Magnum imagery since the beginning of its history. This philosophy asserts that "people are people the world over,"⁵² that we all have human qualities in common that override our local particularities. By combining a sense of the candid with sympathetic (i.e. humanistic) portrayals, the Magnum style enables the viewer to identify with the subjects. Both qualities of

⁴⁹ I use the term documentary realism to suggest a strand of realism that is different from those referred to in film studies, such as Italian neo-realism.

⁵⁰ Terry Lovell, *Pictures of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics, Pleasure* (London: British Film Institute, 1980).

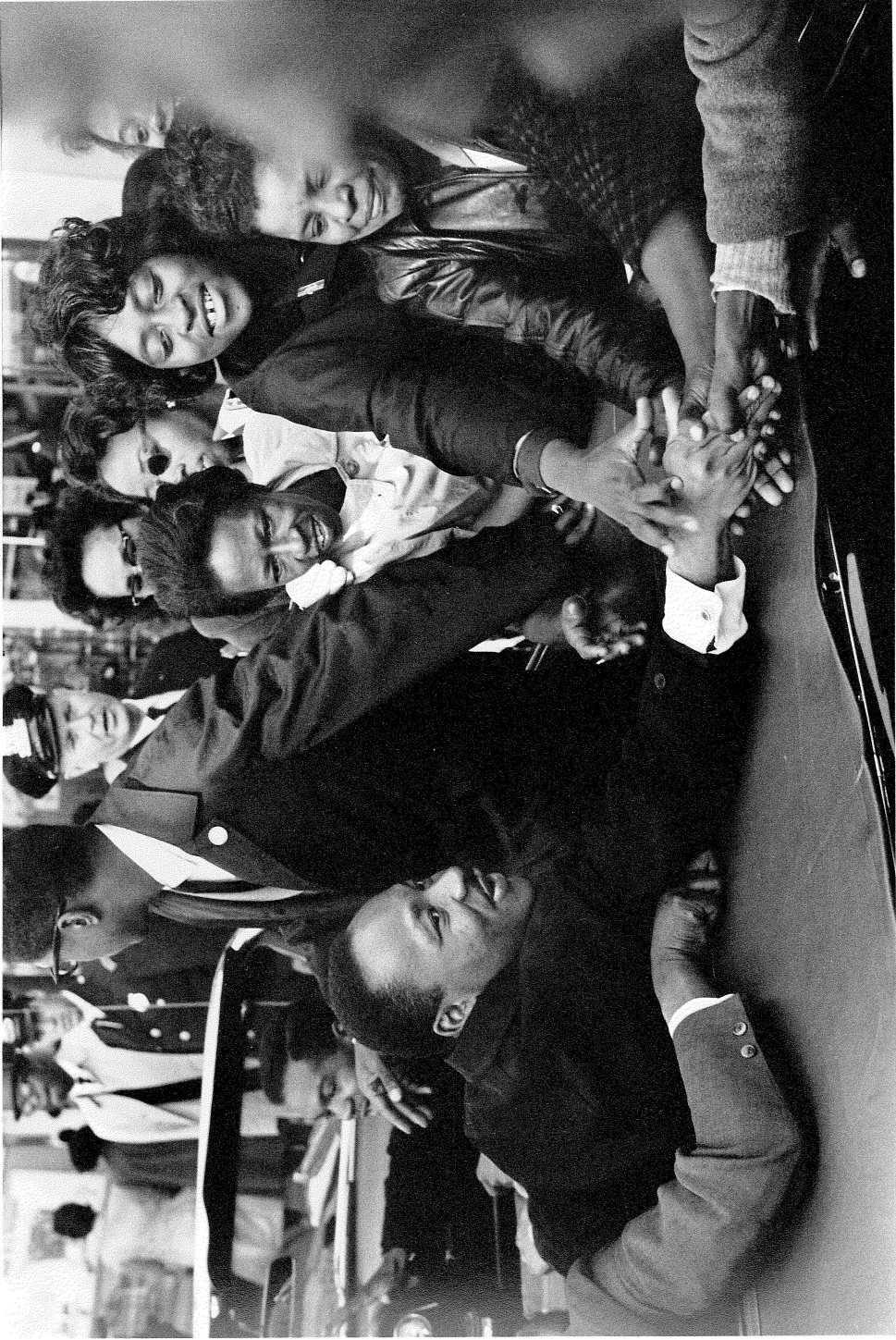
⁵¹ Magnum Photos and Ignatieff, *Magnum*^o. (No capital letters are used in the original text.)

⁵² Magnum's first cooperative project in 1947 was a series of essays for *Ladies Home Journal* titled "People are People the World Over." Miller, *Magnum: Fifty Years at the Front Line of History*.

candidness and humanism provide a sense of documentary realism by decreasing the distance between the viewer and the scene depicted, allowing the viewer to ignore the constructed nature of the image. The distance is further eroded by an aestheticization of subjects through choices in lighting, composition, and use of space, as well as by choosing to depict generally flattering human expressions. These stylistic techniques create dignified, beautiful scenes that appear ultimately *believable* to the Western bourgeois liberal perspective, and thus appear realistic.

A number of techniques are used to convey a sense that the photographed moment is candid, meaning that it has occurred spontaneously, without orchestration or influence by the photographer. One stylistic element that suggests that the photographer is in the position of a "fly on the wall" - observing without interfering - is to allow little or no direct gazes into the camera, unless the image is intended to be a portrait. When a subject appeals directly to the camera, the photographer's presence is explicitly acknowledged as the intermediary between viewer and subject. The candid image, on the other hand, conveys a sense of "being there" as objective witness rather than as participant.

In Leonard Freed's photograph "Martin Luther King, Jr., after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, Baltimore, 1963," it is the intensity with which everyone is concentrating on a particular moment unrelated to the photographer that gives it such a sense of candid realism. (Figure 9) If any of the people in the photograph were looking directly at the camera, the focus would shift slightly away from the



LEONARD FREED

Figure 9

event, currently contained as a whole within the frame, and disrupt the frame to include a sense of the photographer's presence and one's own presence as viewer.

Creating a sense of realism is also achieved through shots of behind-the-scenes moments in addition to those of the newsworthy event itself. Magnum photographers, by virtue of their prestige and the support of their agency, are more free to pursue their own vision than most photojournalists and can therefore afford to ignore the predictable image of those events that are most stage-managed for the purposes of publicity. They instead often turn around to observe the observers. In a photograph of a military parade in Mexico, instead of depicting the parade itself, the photographer Abbas focuses on the public watching. (Figure 10) He includes at the very bottom of the frame only the white hats on the heads of the military men in the parade. Their guns fitted with bayonets slash up through a picture that is composed of three levels of onlookers in a building with bars that mirror the lines of the guns.

The shift of focus to what happens alongside or behind the main event was a common trope of Henri Cartier-Bresson's early photographs. One of the most famous is "Trafalgar Square on the day George VI was Crowned: London, 1938," where a man is asleep in piles of newspapers below crowds of people presumably watching official events that press photographers were busy photographing. (Figure 11) Even the Magnum photographer Martin Parr, whose admittance to the agency was hotly contested on grounds that he does not follow in the humanist Magnum tradition, fits into the Magnum style on this point. With his use of flash in outdoor

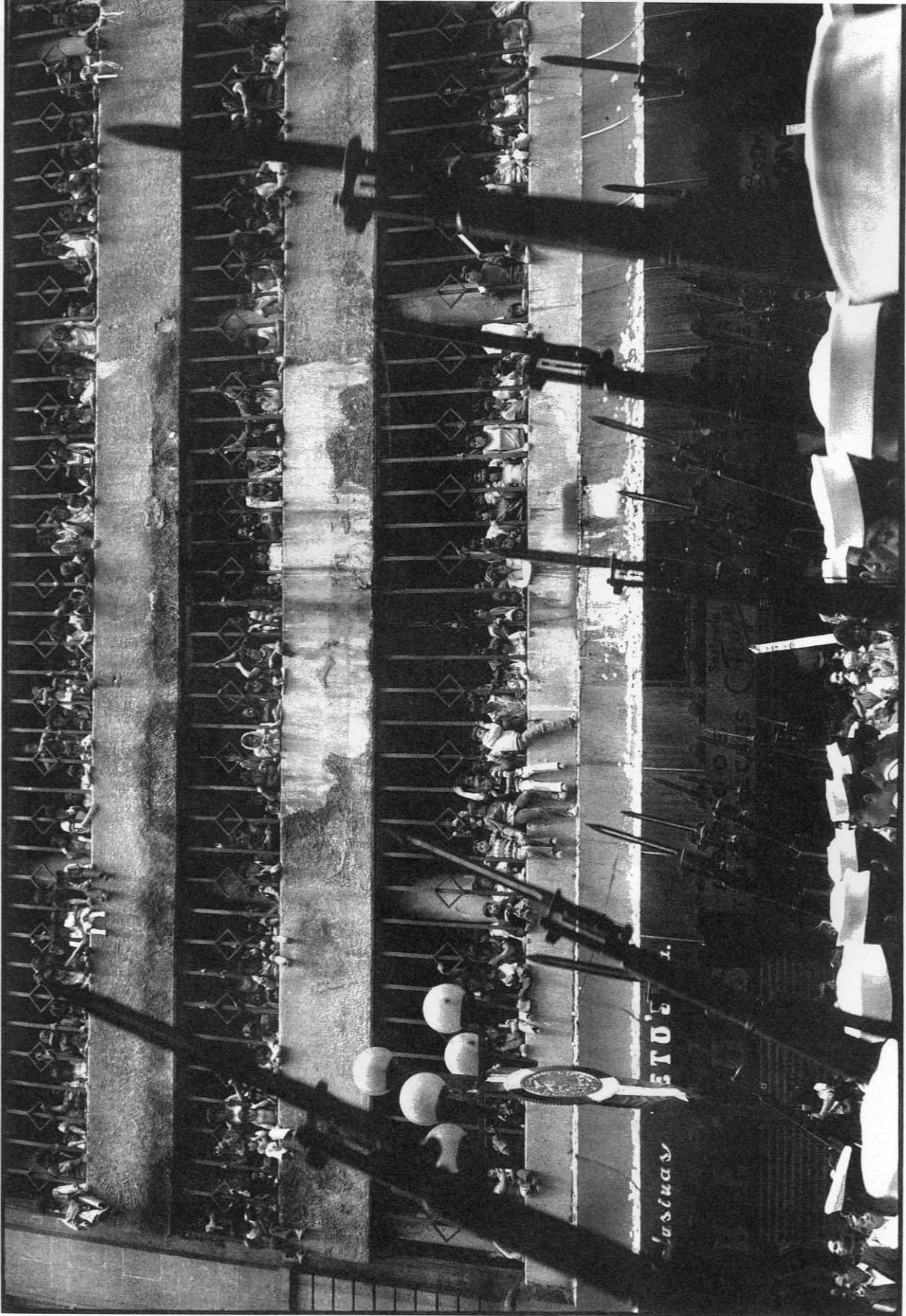


Figure 10



Henri Cartier-Bresson

At the coronation parade of King George VI, London, 1937.

Figure 11

daylight situations Parr creates a distinct over-bright and super-saturated color effect that is not as evocative of realism as it is of a garish type of advertising. However, his photographs are candid in that his subjects are generally unaware of his presence as he photographs them caught in the act of being tourists. He depicts the way people behave when they don't feel like they are being watched, when the focus of their attention is on tourist sights often outside the frame of Parr's photographs. His photograph "East Midlands Safari Park, England, 1993" crops out the bulk of the wild animals' bodies on the right side of the image and focuses instead on the family peering at them out the windows of their car, making the people the exotic animals on display. (Figure 12) Parr is not interested in the giraffe and the water buffalo, but with the absurdity of the drive-through safari park and the incongruous effect that somehow it seems the animals are watching the humans.

Another technique for creating a sense of documentary realism that is an important aspect of the Magnum style is the use of deep focus to include an abundance of foreground and background contextual information. It is a convention of photography that the more descriptive information kept in clear focus, the greater the illusion that the photograph is an objective document with a functional rather than expressive purpose. A photograph such as Sebastião Salgado's "Serra Pelada goldmine, State of Para, Brazil, 1986," packs an incredible amount of information into the frame and manages to keep most of it in focus. (Figure 13) In the foreground and positioned nearly in the middle of the frame is an individual miner resting against a plank of wood in an almost Christ-like position while all around



east midlands safari park, england, 1993

Figure 12

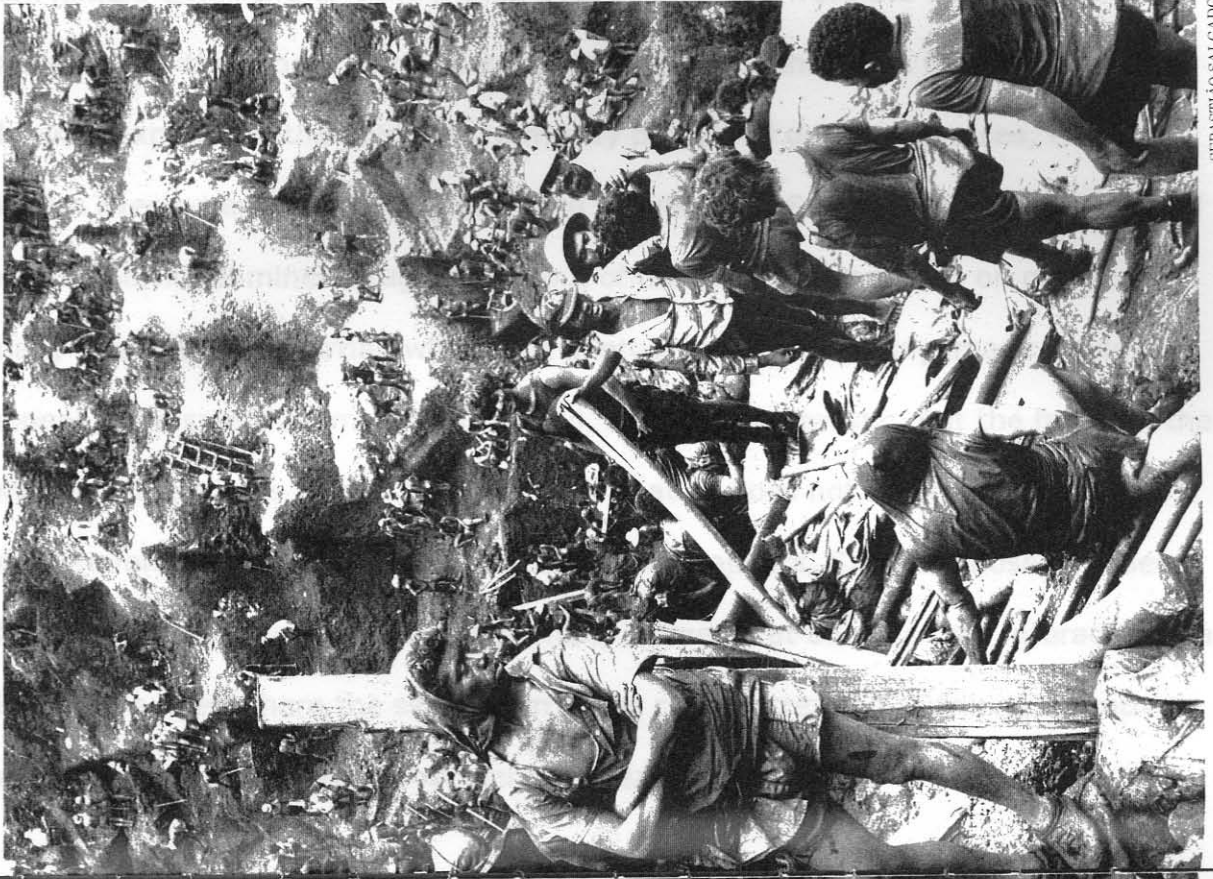


Figure 13

him miners enter and exit the frame, those coming up from the mines carrying sacks of dirt, the others going down empty handed. Behind this flow of workers is the vast expanse of the goldmine, a muddy pit carved out into terraces, with miners everywhere standing, sitting, and shoveling. If Salgado had instead focused on one individual miner struggling up out of the mine or zoomed in on one of the many interactions occurring within this photograph, the resulting image would appear more selective, more constructed, and less naturalistic. But the fact that the photograph contains so much detailed information does not mean that the result is purely informational. Like many Magnum photographers, Salgado chose to widen the angle of his view and encompass many elements at once as they interact with a dominant subject, here the single man in the center, creating a striking narrative tableaux as well as a heightened sense of realism.

