

see, not what my photographs can be made to suggest. The result seems linked to the anti-style of German conceptual photographers such as Michael Schmidt and Joachim Brohm. Graham Smith's work, on the other hand, seems a cross between Bill Brandt and Brassai - with the former's stark equation of contrasty black-and-white tones with personal and social depression, combined with the latter's sense of the pub as social nexus. But Smith's pubs come out of Marat/Sade, an insane asylum of the damned seeking oblivion by the fastest route possible.

For Chris Killip, too, Brandt is a shaping influence. In the selection of Killip's work here, documentary comes to the verge of theatre, with the quizzical gesture, the poetic dance of the moment, defining the image. John Davies's melancholy landscapes form an apt counterpart to Killip's people. In them the plump, airy fullness of Constable's archetypal English countryside is replaced by drab rows of council housing and the ominous hourglass of cooling towers. Martin Parr's work is sardonic and understated and ironic - the perfect stereotype of British humour, so much so that people here, including myself, probably miss half the smart and witty references to social distinctions within British society that they make.

Each of these five has developed a personal brand of documentary photography which is, in effect, a sort of meditation on the possibilities and functions of documentary, rather than a confident essay in the genre. This is documentary stripped of its social function, framed, and made into art.

As an American I hesitate to speculate much about how accurately these pictures reflect the social makeup of present day Britain, but the range of British life they present seems remarkably narrow. Where are the stock-brokers, the doctors, the farmers, the blacks, the Asians? Along with the nostalgia for documentary photography goes - in the work of Killip, Smith, and even Parr - a nostalgia for the simplistic class oppositions exemplified in the kitchen sink dramas of the '50s and '60s, the face-off between the public school upper-middle class and the hereditary workers. This is a view of British class society that confirms stereo-

types rather than venturing a new, more complicated picture.

But where is the rest of British photography? Where is the politically analytical work of Victor Burgin, Mitra Tabrizian, Karen Knorr? Where are the Scots - Calum Colvin, Ron O'Donnell, Andy Wiener et al.? Where are the mysterious surrealist-derived work of Helen Chadwick, Boyd Webb, John Hilliard? Where are the landscapes of Peter Fraser or Hamish Fulton? All of them were working during 'the Thatcher years' - but apparently they do not fit into the narrow focus of the MoMA show.

Is this show as narrow as it is out of ignorance or choice? Maybe it's just mislabelled: perhaps it should be called 'Five Male Documentary/Art Photographers Working in Britain Today' and forget about trying to present a full picture of British life today, or British photography today - or even British documentary photography today. It's still a valuable show: these are all important photographers, unwilling to give up the medium's connection to society beyond the art world. But the exhibition wants to be more than it is, maybe, given the exigencies of exhibitions, more than it can hope to be. The ambition is laudable, but the result is hollow.

Charles Hagen

*British Photography From the Thatcher Years* showed at New York's Museum of Modern Art until 28 April.

## PUTTING PAIN IN THE PICTURE WOMEN, HEALTH & REPRESENTATION AT CAMERAWORK

It's less often what's done than how it's done that matters most. Few would argue with the premise that preventative health care is preferable to aleopathic 'cures'. But, along with a host of dubious - and sometimes downright dangerous - industries that capitalise on our well-founded fears that we take too little exercise and too many noxious substances, there goes an ideology that blames the victim for failing to 'maintain her health'.