Although Salgado left Magnum in 1994, after fifteen years as a member, his style and philosophy remain consistent with Magnum's style. Salgado has expressed his belief in a humanistic philosophy, saying that "It is time to launch the concept of the universality of humanity. Photography lends itself to a demonstration of this and as an instrument of solidarity between peoples."⁵³ The humanism in Salgado's projects manifests not only in the subjects he covers - manual workers, mass migration, indigenous struggles for justice - but also in the way in which he visually depicts them. As in the Magnum style as a whole, Salgado creates sympathetic, dignified, and aestheticized portrayals of "ordinary" people. Julian Stallabrass has pointed out Salgado's use of Catholic symbolism within his photographs and states

that "Salgado seems to be appealing to a quasi-religious humanism, to our empathy on the basis of the fact that we, too, are human, though using specific and traditional cultural means - the forms of Catholicism, here taken to be universal. Behind the corrupt and ruinous forms of work, of national and ethnic division, and utilitarian categorization, photography hopes to reveal a universal, transparent and comprehensible experience."⁵⁴ Although Stallabrass conflates all of photography with a particular style of photojournalism, that of the Magnum group, he makes the important point that this type of humanism assumes particular values to be universal. Salgado, through the use of Christian symbolism (often by incorporating references to the cross, as seen in the photograph above), asserts a humanistic belief in people's universal inherent dignity.

Stuart Franklin, in his photograph "Children in a housing estate, Moss Side, Manchester, 1986," has created a similar sense of realism as Salgado, although on a much smaller scale. (Figure 14) In this photograph everything is in sharp focus, from the grass in the foreground to the furthest lamp posts and tree leaves in the background. The medium-wide angle encompasses a boy up close on the right, as he props himself up on his bicycle and fiddles with a toy sword, and also includes the boys behind him scrambling up and jumping off a boxy structure onto a pile of old mattresses. The realism here is conveyed by its candid nature (no boy seems to notice the photographer) as well as by the inclusion of contextual information in deep focus: the bits of trash, the uniformity of the housing structures, the

⁵³ Amanda Hopkinson, "Interview with Salgado," *British Journal of Photography*, March 29, 1990.

makeshift playground, and the boys' gestures and expressions. The method of singling out a central character, like in the Salgado photograph described above, is replayed here with the boy on the right. Besides creating greater visual interest, the result is to imply a cryptic narrative about the relationship between the lone boy and the group of boys playing behind him.

A further example of the Magnum style's humanistic approach can be seen visually in Constantine Manos' photograph "Country church, Daufuski Island, South Carolina, 1952." (Figure 15) Two men are seen lost in thought in a simple, tidy wooden church interior, one seated on a bench and the other kneeling. Their hats hang on the wall behind them. Both men's faces are obscured, allowing for the appearance of private reverie and avoiding any sense of voyeurism on our part. By obscuring the specific details that make the men into individuals, the photographer has endowed them with iconic status as embodiments of human spirituality and humble dignity. The viewer is given a generalized impression of any "country church" in rural America, rather than the specificity of these individual lives. The scene is aestheticized through the use of soft natural light from the windows on the left and by the selective focus that keeps the central man sharp but allows the rest of the image to lose some detail and become a soft background to his gesture.

Garry Winogrand's book *Public Relations* (1977) provides a good counterpoint to Magnum's particular style of realism, which works in conjunction with a belief in the

⁵⁴ Julian Stallabrass, "Sebastião Salgado and Fine Art Photojournalism," *New Left Review*, no. 223 (1997).



STUART FRANKLIN

Figure 14



CONSTANTINE MANOS

Figure 15

dignity of humanity.⁵⁵ Winogrand's realistic style differs greatly from the Magnum style; he uses flash in an obvious way - creating harsh shadows and bright highlights, scenes are often compositionally cluttered rather than neatly arranged into a hierarchy of important subject matter, and people are depicted in all their weird specificity without any humanist message. In his photograph "State Dinner, Apollo 11 Astronauts, Los Angeles, 1969," six party guests are arranged across the image horizontally, the bright flash isolating them against a background of black. (Figure 16) The back of one woman's head of curls dominates the center of the image, but seems to have no particular significance. The interaction between two men in uniform and a woman on the left is frozen in an awkward moment with one man's eyes closed with a dreamy expression and the other two staring intently as if each is trying to understand the other. The woman in shadow laughs - we see her teeth - and the last woman on the right gazes nowhere in particular with a blank and lonely expression. Unlike the way in which the Magnum style works, these elements do not add up to a message about humanity or seem to refer to a deeper truth about the world.

⁵⁵ Garry Winogrand, *Public Relations* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1977).



State Dinner, Apollo 11 Astronauts, Los Angeles, 1969

Figure 16

Narrativity

The nature of still photography often poses narrative questions - what happened before the shutter was released, what will happen next, what is just outside the frame, what is the relationship between these people? However, there is a spectrum or range of narrativity in photography, from highly specific to highly abstract. On one end, photographs can be highly informational and descriptive, creating a narrative tightly focused on these particular people, circumstances and events. Or, farther along the spectrum, they can create more abstract narratives that transcend the specific moment depicted to impart a message about the larger world. This creation of narratives that fall on the abstract end of the spectrum is a significant quality of the Magnum style. Through the use of rhetorical structures such as paradox, irony, and metaphor - achieved especially through the strategy of juxtaposing significant elements and implying relationships through framing and angle of view - Magnum photographs strive to tell big stories about the human condition.⁵⁶ While the original purpose of the photographs may have been to illuminate a particular news event or social issue, the images included in compilation books of Magnum photographs are made to stand virtually alone with only a short, often un-descriptive, caption. In this space where the emphasis is on the photograph as an object rather than on its informational content, the images that are most able to stand alone and thus are most often chosen to represent Magnum's work, are those that imply a grand narrative about human nature or society, one that is abstracted from the specific moment being depicted. Magnum

⁵⁶ For a fascinating exploration of how rhetorical devices can be used to understand the meanings in landscape, which inspired my understanding of Magnum's use of narrativity,

photographs are distinguished from the work of many other photo-commentators by the frequency with which they fall on the most abstract, grand narrative end of the spectrum of narrativity.

A photograph by John Vink titled "Displaced South Sudanese. Kosti, Sudan. 1988," is a wide angle view of the back of two women in simple cotton dresses, both carrying children in their arms, as they walk a dusty road towards a line of pointed thatch-roofed huts on the horizon. (Figure 17) Vink's use of a wide angle lens enabled him to crouch down and catch one woman's full figure in the background while also dominating the left side of the photograph with the cropped mid-section of the other woman. But the most important element, nearly in the center of the frame, is the feet and too-skinny legs of the child wrapped around the waist of the woman closest to the lens. The emphasis makes the feet the most significant element in the photograph, and along with the walking movement of the women, creates a metaphor for a refugee life: physically moving away from their homes to the status of displaced persons. The narrative of displacement is abstracted from these women's daily reality, there is no information about their particular circumstances, but instead a simple statement about the plight of refugees in general, achieved through a strategy of selective framing and emphasis.

Using well-organized, simple and clear compositions enables the creation of easily readable narratives. Vink's photograph of the displaced women is one example of this. Another example is Burk Uzzle's photograph "Memphis: Plane bearing body of

see Anne Whiston Spirn, *The Language of Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press,

Martin Luther King takes off for Atlanta." (1968) Uzzle uses the technique of juxtaposing opposing elements and meaningful gestures to create a poignant and tense representation of a conflicted time. (Figure 18) The airplane on the runway, propeller spinning, is glimpsed through the silhouetted backs of two black men with fists raised in the black power salute. Between them can be read "merica" - part of the American Airlines name on the plane. On the far right side of the frame, closest to the photographer and facing the lens, is a well-armed, helmeted white policeman holding his shotgun upright as it leans on his hip. By including the policeman with shotgun in the frame and the gap between his back and the backs of the black saluters, the narrative is expanded or abstracted from being a farewell to Martin Luther King to a reference to the tensions between the civil rights and black power movements and the white establishment. Even the fragment of the word America on the plane participates in constructing this image as a comment on "America in Crisis," the title of the Magnum compilation book where this photograph was published in 1969.

Irony is another rhetorical trope used to convey a sense of narrative. Chris Steele-Perkins' photograph "Bethlehem" (1987) juxtaposes a soldier on patrol in the Israeli occupied West Bank with a plywood cutout of Santa Claus ringing a bell and carrying a sack of presents. (Figure 19) They seem to stride away from each other, the soldier to the right, Santa to the left. The image tells a story of the disjuncture between the reality of violence represented by the soldier and the fantasy of peace and plenty held up by the image of Santa Claus.

1998).

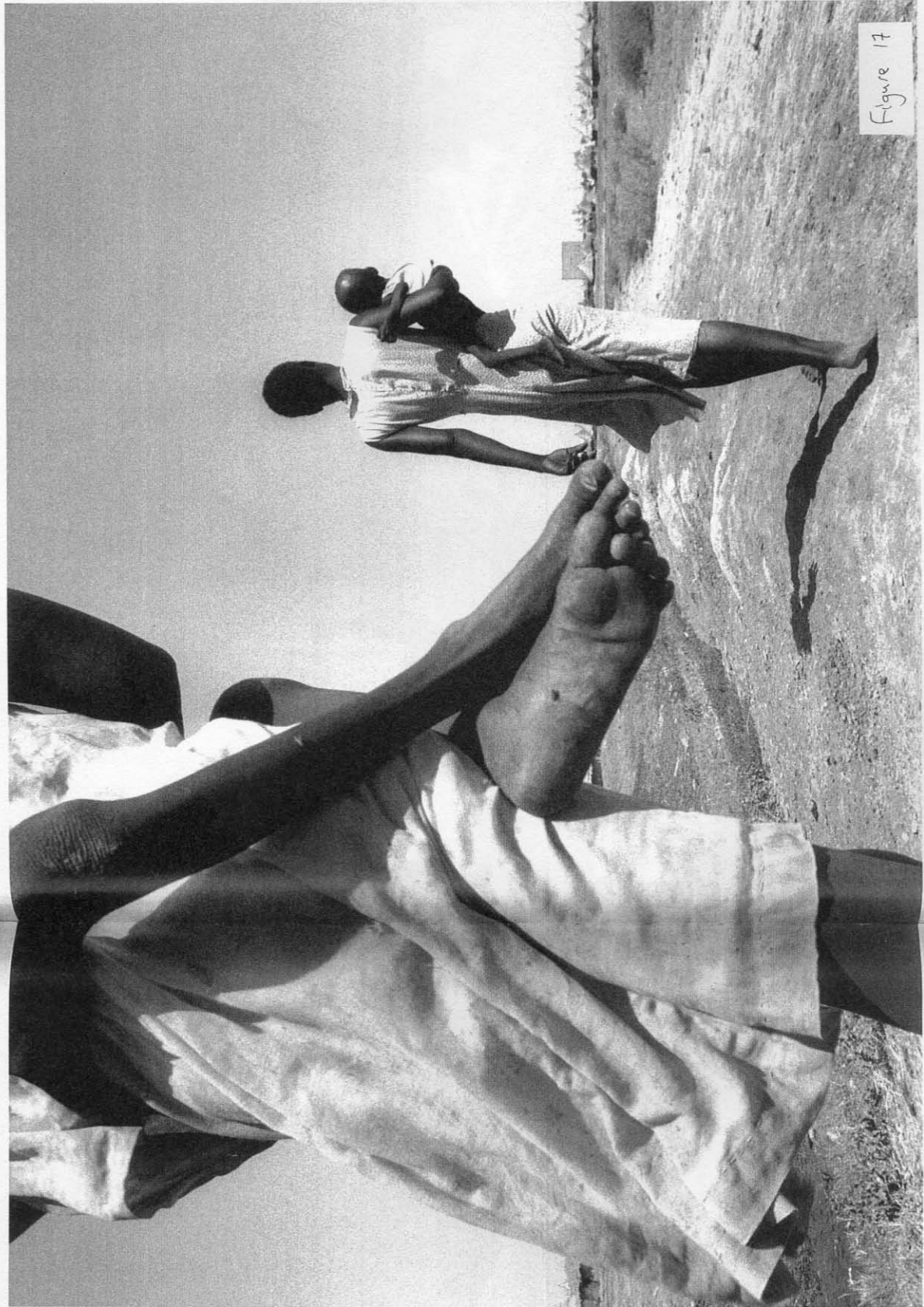
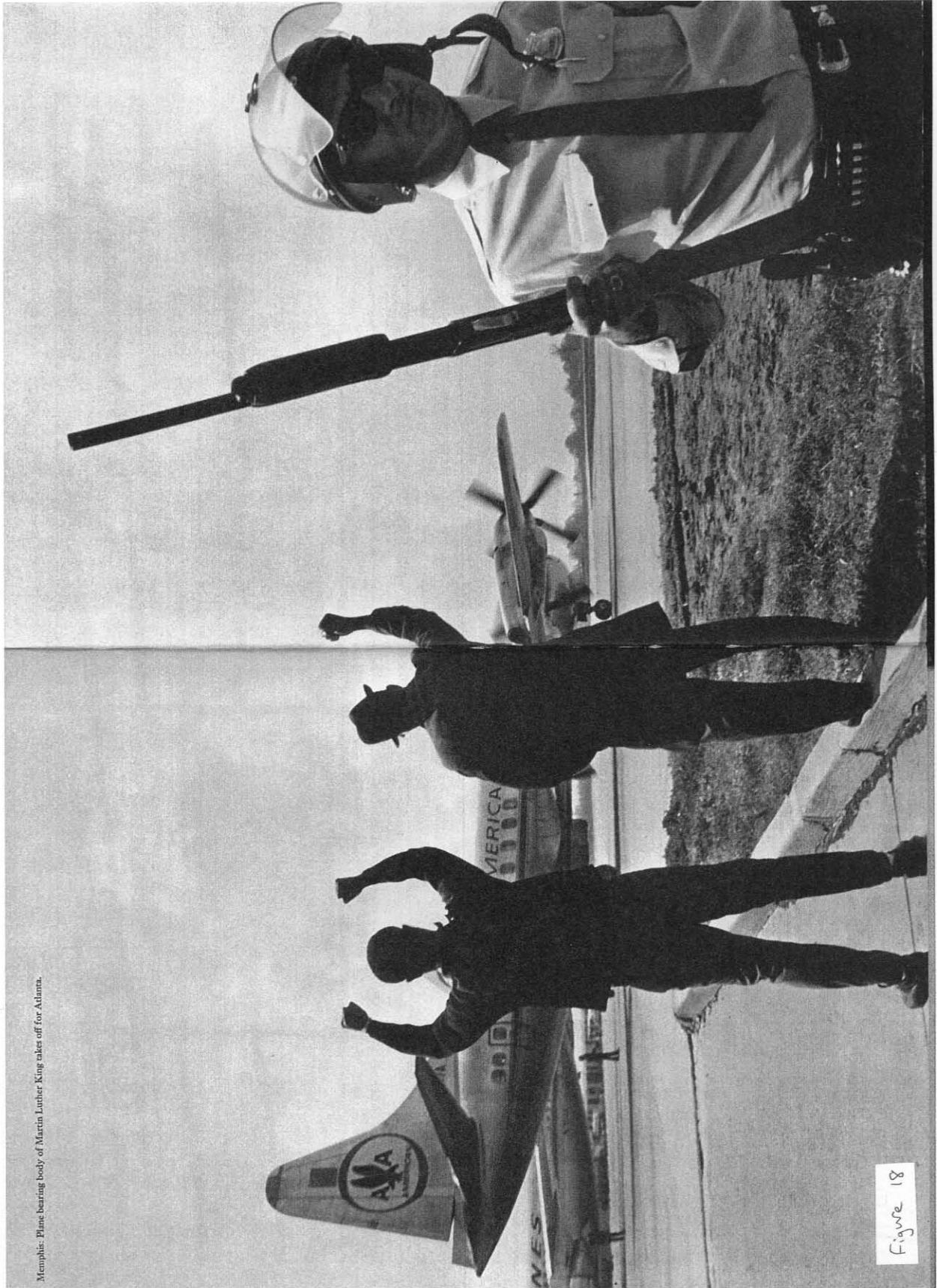


Figure 17



Memphis: Plane bearing body of Martin Luther King takes off for Atlanta.

Figure 18



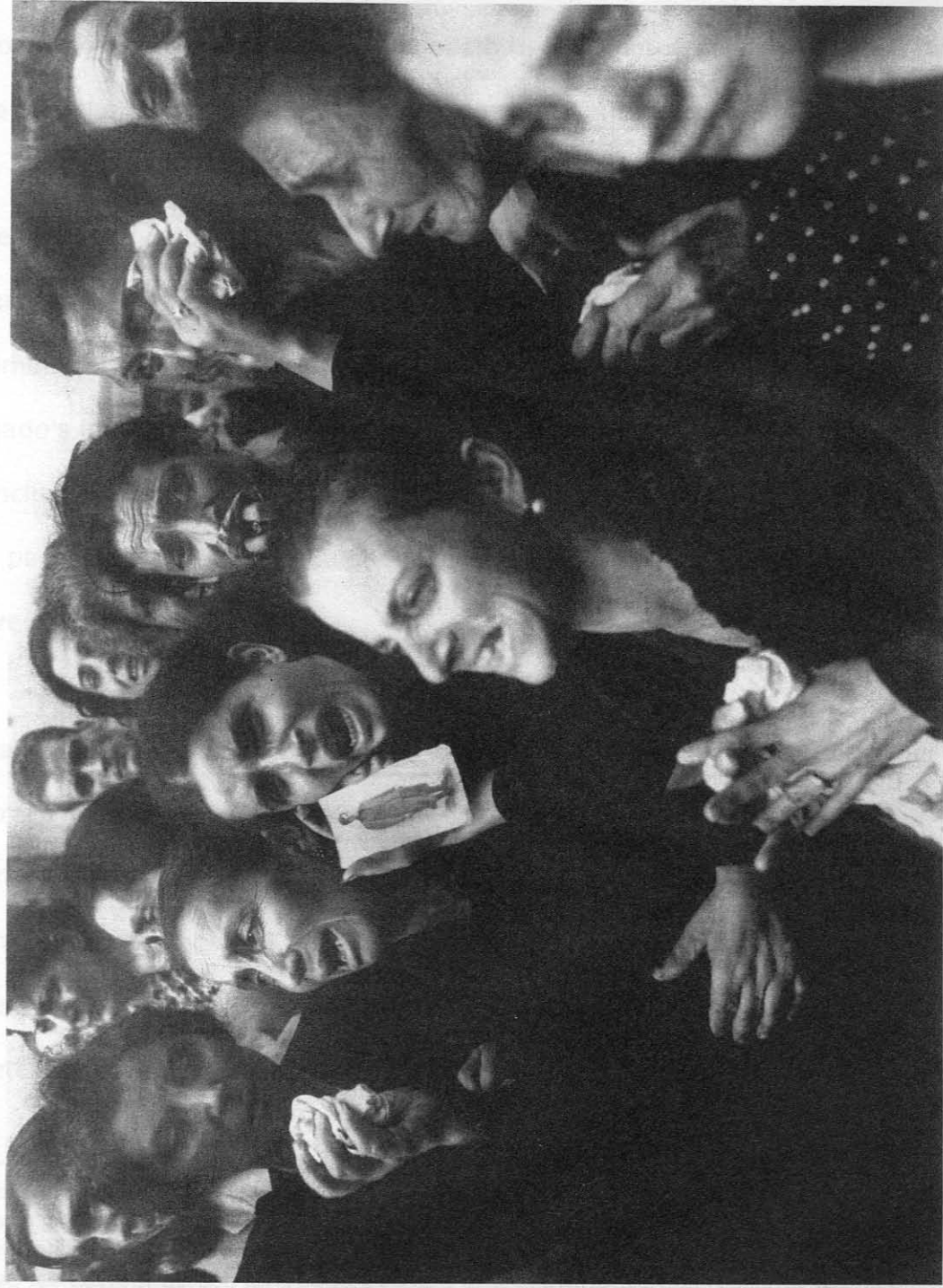
Figure 19

²² The image is from the book "The War in Vietnam" by Susan Maxwell and Susan Maxwell in Kuchel.

Another technique often employed for achieving a sense of narrative in the Magnum style is that of capturing a revealing gesture or expression. Robert Capa's photograph "Mothers of Naples lament their sons, Naples, 1943" is often reprinted as one of his best images. (Figure 20) In this photograph a cluster of women are depicted with various expressions of grief as they weep. One woman holds a photograph of her son next to her face in a gesture that photographers ever since are drawn to capture in conflicts around the world.⁵⁷ The meaning of the photograph is carried almost solely in the women's expressions, without them there is no way to understand what is happening at this moment. By focusing in on their faces to the exclusion of other descriptive elements, Capa has created an image that can represent the agony of all mothers who lose children in war. This movement to the abstract creates an image that does not require the viewer to know any of the particularities or complexities of these women's lives. The Magnum style has promoted this abstraction process to the point that Magnum photographs' documentary value might need re-evaluation.

While the medium of photography lends itself to generating a narrative about what might be happening outside the frame and outside the split second time of the exposure, there are non-Magnum styles of photojournalism that suppress the narrative in favor of aesthetics. A prominent style that favors aesthetics is found in *National Geographic* magazine; one example is the photograph by Stephanie Maze titled "A coat of mud cloaks a gold miner at the federally operated Serra Pelada

⁵⁷ The image of a woman holding the photograph of her dead child or husband has become something of a cliché since Capa's time. For examples see work by Larry Towell in Palestine, and Susan Meiselas in Kurdistan.



ROBERT CAPA

Figure 20

mine in Pará, in northern Brazil." (1987) (Figure 21) The photograph is a close-up achieved through the use of a telephoto lens, which compresses and blurs the background so that no contextual information remains; the viewer would not know this is a mine if the caption did not say so. This portrait aestheticizes the gold miner by focusing on the detailed textures of cloth, skin, and mud as well as on his shy gaze into the lens. The photograph is composed entirely of shades of brown. The only information a viewer can conclude from this photograph is that working in mines is muddy work and that the miners seem approachable.⁵⁸ This impression differs markedly from that gained from Sebastião Salgado's "Serra Pelada goldmine, State of Para, Brazil, 1986," which was discussed earlier. (Figure 13) Salgado's image implies a story about the dignity of workers at the same time that he includes an impressive amount of contextual information that roots his subject in that particular mine. While Salgado aestheticizes his subjects, his photographs also convey abstract narratives.

Certain non-Magnum photographers work with a sense of narrative, neither abstract nor absent in favor of aesthetics, but one which is on the highly informational end of the spectrum and that preferences the specific and particular.

Allan Sekula, a scholar of photography as well as a photographer, creates documentary essays, often about working class life or militarism. His project "Sketch for a Geography Lesson," (1982) appears in his book *Dismal Science*:

⁵⁸ See Lutz and Collins' work for a critique of the *National Geographic* style and a discussion of how gazes into the camera "can also set up at least the illusion of intimacy and communication...*National Geographic* photographers commonly view the frontal shot as a device for cutting across language barriers and allowing for intercultural communication." Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*.

Figure 21



Photo Works 1972 - 1996, a compilation of his photographic and written essays. In ten photographs and an essay Sekula's "Sketch for a Geography Lesson" brings together documentation of the region around a United States military base in Germany next to the border with East Germany and an interactive TV war games program broadcast in Ohio. The photographs are not metaphors for some larger truth but attempt to evoke the particular reality of one US military base in Germany and how that is related to US citizens. While the photographs have no captions and are somewhat cryptic until reading the essay at the end, the images cannot be taken out of context and assigned some more abstracted narrative. For example, the photograph of a woman in the snow next to a German border sign warning of mines and holding up a postcard of people standing at a fence only makes sense after reading that the border used to be a tourist attraction. (Figure 22) In *Photography Against the Grain*, Sekula writes that "The emphasis in these photo works has consistently been on the *ensemble*, and not on the formal or semantic success or failure of the single image. ...this seemed the only reasonable way to counter the tendency to incorporate photography into the museum, the tendency to produce work designed for judgement and acceptance by that institution."⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Allan Sekula, *Dismal Science: Photo Works 1972 - 1996* (Normal, IL: University Galleries of Illinois State University, 1999).



Figure 22

Artistic Expression

In 1952 Henri Cartier-Bresson defined what photography meant to him in his influential book, *The Decisive Moment*.

To me, photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression. ... For me, content cannot be separated from form. By form, I mean a rigorous organization of the interplay of surfaces, lines, and values. It is in this organization alone that our conceptions and emotions become concrete and communicable.⁶⁰

As a recognized photographer and artist by the time he helped found Magnum in 1947, Henri Cartier-Bresson has had an important influence on photographers for several generations. His concept of the "decisive moment" when the photographer has "instinctively fixed a geometric pattern without which the photograph would have been both formless and lifeless,"⁶¹ is so prevalent in photographic discourse as to have become a cliché, especially among students. Cartier-Bresson's legacy within the Magnum style is evident in the effort to combine the artistic and expressive elements of photographic practice with the reportorial function of photojournalism. As David Strettell, current Director of Cultural Projects in Magnum's New York office, has said of the tension between art and documentary in the agency, "this can be traced back to two most influential figures in Magnum, Henri Cartier Bresson and Robert Capa. To simplify - HCB's imperative being an aesthetic one and Capa's a documentary one. This balance has always been a concern within Magnum - the

⁶⁰ Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952).

⁶¹ Ibid.

aesthetic value outweighing the documentary one and visa versa but in my opinion it is precisely this dynamic that has kept the agency vital."⁶²

There is more than one way to make an artistic photograph, but I argue that the classic Magnum style predominantly relies on the use of formal, abstract patterns achieved through compositional arrangement of elements, as described by Cartier-Bresson's understanding of the decisive moment. The Magnum style's type of artistic expression is not simply a creation of beauty in the image through aestheticizing methods such as the highlighting of textures and colors, or the use of light. While these methods are certainly used in the Magnum style, they are almost never used divorced from other elements of the style, but are instead used to enhance narrativity, to create a sense of humanism, or as a complement to formal patterns. Particular Magnum photographers, most notably Steve McCurry, do compose photographs based solely on colors and textures. However, his primary client is *National Geographic*, which, as has been noted earlier, has a style that emphasizes beauty in appearances at the expense of narrativity or context.

One aspect of the Magnum style's artistic expression that overlaps with the element of narrativity is a sense of wit. The photographer Elliott Erwitt often combines wit and humor with formal patterns. In the photograph "San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1978," He captures a row of people clustered together on the beach (watching something in the ocean outside the frame) seemingly being watched by a cluster of wooden statues, probably carved for tourists. (Figure 23) Besides the humor of the statues

⁶² Correspondence with author by email, April 4, 2002.

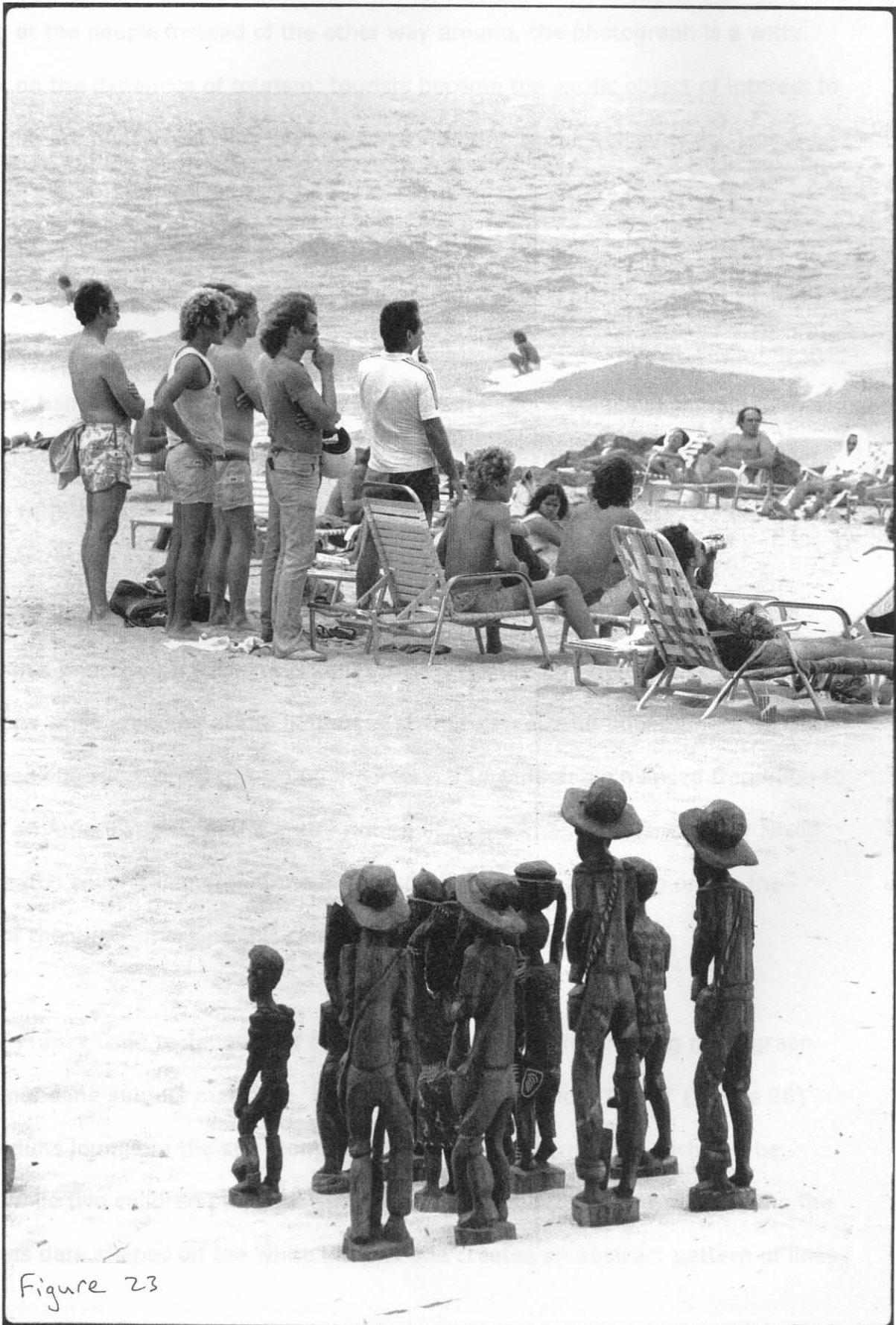


Figure 23

looking at the people instead of the other way around, the photograph is a witty remark on the dynamics of tourism: tourists become the exotic object of interest to locals who are concerned with the revenue they bring to the economy.