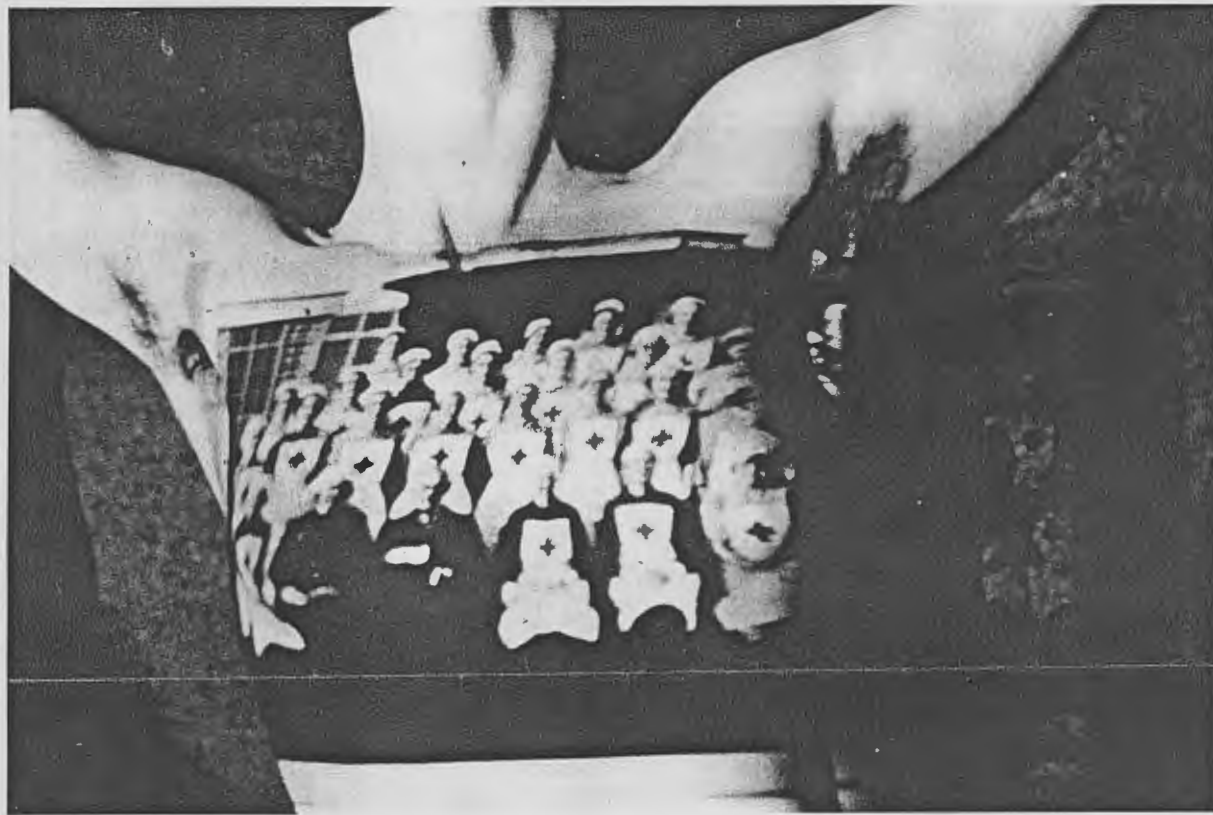
The question is more likely to arise in this form for women, since society

has long acclimatised us to feeling culpable; taking the blame, assuming the victim's role. Since these responses take the form of sensations, it doesn't always help to recognise that serious diseases are far more commonly viral or environmental in origin than self-inflicted by a 'deficient lifestyle'. Particularly when the serried ranks of advertisers, marketeers, medics and paramedics - and, too frequently, well-wishing friends and family who 'hate to see us suffer' - are on hand to tell us what we must have done wrong and should be doing right.

The beauty of this show is that it offers imaginative visual and verbal explorations both of the 'treatment' meted out to in-valids (why do we have no satisfactory word to describe ourselves when we're ill?) and of the personal experience of dis-ease. This inevitably involves feelings of intense vulnerability, hardly helped by if we're then told how we've 'failed' to stay healthy. By channelling these initially disorienting feelings into an excellent catalogue the artists and contributors have regained a sense of control and made it possible to not only learn, but to create, out of the experience.