Henri Cartier-Bresson's photograph "Gymnastics in a refugee camp, Kurukshetra, Punjab, India, 1948," has more to do with formal qualities of composition than the life of refugees. (Figure 24) Half the photograph is devoted to a blank sky while in the lower half a group of about twenty men are in various stages of jumping, arms thrown to the sky, legs moving in all directions. Their exuberance and smiles seem at odds with the usual picture of hopeless refugees.

The use of an artistic approach to a staged news event can be seen in Raymond Depardon's photograph "Richard Nixon" (1968). (Figure 25) Depardon used a wide angle lens while standing at the bottom of stairs to an airplane door where Richard Nixon has emerged, arms thrown up in victory. The wide angle allowed Depardon to include an American flag in the entire right half of the image, towering over Nixon, and to catch several cameras - one in each bottom corner and even one in the hands of the pilot - marking this clearly as a moment of publicity.

Martine Franck used techniques of composition to create an arresting photograph out of mundane subject matter in "Le Brus, south of France, 1976." (Figure 26) Three adults lounge in the sun alongside a pool (only a corner of which can be seen), while two children play in a hammock in the far background. By treating the people as dark shapes on the white tile grid she creates an abstract pattern of lines,



HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON

Figure 24

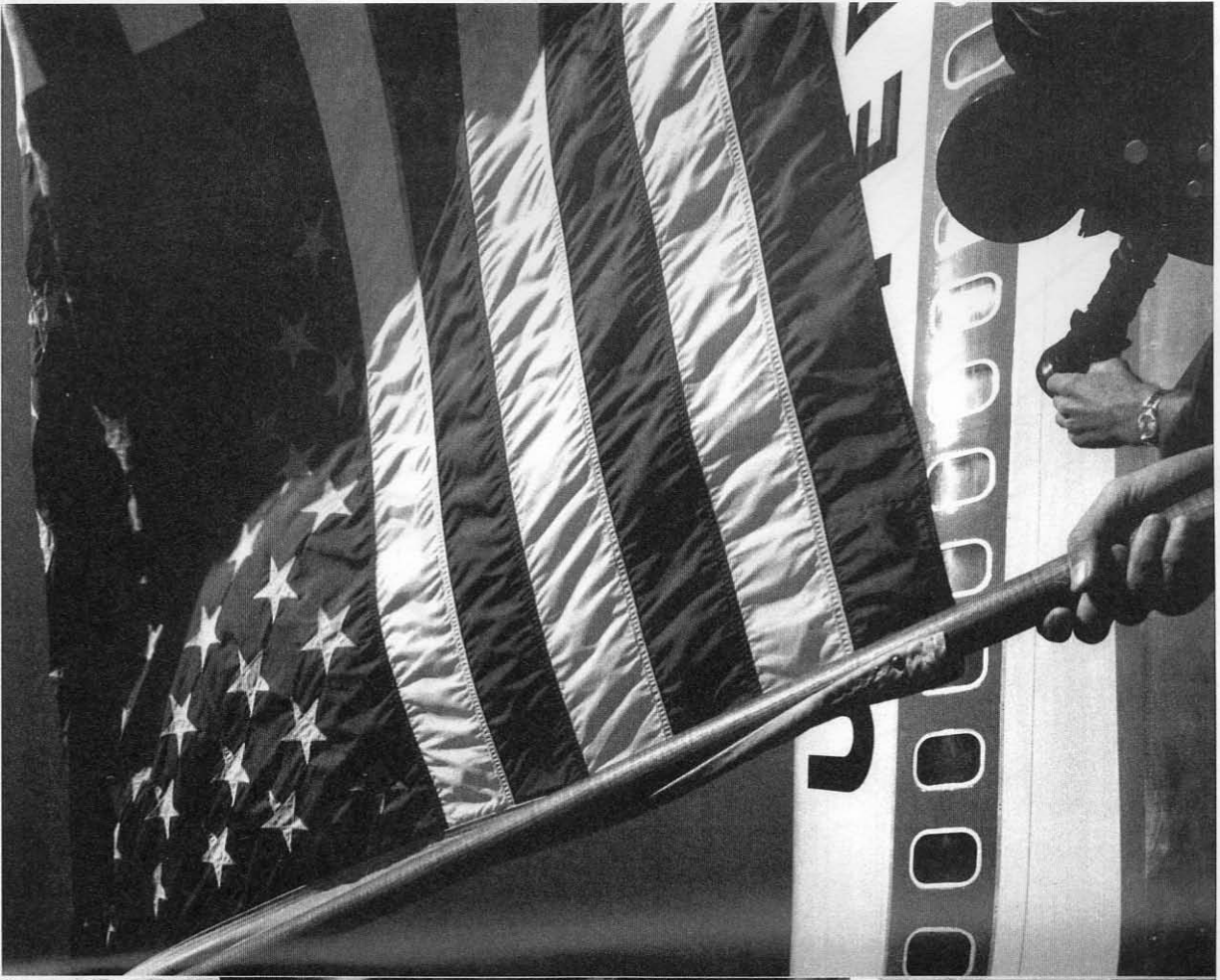


Figure 75

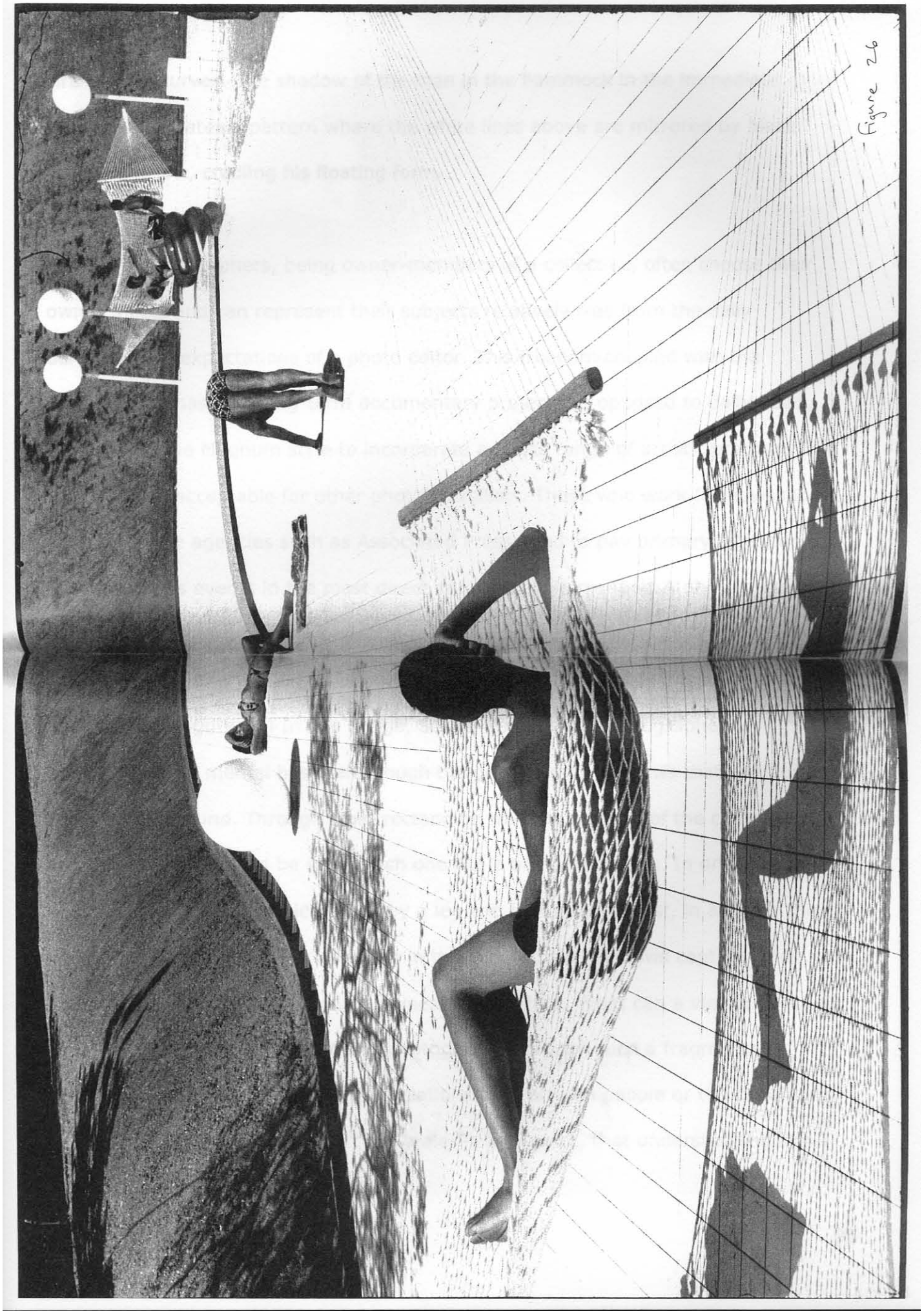


Figure 26

circles, and curves. The shadow of the man in the hammock in the immediate foreground creates a pattern where the white lines above are mirrored by black shadows below, cradling his floating form.

Magnum photographers, being owner-members of a collective, often choose their own projects and can represent their subjects relatively free from the daily demands and expectations of a photo editor. This freedom coupled with the Magnum emphasis on long-term documentary projects as opposed to daily news, has allowed the Magnum style to incorporate a whole range of artistic practices that would not be acceptable for other photojournalists. Those who work for newspapers or wire service agencies such as Associated Press need to pay primary attention to depicting news events in the most direct and accessible manner. A photograph like Chris Steele-Perkins "Edhi Foundation mental hospital, Pakistan, 1997," would not satisfy a newspaper's need for images that appear to objectively impart clear information. (Figure 27) In this image, Steele-Perkins has photographed a courtyard of the mental hospital through the grid of small windows that puncture the walls all around. Through eight rectangles, various sections of the courtyard and the people in it can be seen, each one like a tiny photograph. In one window a torso laying down is complemented by a leg and foot walking past, in another the whole body of a naked man is resting in the sun. Further windows capture other body fragments; only one window frames a man's face. What can a viewer conclude about the mental hospital from this photograph? Through such a fragmented perspective it's difficult to assess the relationships between people or the conditions of the hospital. That may be part of Steele-Perkins point, that understanding this

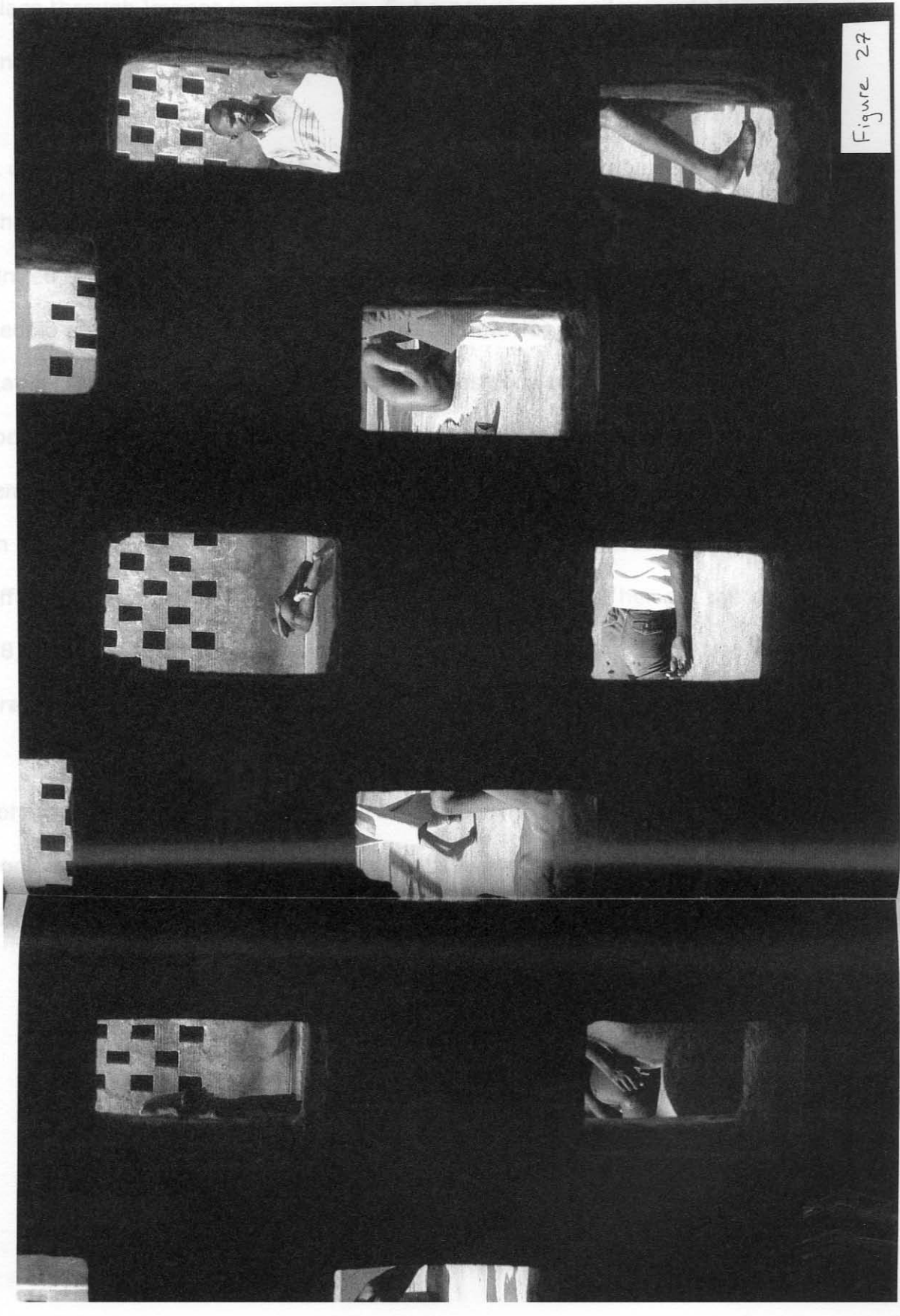


Figure 27

place through images is impossible. But a newspaper editor would have difficulty finding a use for it because there is no clear visual informational statement.

A different artistic approach to documentary material can be seen in non-Magnum photographer Robert Frank's book, *The Americans*. Frank traveled around the United States on a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1955/56 taking photographs of people at funerals, on the street, at drive-in movies, in restaurants, driving cars. Rather than rely on neat geometrical compositions to create abstract patterns, he focused on fleeting, contemplative facial expressions or included empty space to lend his photographs a sense of sad loneliness and of disjuncture between people. In his photograph "Elevator - Miami Beach" the young elevator girl looks wistfully off into the distance as her rich-looking patrons blur past her out the door. (Figure 28) It's not possible to know whether it is her sadness the photograph conveys, or Frank's.

John Szarkowski, writing about the anger that met the 1958 publication of Frank's book in the United States points out that it wasn't the subject matter that so enraged people, it was the style:

The more distressing new quality in Frank's pictures was equivocating indirection, their reluctance to state clearly and simply either their subject or their moral. ...The very design of his pictures seemed ambivalent and unresolved; he had recognized that the armature of classic geometry underlying Cartier-Bresson's pictures produced work

in service to the virtues of harmony and measure, qualities that were not central to Frank's view of life.⁶³

While the documentary aspect of Frank's work in *The Americans* is highly subjective, like much of Magnum's own work, he uses the element of artistic expression to create a whole different visual style, leading viewers to conclusions about his subjects at odds with the conclusions drawn from work in the Magnum style.

⁶³ John Szarkowski, *Photography until Now* (New York: Museum of Modern Art / Bulfinch, 1989).

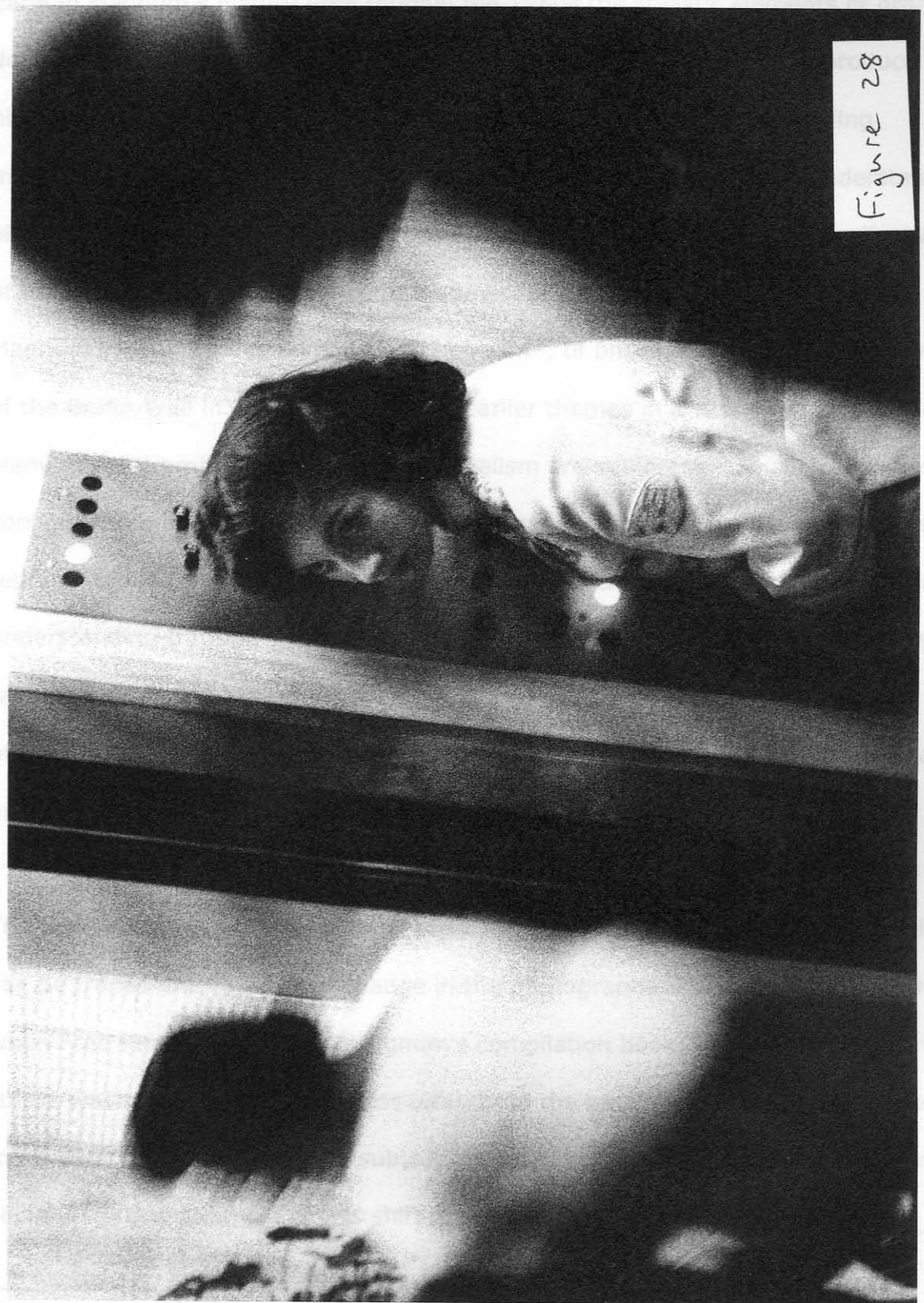


Figure 28

Change in the Magnum Style

Early in Magnum's history until roughly the 1980s the stylistic elements of drama, documentary realism, narrativity, and artistic expression combined to produce highly ordered, clearly arranged compositions that emphasized a revealing moment, expression or gesture that seemed to convey an important understanding of a given situation. Through the 1980s until September 2001 a new manifestation of the Magnum style gradually emerged, visually emphasizing fragmentation. Magnum's latest survey compilation, *Magnum*^o, of photographs taken after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, reveals their earlier themes in a new form. The basic elements of drama, narrative, art, and realism are still present, but often in a new configuration. Instead of orderly and direct compositions, a new Magnum mode of representation has evolved to emphasize disorder, chaos, exoticism and lack of understanding through undecipherable juxtapositions in a framing that appears random (but is not). Whereas the classic Magnum style branded their work as photojournalism done artfully, the balance has now shifted to an emphasis on art and expression, with little promotion of any documentary value.

The development of a new mode of representation out of Magnum's classic style can be traced first to a broad change in the photographers' focus in the late 1960s, when Fred Ritchin (writing for Magnum's compilation book, *In Our Time*) notes that "there was a significant movement away from the public and newsworthy to the more personal and intimate as subject matter, often to the fringes of one's own society."⁶⁴ One example of this shift in subject matter, Bruce Davidson's work on

⁶⁴ Ritchin, "What Is Magnum?" p. 435.

East 100th Street in New York City in 1966, shows how this new mode was diverging from the classic style. All his photographs from that several year long project were taken with a large format camera on a tripod, as opposed to most all Magnum work which is created with hand-held 35mm cameras. Davidson's photographs are luminous portraits that radiate a spirit of humanism but which do not conform to the candid, dramatic, or even narrative aspects of the classic style. (Figure 29)

Philip Jones-Griffiths project, published as the book *Vietnam, Inc.* in 1971 also marked a change towards more explicit expression of both personal beliefs and of the era's cynicism.⁶⁵ However, much of Jones-Griffiths searing indictment of American involvement in Vietnam comes from his text and layout, while the images themselves largely fit into the classic Magnum style as delineated earlier.

A sharp shift in visual style was ushered in by Gilles Peress' work on Iran in 1980, published as *Telex Iran* in 1983. Peress decided to emphasize his inability to comprehend the complexity of the changes occurring in Iran during the revolution through both words and photographs, rather than create a falsely definitive statement. In images such as "Pro-Ayatollah Shariat-madari demonstrations, Tabriz, Iran, 1980," Peress uses a wide angle lens as if to include details of context but then fills the frame with obstructions to the view such as tops of heads, corners of placards, and empty space such as sky or wall. (Figure 30) There is no attempt in this kind of composition to create a coherent narrative, a dramatic moment, or a

candid shot of revealing gestures, it's not even obvious where the center of the event is located and certainly not what that event means. The deliberate fragmentation of subjects to make a self-conscious point about photography and knowledge that is seen in Peress' images was influential among students of photography.⁶⁶ However, later uses of this technique were often not in the service of a critical perspective on the limits of photography, but became a style in itself.

The development of this new visual mode beginning in the late 1980s has created a look that preferences a poetic description of appearances over a message about the social or political world. A photograph like Harry Gruyaert's "India: Communist Party Congress, Trivandrum, Kerala, 1989," is collage-like in its refusal to separate the significant element noted in the caption from the background and foreground detail. (Figure 31) By reducing distance between objects with the use of a telephoto lens, it becomes difficult to locate them in three-dimensional space. This flattening renders the elements of people, bus, and bicycles as artificial looking as the movie posters plastering the walls of the buildings.

There are several techniques used to achieve this flattening of objects and space that is common to the new Magnum visual mode. One strategy is to maintain a deep focus and photograph from a vantage point that does not allow any one element to dominate the image, but rather allows many diverse details to claim

⁶⁵ Thirteen pages of his photographs were included in Magnum's *America in Crisis* book project in 1969.

⁶⁶ For *Telex Iran*'s influence on a new generation of young Danish photojournalists currently winning international prizes, see Edgar Allen Beem, "Danish Modern," *Photo District News*, September 2001.



Figure 29

BRUCE DAVIDSON



Figure 30



Figure 31

equal attention and thus refuse to identify where the viewer's eyes should rest. Another technique is the use of a telephoto lens to zoom in on a large scene, as in the Gruyaert photograph analyzed above, rather than the more traditional method of indicating the most important element by zooming in on it.

A photograph simply titled "Tokyo, 1996," by Gueorgui Pinkhassov exemplifies this move towards the purely visual. (Figure 32) The focus of the image is the pattern of sunlight as it streams into a corridor through window blinds. Men in business suits mill around, out of focus, while one appears to be on a cell phone in the background. The location might be a hotel or an office, its generic walls and table lamps give nothing away. If the man on the left side, who is facing the camera, was in focus then the photograph could be considered a portrait; if the man was well-known it might even have some news value. However, the pattern of light and shadow is so strong that it overwhelms the particularity of the men and the room, there is nothing a viewer can do but contemplate the colors and abstract pattern.

The emergence of a new Magnum visual mode in the late 1970s and early 1980s marked by fragmentation, chaos, exoticism and irreverence, is fundamentally a switch from a modernist (the classic style) to a postmodernist understanding of the world.⁶⁷ The classic Magnum style delineated in this thesis invokes a belief in the importance of history and the individual, a belief that truth can be uncovered, that certain master narratives can explain events, that heroism is possible. The postmodern mode in Magnum overturns many of these assumptions, suggesting

that there are many truths rather than one, that the photographer cannot presume to determine the meaning of the photograph, that individuals are overshadowed by a world they can't control or understand. While some photographers in Magnum seem to be embracing a postmodern perspective, others continue to work in the classic style. However, the balance seems to be tipping towards the visual description without clear social message that is seen in the postmodern manifestation of the style.⁶⁸

Some critics have noticed this change in emphasis from modernist to postmodernist perspective. Julian Stallabrass, in a critique of Sebastião Salgado, wrote that

The Hayward Gallery exhibition [the 1990 London exhibit "In Our Time"] tracing the history of Magnum clearly showed how the agency had declined from the heights of the pre-war and wartime periods, when its members had produced images of extraordinary political and aesthetic concentration, into the frivolities and cool eccentricities of the 1960s and beyond.⁶⁹

Stallabrass locates Salgado's work firmly in the classic Magnum camp with his work's "strong formal qualities, its manifest compassion, its concentration on the graphic qualities of black-and-white pushed to the limits, it was as if the intervening

⁶⁷ What I am describing as "postmodernist" is the effect of the visual style, I am not making any claims about individual photographers personal points of view.

⁶⁸ For a description of a parallel disruption of perspective, from modernist frameworks to postmodernist ones, in the field of anthropology, see George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

⁶⁹ Stallabrass, "Sebastião Salgado and Fine Art Photojournalism." p. 134.

years [since Henri Cartier-Bresson and Robert Capa's era] had vanished without trace."⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Ibid.

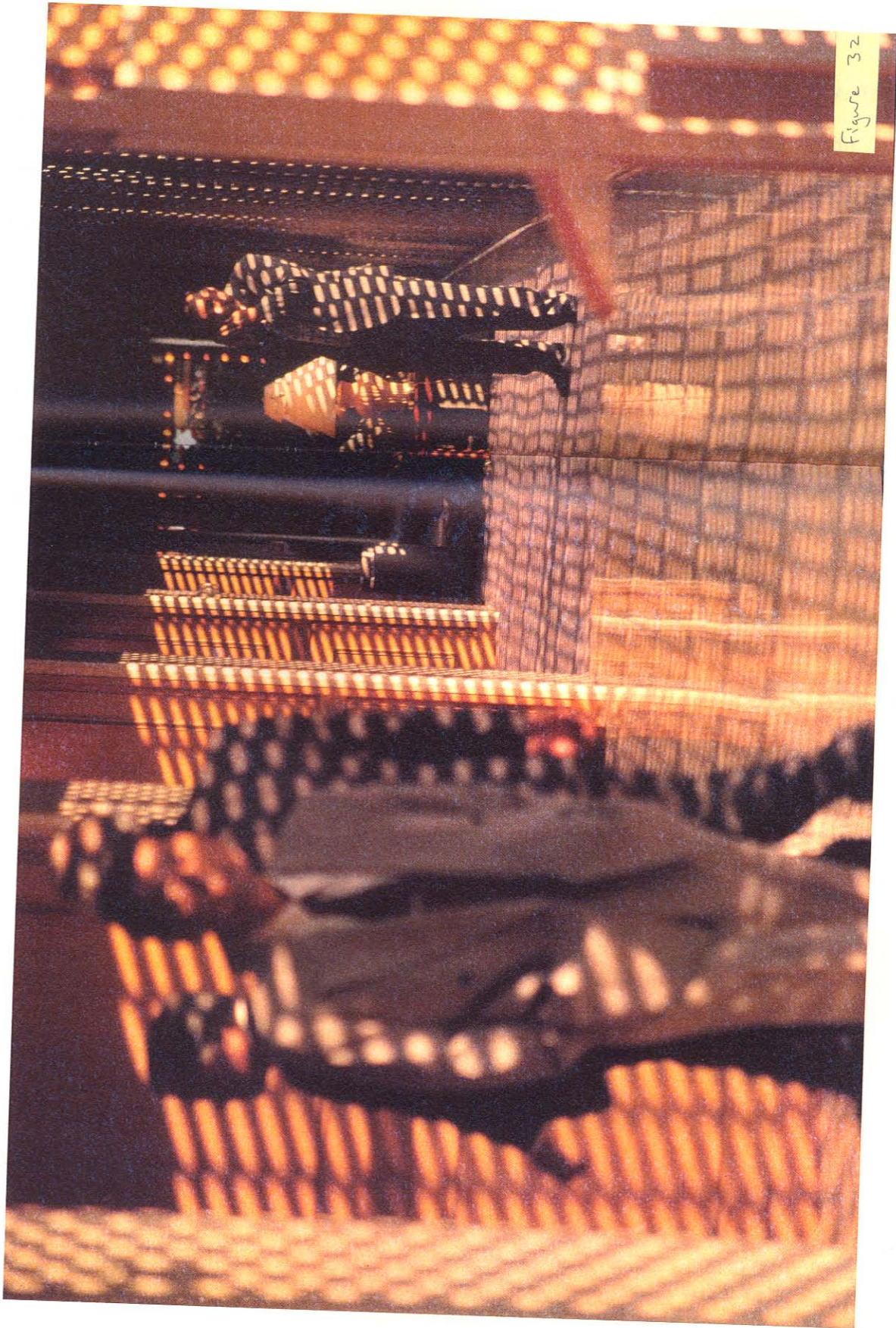


Figure 32

The Magnum Style after 9/11

On September 10, 2001 Magnum held their annual meeting in New York City. The next day many members were still in town and photographed the World Trade Center Towers as they fell and later documented the aftermath. The book *New York September 11, By Magnum Photographers*, published a few months later, shows what could be a renewed interest in promoting the classic Magnum style. The fragmentation, cynicism, and emphasis on the purely visual in the work of the 1980s and 1990s is nowhere to be seen. Instead there is a sincerity and directness to the images and a strong sense of empathy with those caught up in the events - despite the chaos, there is no confusion here.

Magnum member photographer Thomas Hoepker, Magnum's vice-president and editor of the September 11 compilation of images, writes in the book that:

I strongly believe in documentary photography, in taking pictures of real life. When I looked at the pictures from our photographers, there were some that were wonderful or clever compositions, but they emphasized the artistry in photography rather than telling the story. We didn't put those pictures in this book. I don't think they belong in this book because they do not serve its purpose, which is to bear witness. In a moment like this you must be very humble.⁷¹

In the face of a tragedy that hit Magnum and Magnum's audience close to home, and through a venue (book memorials to 9/11) that would be certain to reach a massive American audience, Magnum chose to present itself through the classic

⁷¹ Magnum Photos, *New York September 11, by Magnum Photographers* (New York: powerHouse Books, 2001). p. 67.

style.⁷² Hoepker's comments emphasize the different functions of the two dominant modes in Magnum, the classic modernist attempt to sincerely "bear witness" and the "clever compositions" of the newer postmodernist aesthetic of irony and disjuncture. As has been described in this chapter, the classic style has been constructed to convey an appearance of reality and thus it was the proper choice for a book project publicized as strictly documentary.