Melanie Friend and Kate Musselwhite look at peculiarly 'women's diseases', the menopause and cervical cancer. Janice Howard looks at given images of woman-as-healer, connecting health with culture. Clare Collison confronts her multiple reflections through the prism of her illness. Common to all artists is a rejection of the value judgements and pejorative language common to our society. What arises is an imaginative assessment of feelings of dis-empowerment, of rage as much as frailty, working through to a more balanced way of 'putting oneself in the picture'.

It's no coincidence that much of the work relies on self-portraiture for its effectiveness. Clare Collison, who has used herself as model in a variety of subtle and humorous guises in more robust times, now documents herself meeting her self in nude representation. After all ME 'sufferers' look no different to anyone else. Unless that is, we medicalise the condition, convert the person into a patient and see her as the sum of her symptoms. In this case, that means as a 'sweating', 'shivering'



Clare Collison's  
'Faith, Hope,  
Charity and  
Selfishness'

# REVIEW

feverish merry-go-round, represented by a swivelling table-top. Or, as in *Peeling Potatoes in Paradise*, the eternal woman - post-feminist (and post-illness), hands kept busy at perennial kitchen tasks, denying all temporal transformation.

Melanie Friend deals differently with the question of menopause - a condition that, by its variability, begs every question. Some of the answers are provided by the matching of voices to faces: here words are as important as images, and it's refreshing to find women answering Val Wilmer's appropriately stropic question: 'So are you going to have us talking about it, or are we just going to be being menopausal?' Whatever the women's personal testimony - and some advocate hormone replacement therapy as a way of 'regaining control' (Gill Reeve) or completing 23 books a year (Barbara Cartland); others recommend the strength and rebirth to be found in their forties, their fifties. The accompanying portraits, all (with the exception of the frothy pink confection that is Cartland provided by Norman Parkinson) against deep red or blue grounds, tell different and highly individualised stories. Which helps to give the lie to the idea that menopausal

women undergo a kind of collective mental dementia, or that every discomfort we experience is 'only' psychosomatic.

Kate Musselwhite also explores the borderline between guilt and responsibility, physical and psychological disease. Along with 'cancer sufferers', she has reached the point where definitions fuse and the concept of 'blaming the patient' becomes redundant. It is surely both specious and academic to ponder the chicken-and-egg possibilities of why one 'deserves to be inflicted' with cervical cancer if the overriding result is that you feel ill and need help. What you emphatically do not need is a nurse informing you that 'it is all down to schoolgirl promiscuity', as one admonished me (and, when I asked 'what happens if that doesn't apply?' to be firmly told: 'Then the patient is lying'). Here we are offered both halves of the unequal equation: a 'magazine', titled *Media Infection/malignant obsessions*, mixing teen-romance comic strips with headlines like, 'The Problem Is Myself And My Ambiguous Feelings'. Against this is a giant hoarding showing with the photograph of a sultry male and the - somewhat confusing - slogan: 'If Men Feel Comfortable With My Body Then So Should You.'

A sideswipe at government-sponsored anti-AIDS packages?

Janice Howard also undresses her subject but, unlike Clare Collison's nudes, she lays the outfits themselves, child-size and neatly folded, on a head-teacher's chair. The eight chairs are ranged in a circle, and the nurse's uniform gives way to a witch's cloak and hat as older, more fundamental forms of healing are revealed. The accompanying text is lifted from a 16th-century witchcraft trial, contrasting the diminutive part now awarded to women's healing capacities with the fears formerly expressed over our 'black arts'. Not only is this a show which pushes back boundaries in terms of the ways in which we look but, particularly if used 'with related workshops and events', also of the ways in which we think. Probably no individual has done more to develop the use of photography in self-healing than Jo Spence (who also contributes to the catalogue). It is therefore with a great concern to learn about the threat to her health (*See Jo Spence Health Fund project in Briefing*).

**Amanda Hopkinson**

*Silent Health: Women, Health & Representation* at Cambridge Darkroom from 2 November