One of Magnum photographer Bruce Gilden's subjects is New Yorkers as seen on the street. His work in the *Magnum*^o compilation book, published in 2000, includes five of these portraits. (Figure 33) All use a strong flash and close cropping or blurring of backgrounds to highlight the subjects who are caught with a strange or ugly expression. The result is sensational rather than realistic and either critical of New Yorkers or simply reveling in their weird appearances. However, a Gilden portrait of New Yorkers after the events of September 11 suggests a change in attitude, if only temporarily, that is in keeping with a turn towards the classic Magnum style. In his photograph, titled "Sunday, September 23, there was a memorial prayer service inside Yankee Stadium. The feeling outside the stadium was clear: We're going to beat this.", a young girl holds up a handmade sign that says "Support our Troops!!" while a hand from outside the frame holds out a panoramic poster of New York, with the World Trade Center towers prominent. (Figure 34) Several other young children stand around with flags and signs and two women walk by in the background. In this sort of treatment - using a wide angle

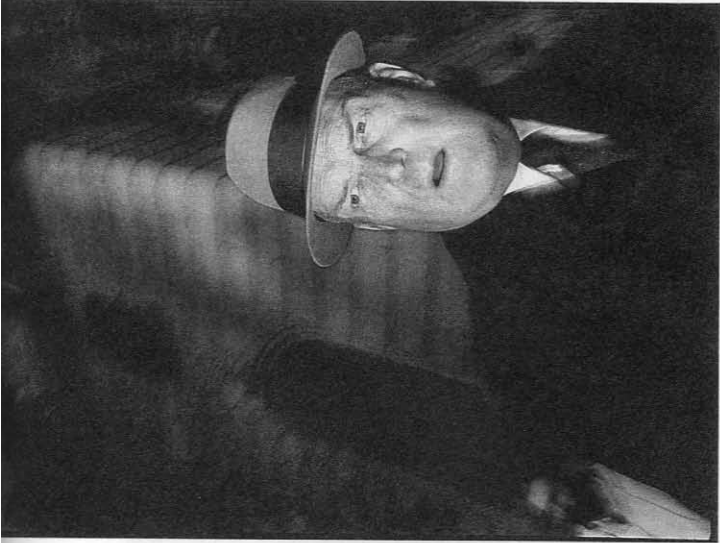
⁷² *New York September 11, by Magnum Photographers* was out on store shelves 66 days after September 11 and sold well, reaching the New York Times bestseller list. See Jack Rosenberger, "Teaming to Pay Tribute," *Graphic Arts Monthly*, January 2002.

lens to include some context, relying on natural light rather than flash, catching somber expressions - Gilden dignifies his subjects with a kind of normalcy in a way that he did not do in his earlier work. Even in two other post-September 11 photographs where Gilden does use flash and either obscure or blurred backgrounds, as in his earlier work, the slightly odd expressions of the Wall Street employees going back to work are justified and humanized by the context provided by the book and the caption, "It seemed to make some people go deep inside themselves; others were guarded, cautious." (Figure 35)

The choice to publish classic style images is a sudden disruption of the rising dominance of the postmodernist mode in Magnum publications. It is still too early to determine whether the new found desire for definitive explanations of world events and the much-heralded predictions for an end to irony will have any lasting effect on Magnum's approach to representing the world. However, there is a possibility that the events of September 11 have created a new relevance for the humanist, documentary realism of Magnum's classic visual style.



1992



1974

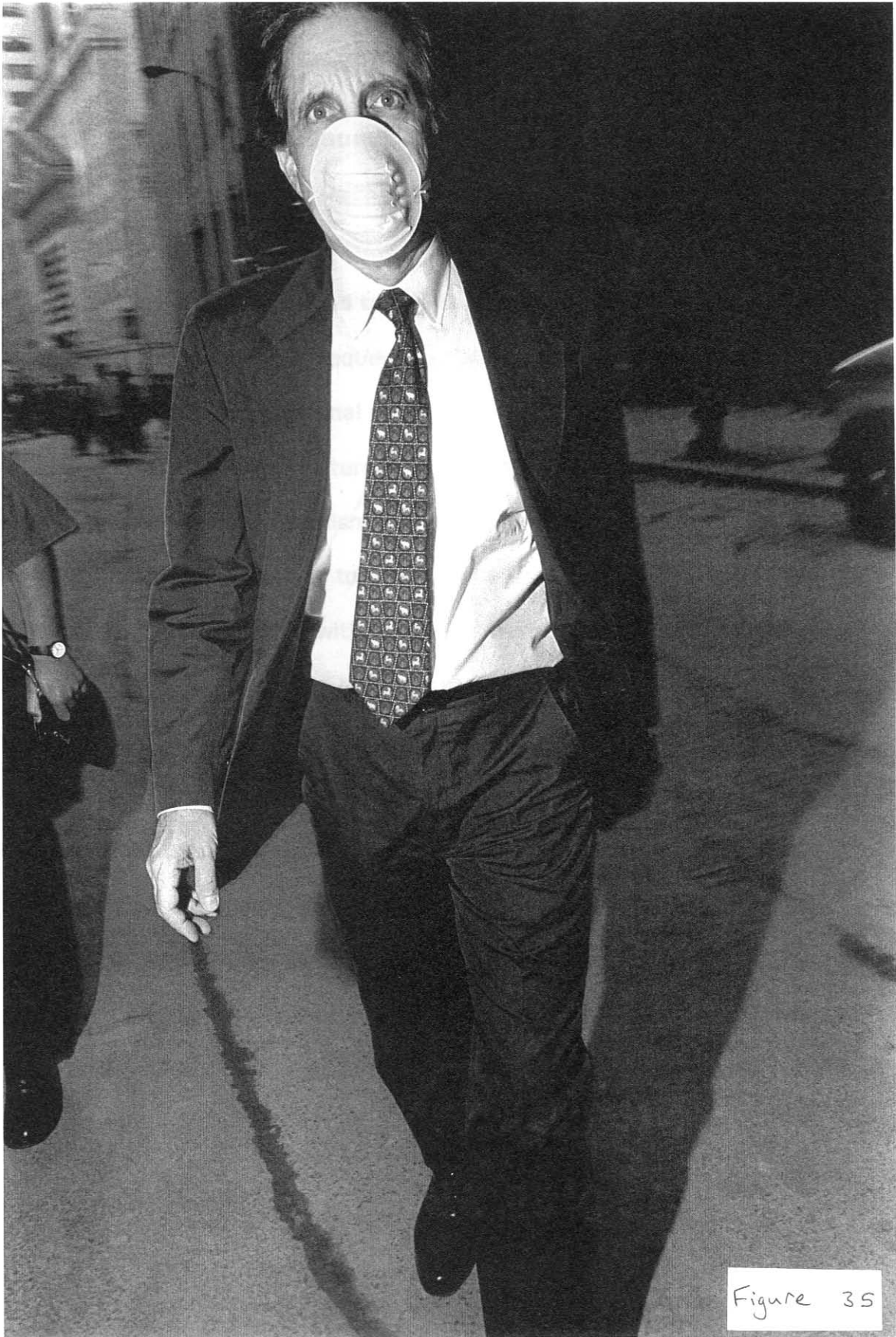
Figure 33



1992



Figure 34



ars everywhere. It seemed to make some people go deep inside themselves; others were guarded, cautious.

Chapter Three

Magnum's Markets and Branding

A combination of factors has led to the current situation where Magnum photographs are seen more frequently in books, exhibits and mass culture items like postcards, than in traditional photojournalism venues such as magazines and newspapers. As the classic picture magazines declined in circulation and popularity in the late 1960s, postmodernism was on the rise in the arts, as was an overtly personal, subjective approach to photojournalism. This era of changing markets and altered paradigms coincided with the slow emergence of a new mode of postmodernist photography in Magnum at odds with their classic black-and-white modernism.

Rather than attempt to set up a cause and effect model of how the changing markets for photography affected Magnum's style, this chapter will explore how Magnum has strategically used the marketplace over time to both promote their classic visual style (even as a new visual mode emerged alongside it) and to continually reassert their distinctive brand of principled, serious, and cutting-edge photo-commentary.

The Magnum Discourse on "Keeping Our Principles"

One strategy for maintaining difference is found in Magnum's discourse about their relationship to markets. In discussing James Nachtwey's unhappiness with Magnum and threats to quit in 1999, Magnum vice president Thomas Hoepker "suggests the problems wouldn't exist if only Magnum had more money and resources. That would require the agency to admit photographers who can earn more money, such as celebrity and advertising shooters. `But we have an image and a tradition to maintain,' Hoepker says. `It's a conflict between keeping our principles and being adaptive to the market.'"⁷³ Hoepker's message is that Magnum has difficulty making money because of their principled dedication to a type of photography that is not easily marketable. Maintaining this distinction between photography that is marketable (i.e. commercial) and their photography which is not, enables Magnum to situate themselves and their work on moral and aesthetic high ground, above other agencies and other styles.

The Magnum discourse on principles has been used internally in an attempt to keep the Magnum cooperative on a certain consistent path, adhering to the original founders' vision of a humanist documentation of the world's realities. These warnings have been issued in a language that suggests a fear of commercialization, but they also appear to be an attempt to discourage members from changing the visual style for marketing purposes. For example, George Rodger wrote to Cornell Capa in 1959 that "surely the spirit of the old Magnum should not die, and our precepts, founded so long ago...should not be lost sight of...I feel we are losing sight

⁷³ Hamilton, "Magnum Opus."

of them now. I feel that money is all that matters now. ... Can't we curb this...almost fanatical striving after kudos and power - and just become, once again, a less flamboyant service organisation concerned mainly with the sales and promotion of pictures that members like, and are most fitted to take?"⁷⁴ Echoing his sentiments, Henri Cartier-Bresson distributed a note to members at the annual general meeting later that year to say that "We have to be very careful in the development of our operation and not accept jobs ... just for the sake of money, because this will kill our sensitivity and integrity."⁷⁵

Henri Cartier-Bresson wrote to members again in 1962:

I wish to remind everyone that Magnum was created to allow us, and in fact to oblige us, to bring testimony on our world and contemporaries according to our own abilities and interpretations. ...I feel a hard touch of sclerosis descending upon us. ...one must stay photographically in contact with the realities taking place in front of our lenses and not hesitate to sacrifice material comfort and security. This return to our sources would keep our heads and lenses above the artificial life which so often surrounds us. I am shocked to see to what extent so many of us are conditioned - almost exclusively by the desires of the clients.⁷⁶

What can be concluded about this sort of rhetoric about markets and its function within the institution of Magnum? In this cooperative organization managed by all its photographer members (currently numbering forty-six), the insistent re-articulation of their desired self-image as non-commercial and serious may work as

⁷⁴ Miller, *Magnum: Fifty Years at the Front Line of History*. p. 170.

⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 175.

a kind of internal branding. At the 2002 Corporate Image Conference, the message to companies was that "The new approach to branding is a holistic one - the brand shows up not just in contact with a customer, but in internal communications, employee relations, even in the company's mission statement."⁷⁷ Magnum needs to maintain a common internal understanding of its goals and principles in order to keep the expression of the Magnum brand consistent and unique in the eyes of their markets - magazines, corporations, and consumers.

In addition to the internal discourse, there is also the discourse produced by Magnum for external use, which emphasizes their high principles and non-commercial goals. In the introduction to Magnum's 40th anniversary book, *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers*, the historian William Manchester wrote that "readers living in a society harried by the hawkers of dubious products and unimaginative pictures may be unaware of Magnum and its high seriousness. ... *In Our Time* is a tribute to their genius, their versatility, and their devotion to their profession."⁷⁸

In the introduction to their 50th anniversary book, *Magnum*^o, Michael Ignatieff even more explicitly situated Magnum photographers above other photojournalists. He argued that agency photographers for Associated Press, Reuters, and Agence France Presse had, by the 1960s, largely taken over the depiction of war and

⁷⁶ Ritchin, "What Is Magnum?." p. 434.

⁷⁷ "2002 Corporate Image Conference Offers Valuable Branding Lessons," *PR News*, January 28, 2002.

⁷⁸ William Manchester, "Images: A Wide Angle," in Magnum Photos et al., *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers*. p. 18 - 19.

disaster from other agencies, including Magnum: "these agency photographers were often courageous and competent, but the magnum ideal had been higher: to raise documentation to the level of art. the market for magnum's kind of intensely personal and intensely seen war photography was now shrinking. magnum photography might have resigned itself to a mannerist future: either as formalist art or as ironic advertising. yet this did not happen."⁷⁹

Positioning Magnum as producers of serious high culture is a strategy that is played out primarily on the level of their discourse, both internal and external, but also through their choices of clients and other publishing outlets for their work, as will be seen in the following sections.

Magazine and Corporate Clients

Magnum's early financial well-being as an agency was linked to the popularity of *Life* magazine, their most steady client until the 1960s.⁸⁰ Magazine photo editors, like Wilson Hicks at *Life*, may have played a role in shaping the classic Magnum style through his need for dramatic photographs and photo-essays suitable for big magazine reproductions.⁸¹ In the period from their founding through the 1960s,

⁷⁹ No capital letters are used in the original text. Michael Ignatieff, "Introduction," in *Magnum*^o, ed. Magnum Photos inc (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 2000). p. 57.

⁸⁰ While *Life* magazine didn't cease weekly publication until 1972, it had already begun to turn away from photojournalism towards lifestyle and celebrity coverage in the 1960s. See Miller, *Magnum: Fifty Years at the Front Line of History*. p. 230. For a description of the relationship between *Life* and the founding members of Magnum, see Janssens and Kalff, "Time Incorporated Stink Club: The Influence of *Life* on the Founding of Magnum Photos."

⁸¹ While it is beyond the scope of this thesis, the influence of *Life* magazine's photographic needs on Magnum's visual style and vice-versa, the influence of Magnum photographers' insistence on controlling the meanings conveyed by their work on the way *Life* used photographs, would be a profitable direction for further research. It is often argued (for example in Janssens and Kalff) that Magnum was founded in direct opposition to *Life*'s

Magnum's clients were overwhelmingly the glossy magazines: American publications such as *Life*, *Look*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *National Geographic* and *Vogue*, England's *Picture Post*, France's *Paris Match*, *Vu*, and *Regards*, and Germany's *Stern*. Magnum could survive on magazine work since the institution had always insisted that the photographer retain copyright over his images, enabling a photographer to shoot one story and sell it to several magazines. Usually the most important condition of sale imposed by the magazines was that Magnum not sell the work to their competitors in the same country. For example, Brian Brake's 1961 color photo essay on the Monsoon season in India was widely published, including in both *Life* and *Paris Match*, pulling in \$75,000.⁸²

By the end of the 1960s, with the decline of the first mass circulation picture magazines, *Life*, *Look*, and *Picture Post*, Magnum turned towards new magazine clients, corporate work, book projects, and exhibits. But interestingly they did *not* turn towards a role as regular supplier of photographs to newspapers, a role filled by many other press agencies, most notably Associated Press, Reuters, and Agence France Presse. As early as 1955, Magnum's international executive editor John G. Morris had suggested that Magnum set up a syndication operation similar to other press agencies to market their photographs to newspapers around the world. His suggestion was motivated by a need to overcome constant financial difficulties.

policies and the style of the photo editor Wilson Hicks, but these accounts are based on photographers' and editors' personal statements that might hide a more complex reality.

⁸² Ritchin, "What Is Magnum?." p. 433.

However, George Rodger and David Seymour, two of the founding members, strongly objected. Rodger wrote to Morris: "Progress and development is fine, of course. But it is the direction it is taking that worries me. After all, this syndication business is a form of commercialisation that is foreign to Magnum."⁸³ This choice to avoid a certain market niche is significant and has distinguished Magnum as belonging to a certain type of agency that pursues in-depth photo-commentary rather than daily news.⁸⁴ Rodger's rhetoric of a fear of commercialization is part of Magnum's discourse about themselves as high-minded and non-commercial photographers, as discussed in the section above. Avoiding the image of catering to the needs of daily newspapers for merely "competent" photographs (as Ignatieff called press agency photos) works to Magnum's advantage, branding the group as working on a level of sophistication above the average press photographer.

The rise of television as a mass medium for information and entertainment affected the fate of photo-commentary by destroying the financial base of the picture-magazines. "By the 1960s, advertisers of cars, soap, cereal, tobacco, and other products could easily reach 100 million American households with a commercial on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. *Life*, even with its record-breaking 8.5 million readers, couldn't compete with the audience numbers television offered."⁸⁵ As advertisers defected to television, general magazines like *Life* (which folded in 1972) and *Look*

⁸³ Miller, *Magnum: Fifty Years at the Front Line of History*. p. 126.

⁸⁴ Newspapers (most likely in their magazine sections) may occasionally run Magnum photographs or assign a story to a Magnum photographer, but Magnum does not cater directly to their daily, front page needs. For example, in 1962, the London *Sunday Times* newspaper began publishing their color *Sunday Times Magazine*, which eventually competed with other Sunday magazine newspaper supplements for Magnum photographs. (Ibid. p. 198 - 199)

(published until 1971) suffered the most. Magazines responded by creating niche markets and turning to special interest audiences.⁸⁶

Magnum also turned to work on corporate annual reports, a much more lucrative endeavor than photo-commentary.⁸⁷ Corporate work or advertising (of which Magnum has actually done very little) appears to be at odds with their discourse of principles and the desire to remain non-commercial. Yet, it was justified both by financial need and by internal reassurances that the Magnum style would not need to change for these new clients. Pat Hagan at the New York office wrote to the members in 1952 that "If this market of advertising and industry is to be opened up, it can only be done by exceptional material, not by Coca-Cola type pictures. Advertising agencies interested in us expect to see pictures of the kind we publish in *Life*, *Look*, *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, etc."⁸⁸ The extent to which Magnum's editorial style is related to their corporate style would be interesting to investigate, however this is beyond the scope of the thesis since their corporate work is not readily accessible.

From Magazines to Books: The Discourse of Principles Revisited

In 1987 Andy Grundberg, a photography critic, asked: "why is it that, in the 1980s, photojournalism is increasingly seen in contexts other than magazines and

⁸⁵ Charles P. Daly, Patrick Henry, and Ellen Ryder, *The Magazine Publishing Industry* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997). p. 17.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ In 1974 Magnum photographers photographed for fifty-one annual reports. Miller, *Magnum: Fifty Years at the Front Line of History*. p. 241.

⁸⁸ Ritchin, "What Is Magnum?." p. 433.

newspapers?"⁸⁹ In 1997 Julian Stallabrass asked a similar question in a review of Sebastião Salgado's pictures of Brazilian gold mines: "why are they better known in the world of fine art than in the mass media?"⁹⁰ These writers go on to suggest that the answer lies both in the effects of television's mass penetration into society and in photojournalists' desires to creatively push beyond the limits imposed by the media.

Grundberg argues that television cameramen are able to broadcast their footage so immediately that the "image potentials of a subject [are exhausted] long before photographers get their film back to their offices."⁹¹ He suggests that the photojournalist's function has been usurped and the highly educated photographers in that field want to create more sophisticated, complex representations that question their own role as documentarians. Stallabrass argues that the decline of "straight" documentary photography is more than a result of technological change (the coming of television), but is instead due to the concentration of Western media ownership into a few corporate hands, thus giving advertisers more power over the media than ever before. As a result, Stallabrass writes, magazines are "filling the pages of even once serious publications with 'features' on food, fashion, cars and the lives of TV personalities. Obviously, the prospects in this mass media for a photojournalism which disturbs the contemporary myths of the market are not good - nor are they for anything which might disrupt the 'buying mood.'"⁹² Stallabrass

⁸⁹ Grundberg, *Crisis of the Real: Writings on Photography since 1974*. p. 189.

⁹⁰ Stallabrass, "Sebastião Salgado and Fine Art Photojournalism." p. 133

⁹¹ Grundberg, *Crisis of the Real: Writings on Photography since 1974*. p. 189.

⁹² Stallabrass, "Sebastião Salgado and Fine Art Photojournalism." p. 133.

suggests that this has pushed photojournalism to the mediums of books and art exhibit venues to avoid the restrictions in the mass media on content and approach.

John Szarkowski, an historian and former curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, locates the initial decline of magazine work for photographers in the decade of the 1960s. He argues that while the magazines at that time were paying photographers more than ever and still maintained high circulation, "the photographer's faith in [the magazines] usefulness to his own ambitions was failing. The magazines had seemed to promise the opportunity to reshape the world a little, but after a short generation that promise had faded."⁹³ Like Grundberg and Stallabrass, Szarkowski sees not only a decline in the market for photo-commentary but also a disillusionment in photographers hopes for genuine communication of important social issues through that market. The result, these three authors suggest, is a turn towards other modes of expression such as book projects and exhibits (where the photographer has control over content and layout), as well as the development of new styles. Szarkowski cites Robert Frank as one of the most influential of a number of photographers who "had become bored or outraged by their own work as it appeared in the magazines [and] revenged themselves by adapting advanced photojournalistic style to the needs of their own anger."⁹⁴

Missing in the discussions, like those mentioned above, of photographers turning away from the magazine market is any clear articulation of which photographers

⁹³ Szarkowski, *Photography until Now*.

are moving in new directions. Clearly there are still many magazine photographers who serve this large market, from the 1960s through the foreseeable future. The photographers who chose to leave the magazine market are differentiated from those who stayed and are variously described as "advanced photographers" or "photographers of ambition and high talent" (Szarkowski), and "today's most stimulating photojournalists" (Grundberg).⁹⁵ Certainly there have also been numerous articles in the popular and photographic press criticizing photo-commentators for moving into non-mass media venues.⁹⁶ However, the more usual discourse both inside and outside of Magnum asserts that the eventual turn away from magazines at a time when they were seen to be commercializing is a principled choice that reflects a photographer's high morals and creative spirit. Fred Ritchin participates in this discourse when he writes that:

As many of Magnum's photographers have chosen to emphasize their own personal vision, working at greater length and complexity, they have had to not only look for forms of presentation other than the magazine, but to develop and refine skills that go beyond the traditional parameters of the photojournalist as producer of images. ... Many have become, to a considerably larger extent, the authors of their own work, able themselves to direct the meanings of their photographs, to preserve ambiguities when wanted, to place the images in contexts which amplify, rather than redirect or constrict, their meanings. In this sense they continue to extend the Magnum

⁹⁴ Ibid. Frank's book, *The Americans*, appeared in 1958.

⁹⁵ Ibid. and Grundberg, *Crisis of the Real: Writings on Photography since 1974*. p. 186.

⁹⁶ For examples of criticism of Magnum's work on war and suffering that, despite the subject-matter, is often displayed outside the mass media, see Ingrid Sischy, "Good Intentions," *The New Yorker*, September 9, 1991. Richard B. Woodward, "To Hell and Back," *The Village Voice*, June 13, 2000. Susie Linfield, "Beyond the Sorrow and the Pity," *Dissent* (2001). Susie Linfield, "Capture the Moment: On the Uses and Misuses of Photojournalism," *Boston Review*, April/May 2001.

tradition of independence. ...almost everyone seems to be working on a personal project, usually a book or exhibition.⁹⁷

The effect of this discourse is to yet again place Magnum at the top of their field and differentiate the cooperative from other photo-commentators. The fact that since the end of the 1960s Magnum doesn't publish primarily in mass-circulation magazines reaffirms their status as independent, moral, and talented. Their renown was previously based on their ability to work with the mass-circulation magazines while maintaining their independent visual style and photographer's rights. But as markets changed and magazines had less money to spend on photography, leaving the magazines behind as major clients began to look like the best choice for Magnum both financially and as a strategy to maintain difference and remain on the cutting-edge of photo-commentary.

The Role of Color

Before the 1960s color photography was associated with advertisements, while black and white was the norm for serious work such as photo-commentary.⁹⁸ Max Kozloff, writing in *Art Forum* in 1975 suggests that "Much of this began to change in the '60s, the era of Pop art, standard color movies, and color television."⁹⁹ Szarkowski notes that "By 1970 younger photographers were beginning to see color not as a decorative gloss on the facts - the beauty part - but as content."¹⁰⁰ Some Magnum photographers, like Susan Meiseles, were part of that younger generation

⁹⁷ Ritchin, "What Is Magnum?." p. 441.

⁹⁸ Black and white, being an abstraction of the way the world is normally perceived, is an important tool for photographers who wish to convey an abstract message about the "human condition."

that embraced color in photo-commentary work. Her book *Nicaragua*, published in 1981, received both condemnation and praise for her choice to photograph a civil war with color film.¹⁰¹

By 1986 the exhibit "On the Line: The New Color Photojournalism" showcased twelve photo-commentators working in color, six of whom were Magnum members. One of these six was Harry Gruyaert, whom a critic writing about the "On the Line" exhibit describes as someone "who consistently sacrifices the newsworthy aspect of a given scene in the interests of a certain tone or mood. ... Gruyaert's subject matter...is to a large extent Gruyaert himself."¹⁰² As shown in Chapter Two, Gruyaert's work is part of the emerging postmodernist mode in Magnum, in which color is an important element of expression. By the 1990s color work had been integrated into Magnum's style, both in the modernist and postmodernist modes, as it has been in the work of photo-commentators in general.

Targeting Individual Consumers: Book Projects and Exhibits

"I don't think there is any other agency in the world,' Martine Franck points out with some pride, 'whose members have published so many books and organised so many exhibitions.'"¹⁰³ As Magnum members pulled away from the magazine market they began to more actively use book projects and exhibits to promote their visual style and maintain their distinction as a unique group, especially after 1979.

⁹⁹ Max Kozloff, "Photography: The Coming to Age of Color," *Art Forum*, January 1975. p. 33.

¹⁰⁰ Szarkowski, *Photography until Now*.

¹⁰¹ For a review, and discussion of the US reception, of the book *Nicaragua* originally published in 1981, see "Meiselas, Mark, and Singh", p. 167, in Max Kozloff, *The Privileged Eye: Essays on Photography* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987).

¹⁰² Nancy Roth, "The Elements of Style," *Afterimage* vol. 14, no. 3 (October 1986). p. 6.

These projects directly appeal to a whole new market, the individual consumer, rather than Magnum's business clients in the magazine and corporate worlds. Magnum has had numerous group exhibitions in the years after the famous "Family of Man" exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1955, to which they contributed 14% of the photographs on display.¹⁰⁴ Four Magnum group exhibits were held between 1956 and 1962, then there was a gap of 14 years before the next exhibit in 1976. Between 1979 and 1982 Magnum had a group exhibition each year. There was also a gap between 1969 and 1979 in their publishing of compilation books, but since then Magnum has achieved a regular schedule of producing at least one group book every year or two.

The books published by Magnum have not all been undertaken in the same spirit. There has been a shift, most pronounced since the late 1990s, from Magnum books that purport to document a moment in history to books that celebrate the artistry in a collection of individual images. This shift can be seen in the subjects covered by the books as well as in the discourse surrounding the different projects. In the book *The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers* (1960) that accompanied the exhibition of the same name, Edward Steichen wrote "This unique association of freelance photographers is continually and persistently following the course of events wherever they happen on this globe. Today they are among the ranking contributors in the reporting and documenting of the human aspect of timely world events, which, tomorrow, become timeless visual affirmations of history."¹⁰⁵ The

¹⁰³ Miller, *Magnum: Fifty Years at the Front Line of History*. p. 274.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 127.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 182 - 183.

book *Creative America*, published in 1962, featured text written by John F. Kennedy, while the book *Peace on Earth* (1964) illustrated Pope John XXIII's yearly encyclical letter with images of daily life around the world. *America in Crisis* (1969) documented American social issues of violence, poverty, civil rights, the Vietnam war, and presidential politics throughout the year 1968. In the foreword, the editors state that "*America in Crisis* is an effort to examine the dream and the reality. In text and pictures it seeks to identify the events, the trends, and the feelings involved in this crucial period of the American experience."¹⁰⁶

In all these books Magnum's photographs are viewed as contributing to a process of close examination of some aspect of life in the world. Later books retain the rhetoric about recording history, but the topics become much more generalized. On the dust jacket for *Heroes and Anti-Heroes* (1991), a collection of portraits from Robert Capa's 1932 Leon Trotsky to Stuart Franklin's 1989 man stopping tanks in Tienanmen Square, it is proclaimed that "Magnum photographers have been documenting history as it happens, and, inevitably, the most notable figures of our time." These books are essentially vehicles to publish a wide range of Magnum photos from the archive, partially designed to pull in much needed revenue, rather than projects that are set up to investigate or document a current social issue or event. (The photographs in the archive are not necessarily old, as the word may seem to imply, but are simply Magnum's files of images made for various purposes other than for these books.) Their 40th anniversary book, *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers* (1989), is also a compilation of individual

¹⁰⁶ Magnum Photos and Mitchel Levitas, *America in Crisis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and

images from the archive loosely organized by (un-acknowledged) themes such as politics, the Middle East, and humor. This trend only becomes more pronounced as the 1990s go by: *Magnum Cinema* (1995), *Magnum Landscape* (1996), *Magnum Photos* (1997), *Israel: 50 Years as Seen by Magnum* (1998), a series of ten books published in France on themes such as *Desert, Birth, Trees, Night, Struggle*, and *Film Stars* (all 1998), *Magna Brava: Magnum's Women Photographers* (1999), and their 50th anniversary book, *Magnum°* (2000). Their most recent publication breaks from this mold of archival photos published in theme books only because world events finally crashed in on them at home: *New York September 11, By Magnum Photographers* (2001).

These recent books that draw solely from the archive serve as reminders to the public of Magnum's role in the visual representation of the world, all the way down to how our walls look (see the book *Walls*, in the French series published by Terrail Photo). The presentation of especially the themed books, such as *Magnum Landscape*, *Walls* or *Magna Brava: Magnum's Women Photographers*, is that of the now familiar glossy art book geared towards an audience interested in images, rather than in photo-commentary. Magnum is taking photographs originally made as part of long-term photo-commentary projects such as Larry Towell's work on the Mennonites and repackaging them for greater consumer audience appeal.¹⁰⁷ Introducing consumers, who may not follow work done in photo-commentary, to the work of Magnum through the less political, more aesthetic medium of theme

Winston, 1969).

¹⁰⁷ Larry Towell's photographs of the Mennonites are now seen fragmented from each other in the *Magnum Landscape* book.

books, seems to be a strategy by Magnum to produce a new market. As Rosemary Coombe explains in *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties*,

The value of a product...lies in the exchange value of its brand name, advertising image, or status connotations: the 'distinction' that it has, or will acquire, in the market. Monopoly of this trademark or commodity/sign and its meaning is crucial to corporate capital. For today it is no longer the production of goods but the production of consumers to produce demand that is fundamental to profit expansion and a strategic site for corporate investment.¹⁰⁸

Branding glossy, aesthetically appealing, and easily digestible photography books with the name Magnum is producing consumers who will learn to look to Magnum for visual pleasure, rather than the social knowledge that is promoted in photo-commentary.

In a review of Magnum's 50th anniversary exhibit and book (*Magnum*^o) Peter Hamilton writes that,

it [the book] is over-designed, too trendy for its purpose. A triumph of form over content, this publication symbolises the trend away from the mission to inform which was once at the heart of the Magnum project. ...The old markets (magazines such as *Life*, *Time*, *Stern*, *National Geographic*, etc.) have gone overboard for lifestyle features, changed their focus, cut back their photographic budgets or collapsed altogether. ...At the same time a new cultural field has emerged, a cross-over domain that includes the glossy press, book publishing, TV, commercial galleries, advertising agencies, plus the subsidised art

¹⁰⁸ Rosemary J. Coombe, *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties: Authorship, Appropriation and the Law* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998). p. 56.

sector etc. This is a new environment that prizes work made by a more creative and less editorial approach.¹⁰⁹

It is this "new cultural field" that is being exploited by Magnum with projects such as the themed books, the current 2002 exhibition "Magnum Cinema: Photographs from 50 Years of Movie-Making" based on their 1995 book of the same name, and the creation of a computer screen-saver of Magnum photographs, available for free download from their website.¹¹⁰ It is now also possible to buy collector's prints of Magnum photographs online at artnet.com. The most commercial, least "journalistic" item in this trend is a box of Magnum postcards. Published by Phaidon Press, the box of fifty postcards for \$20 are reproduced from the recent *Magnum*^o book. The Phaidon website quotes a "review" by the popular *American Photo* magazine: "Another price-is-right item from Phaidon...the cards range from Martin Parr's whimsically garish English close-ups to photojournalist James Nachtwey's austere black-and-whites. They come in a cute little tin that's worth saving."¹¹¹ Two of the biggest names in Magnum have also turned their photographs into Phaidon Press postcards and greeting cards that tie-in with recently published Phaidon books: Steve McCurry's colorful *National Geographic* work on Southeast Asia, and Elliott Erwit's humorous photographs of dogs.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Hamilton, "Magnum Opus."

¹¹⁰ <http://www.magnumphotos.com>

¹¹¹ <http://www.phaidon.com>

¹¹² While book projects have been taken on by individual Magnum photographers since the late 1960s and are an important element in Magnum's image, there is not space in this thesis, which chose a focus on the group, to analyze how individual projects articulate with the larger group brand.

The production of themed books and exhibits has made it easy for Magnum to incorporate both the modernist and postmodernist modes of their style into their products. The nature of these recent endeavors is to emphasize the visual artistry of the photographs over their documentary value, thus allowing for a greater range of visual styles that might in other presentations clash and distract from the subject. Perhaps, if Magnum continues to promote the group through visual themes rather than social issues, the importance of maintaining their classic style for conveying their brand will diminish.

Conclusion

The thesis' contribution to the study of photography is to make a case for the careful and detailed study of visual style in photojournalism. It is crucial to consider both the content and form of photojournalism, in its historical and social context, in order to effectively analyze the specific iterations of the genre and their influence on viewers' understanding of world events and of history. By first analyzing a body of visual work in the context of the institution that produces it, we can then go on to explore a photographic archive's ideological content and how it is mobilized within particular discourses. Without an understanding of how photographs, and photography as a medium, have been constructed through practice (both institutional and individual) and through discourse, it becomes impossible to grasp how they influence viewers' perceptions.

This thesis has shown how Magnum Photos Inc., the most prestigious international agency for photojournalists, has developed a particular visual style of representation since its founding in 1947. As delineated in this thesis, the classic Magnum style has created an aesthetics that uses the elements of drama, documentary realism, narrativity, and artistic expression to create highly ordered, clearly arranged compositions emphasizing a revealing moment, expression or gesture that implies an important understanding of a given situation. This has been demonstrated with examples of how Magnum photographs use specific stylistic

choices in framing, use of light, depth of focus, angle of view, choice of lens, composition, and treatment of space. It has also been shown how the classic Magnum style of representation includes an emphasis on a photographer-author persona who is heroic, yet humanist, both through visual techniques and through discourse.

As a hypothesis that needs further study, I suggest that Magnum's influence within the field of photojournalism has led this classic visual style to become the standard aspired to by most photojournalists (as well as by some photo-commentators who work in the documentary genre). I propose that the Magnum style has become the definition of "good" photojournalism, limiting the representational options for photo-commentators hoping to have their work published widely. As more photojournalists have followed in the Magnum style, the prospect of becoming a generic brand has slowly forced the institution of Magnum to look in new directions in order to maintain their distinction and their markets. This may be part of the reason that the classic visual style gradually lost prominence within Magnum itself to a new postmodernist visual mode during the 1980s and 1990s. As Coombe explains, "In a rule often referred to among lawyers as *genericide*, it is established that if a trademark becomes the generic name for the thing itself - if everyone routinely asks for a Kleenex to blow their nose, for example - then the trademark no longer serves the function of distinguishing the product in the market."¹¹³ If Magnum loses its distinction because its classic visual style has become so widespread, then Magnum will need to create a new trademark look.

The new postmodernist mode that has gradually emerged within Magnum uses the same elements of drama, realism, narrativity, and artistic expression that appeared in the classic style, but now in a new configuration to emphasize disorder, chaos, and the lack of an ability to understand the situation. Whereas the classic Magnum style branded their work as photojournalism done artfully, the balance has now shifted to an emphasis on art and expression, with little promotion of any documentary value. I argue that this change in style was influenced by particular market pressures and specific Magnum strategies for creating distinction from other photojournalistic work. The postmodernist visual mode not only sets Magnum apart from other photography agencies, but is also particularly well suited to contemporary market niches such as glossy picture books, gift items like postcards, and the interests of art dealers and curators looking for cutting-edge work. The discourse within Magnum of the endless clash between those who lean towards art and those who are dedicated to journalism allows Magnum to strategically situate itself within both the world of photo-commentary and the world of art, exploiting markets all across these fields. The Magnum discourse that shuns commercialism and promotes their principled dedication to documenting world events, mutes any suspicions that Magnum is not the uniquely heroic band of intrepid adventurers they still appear to be.

The on-line photography book seller, Photo-Eye, describes Magnum's latest book *Magnum*^o, as "An awe-inspiring collection... These are not the images by the fabled

¹¹³ Coombe, *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties: Authorship, Appropriation and the*

creators of Magnum; instead this is superb visual poetry, at times hard-hitting, created by a whole new generation of image-makers."¹¹⁴ This seems to be exactly how Magnum needs to be viewed in the early 21st century in order to keep audiences and markets interested, as an agency supported by a "fabled" past, but newly rejuvenated by a younger generation creating dramatic, un-sentimental "visual poetry" in tune with what are perceived to be the harsh realities of our times.

This thesis also explores how, in response to September 11, 2001, there was a renewed interest within Magnum in promoting their classic style, as evidenced in the book *New York September 11, By Magnum Photographers*. It may be that the mood in the West, and in particular in the United States, for easy explanations of globally significant social issues (such as the phenomenon of terrorism) calls for a style of visual representation in photojournalism, such as Magnum's classic mode, that offers a belief in the importance of history and the individual, that truth can be uncovered, that certain master narratives can explain events, and that heroism is possible. These are assumptions that had been gradually overturned by Magnum's postmodernist mode. While it is still too early to tell, it is possible that the classic style might be attaining a new relevance after the sudden realization among Americans and Europeans that we are vulnerable to forces previously thought only to afflict others.

Law. p. 79.

¹¹⁴ <http://www.photoeye.com>

The reaction in Magnum to shift back to the classic style in their public presentation as an agency after the events of September 11 illuminates just how closely aligned Magnum's mode of representation is to a Western, bourgeois perspective. Why did catastrophic events in other regions of the world, from large-scale natural disasters to political "ethnic cleansing," *not* prompt Magnum, as an institution, to publish in-depth, classic documentary coverage like that in *New York September 11*?

Certainly part of the answer lies in the lack of a significant market for photography books about suffering in foreign countries; Magnum must survive as a business despite all their rhetoric about high principles. But it is still crucial to question what Magnum, the world's most prestigious photography agency, chooses as worthy of representation. How has Magnum's choice to cover certain world events and not others influenced viewers notions of what (and who) is important? How are these decisions made, what are the implications, and what does this suggest about Magnum's target audience? Will Magnum, as an international agency, choose to extend its new found enthusiasm for documentary work in the classic style to other social and political issues outside the United States?

New Questions and Future Directions

The process of researching and writing this thesis has made it possible to answer some questions about Magnum's visual style and strategies of differentiation, while at the same time it has prompted the emergence of new questions. I bring up these new questions here as suggestions of future directions for researchers in photojournalism.

Due to time constraints I was not able to seek access to Magnum archives. However, it would be worthwhile to carefully analyze Magnum photographers contact sheets in order to compare the visual style of those photographs that were chosen to be reproduced versus those that were not. Was the development of the classic style done in the editing or in the shooting stage? Do the Magnum book projects construct a group style out of diverse individual styles or do the individuals in Magnum share a similar style regardless of what is chosen to be reproduced in the compilation books?

A further productive direction to take this research would be to investigate the correspondences and influences between photojournalism and other media, such as cinema. The rise of photojournalism as a profession and the establishment of Magnum coincided with the documentary film movement towards a cinema verité style. A comparative media approach analyzing the correlations in the post-war period between the social practice and style of photojournalism, cinema, television news, and maybe radio news, could provide valuable insights towards understanding how mainstream Western media has framed world events. In a similar vein, the rise of Magnum's postmodernist mode coincides with the "crisis of representation" in anthropology and other human sciences.¹¹⁵ This movement within anthropology encouraged a reflexive practice that takes the personal role of the anthropologist into consideration and influenced anthropological writing as well as ethnographic filmmaking and photography. Situating photojournalism in the

¹¹⁵ See Marcus and Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*.

context of larger cultural practices and movements would be particularly insightful and valuable.

While many photography critics endlessly debate the ethics of combining aesthetics with photojournalism,¹¹⁶ I suggest that a new critique should be undertaken around the question of the effectiveness of different visual styles of photojournalism in illuminating (or obscuring) social and political realities; not all styles of photojournalism convey information in the same way. The classic Magnum style promotes a tendency to create generalized, abstracted narratives about the "human condition" instead of depicting a specificity of events.¹¹⁷ Rather than informing the viewer about the particular causes and implications of events in a locatable time and place, Magnum photographs often aspire to the iconic status of images used to represent supposedly universal themes about humanity. As Philip Jones Griffiths, who objected to admitting Harry Gruyaert into Magnum has said: "I thought accepting Harry Gruyaert [in 1981] was a turning point in Magnum's history. ...his work had nothing to do with what made Magnum Magnum; that is, he made no pretence of capturing the human condition."¹¹⁸ This abstracting mode of representation often limits what viewers of these images can learn about the world to bland statements about human dignity and suffering, the brutality of war, and the photographer's courage in witnessing. The question of what can be learned from photographs is still important almost thirty years after Susan Sontag wrote in

¹¹⁶ For examples of this debate see: Linfield, "Beyond the Sorrow and the Pity." Sischy, "Good Intentions." Woodward, "To Hell and Back."

¹¹⁷ Griffin, "The Great War Photographs: Constructing Myths of History and Photojournalism." p. 140.

¹¹⁸ Miller, *Magnum: Fifty Years at the Front Line of History*. p. 257.

her famous essays *On Photography*, that "Strictly speaking, one never understands anything from a photograph. ...The knowledge gained through still photographs will always be some kind of sentimentalism, whether cynical or humanist. It will be a knowledge at bargain prices—a semblance of knowledge, a semblance of wisdom."¹¹⁹

I would argue that while her statements are too sweeping and polemical, they nevertheless may aptly describe the extreme end of certain types of photograph produced in Magnum's classic style.¹²⁰

Lastly I would suggest that more attention be paid to how photojournalists operate in the field and how conditions of work influence the representations they produce. I would encourage an ethnographic study of the social practices of photojournalists at work and an analysis of their discourse about themselves and what they do. How is photojournalism constructed by particular practices? Who are photojournalists and how are they taught to produce photographs? What are the hierarchies and rivalries among photojournalists and what are the implications of this for the photographs they create? What is the structure of relations photojournalists are enmeshed in with editors, other photographers, clients, and their audiences?

Each of these questions makes clear the need for an analysis of how photojournalism is constructed, which has been made even more urgent by the current charged political atmosphere post-September 11, 2001. As we have been

¹¹⁹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977). p. 23-24.

¹²⁰ For a discussion of the limitations of photography to impart knowledge and a convincing claim that Gilles Peress' photographs are a model of work that effectively negotiates between relativism and positivism, see Linfield, "Capture the Moment: On the Uses and Misuses of Photojournalism."

watching images flow in from Ground Zero in New York City, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, it's crucial that we learn how to de-code what confronts us daily in the news.

Photograph Credits

- Figure 1 - Robert Capa, *Slightly out of Focus* (New York: H. Holt, 1947). p. 40
- Figure 2 - Capa, *Slightly out of Focus*. p. 176 - 177
- Figure 3 - Magnum Photos et al., *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers* (London: American Federation of Arts in Association with A. Deutsch, 1989). p. 89
- Figure 4 - Magnum Photos et al., *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers*. p. 260
- Figure 5 - Magnum Photos and Mitchel Levitas, *America in Crisis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969). p. 118-119
- Figure 6 - Magnum Photos et al., *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers*. p. 265
- Figure 7 - Sophie Ristelhueber, *Beirut* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1984). p. 13
- Figure 8 - Ristelhueber, *Beirut*. p. 46-47
- Figure 9 - Magnum Photos et al., *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers*. p. 175
- Figure 10 - Magnum Photos et al., *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers*. p. 288
- Figure 11 - Magnum Photos et al., *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers*. p. 21
- Figure 12 - Magnum Photos and Michael Ignatieff, *Magnum°* (London: Phaidon, 2000). p. 528
- Figure 13 - Magnum Photos et al., *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers*. p. 304-305
- Figure 14 - Magnum Photos et al., *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers*. p. 209
- Figure 15 - Magnum Photos et al., *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers*. p. 176
- Figure 16 - Garry Winogrand, *Public Relations* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1977). p. 101
- Figure 17 - Magnum Photos and Ignatieff, *Magnum°*. p. 250-251
- Figure 18 - Magnum Photos and Levitas, *America in Crisis*. p. 32-33
- Figure 19 - Magnum Photos, *Israel 50 Years: As Seen by Magnum Photographers* (New York: Aperture, 1998). p. 148
- Figure 20 - Magnum Photos et al., *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers*. p. 99
- Figure 21 - Cathy Newman, *Women Photographers at National Geographic* (Washington: The National Geographic Society, 2000). p. 117
- Figure 22 - Allan Sekula, *Dismal Science: Photo Works 1972 - 1996* (Normal, IL: University Galleries of Illinois State University, 1999). p. 171
- Figure 23 - Magnum Photos et al., *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers*. p. 164
- Figure 24 - Magnum Photos et al., *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers*. p. 404

- Figure 25 - Magnum Photos and John Updike, *Heroes and Anti-Heroes: Magnum Images* (London: André Deutsch Limited, 1991). p. 50-51
- Figure 26 - Magnum Photos et al., *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers*. p. 166-167
- Figure 27 - Magnum Photos and Ignatieff, *Magnum*^o. p. 330-331
- Figure 28 - Robert Frank, *The Americans* (New York: SCALO Publishers, 1958). p. 97
- Figure 29 - Magnum Photos et al., *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers*. p. 117
- Figure 30 - Magnum Photos et al., *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers*. p. 266
- Figure 31 - Magnum Photos and Ignatieff, *Magnum*^o. p. 318-319
- Figure 32 - Magnum Photos and Ignatieff, *Magnum*^o. p. 387
- Figure 33 - Magnum Photos and Ignatieff, *Magnum*^o. p. 484-485
- Figure 34 - Magnum Photos, *New York September 11, by Magnum Photographers* (New York: powerHouse Books, 2001). p. 118-119
- Figure 35 - Magnum Photos, *New York September 11, by Magnum Photographers*. p. 116-117

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