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While many of the black and
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violence, which at worst was always in danger of
confirming stereotypes and clichés, they only go
so far as to mime a documentary look. In contrast
to Wall's heavily authored and controlled scenes,
documentary practice always had and has the
potential to offer a productive, dialectical and
dialogical site, of exchange, empowerment and
repositioning, a space in which clichés and
stereotypes can be more effectively contested and
countered. If Wall is now saying he is rethinking
his relation to the documentary tradition, he
would do well to begin to address this aspect of
its history.

Mark Durden

BLINK

£39.95
Phaidon Press
ISBN: 0714841994

It's the art world's equivalent of the commercial
world's source book, *Le Book*. But instead of ad
photographers, stylists, hairdressers and so on,
Blink lists 100 'hot' photographers. It will interest
curators, gallery and museum professionals, even
art directors scouting for the next 'style' to skim.
Like *Le Book*, *Blink* is fat and glossy and
shamelessly hagiographic. Unlike the
photographers who pay *Le Book* to let them set
out their stall, these photographers are there
through the influence of one of 10 'experts'. *Le*
Book publishes everyone's contact details, but
Blink doesn't. On the other hand, *Blink* - like *Le*
Book - is in the 'talent business': check everyone's
'form' (the c.v. which lists participation in shows,
biennales, museum collections, etc.) and you'll
get an idea of their current and possible future
market value.

Blink has been designed for easy reference.
The photographers, who represent many countries
and persuasions, are listed alphabetically, each
meriting four 'portfolio' pages and a short
contextualising essay. At the back, each selector
(listed alphabetically) summarises his/her
rationale for choosing a particular group of

photographers. Interestingly, comments range
from the prosaic to the polemical. Some question
the selection process itself. Christine Frisinghelli,
of *Camera Austria*, thinks that a more pressing
question than: who are the most interesting and
most significant photographers around?, would
be: 'which organisations have the authority to set
up such a ranking?'. Both Paul Wombell and
Wendy Watriss hold the richness of the work they
have chosen against those who predicted the
death of photography. In fact photography, freed
from mimesis and fully integrated into art, has
'taken off' gushes Watriss. Interestingly, Wombell
and Frisinghelli, in their statements, and
Hripsimé Visser (in her essay selected by
Wombell) warn about a lack of expertise in
photography among art professionals - who are
rapidly assuming most responsibility for
contextualising it. The welcome presence of a
little bit of lively debate reminds me that *Blink*
owes quite a lot to a certain type of photography
magazine. Photography magazines, of course, are
the natural home of this kind of litmus-testing
publishing - because they publish periodically
they are closer to grass-roots evolution and best
placed to monitor change.

The aim is to deliver the best, the most
'cutting-edge' and anticipate the next
photography show at the Tate. How does the
selection measure up? Well, there's lot's of variety
- from gallery work (installation and 'hard copy')
and fashion to digital variants and even (weirdly)
old fashioned monochrome reportage from around
the world. About half the cast are semi to well
established (Inez van Lamsweerde, Hannah
Starkey, Philip-Lorca di Corcia, Boris Mikhailov,
Rineke Dijkstra), so the publishers got round the
problem of their 'newness' by publishing some
current pictures. It is good to see new faces from
'exotic' places that are usually under represented
- Algeria (Omar D), Africa, China, Japan (Shino
Kuraishi's inspired choice of the work of Taiji
Matsue), Mexico and Korea (interesting work from
Atta Kim chosen by Alasdair Foster). Nevertheless,
the analogy with photography magazines can only
go so far: a book that wants to succeed just can't
take the kind of risks that (say) *Source* will with

untried talent.

Such a diverse and not uninteresting selection
reflects an interesting panel (by calling them
'curators' the editor presumably hoped to
discourage comparisons between selecting and
'judging'). It included some of the usual suspects,
of course, but also people with fresh perspectives
on the world of photography - for instance the
editor of *Revue Noir*, Simon Njami and Joan
Fontcuberta, the Spanish photographer and critic,
as well as Marcelo Brodsky from Argentina.

Modelled the format of such other 'who's new'
books as *Fresh Cream* (contemporary artists) and
10x10 (architects), *Blink* desperately wants to be
a regular feature on the landscape, acting as a
benchmark for what's new and exciting. If it can
find that niche then it will be evidence that there
is a large non-specialist reader for contemporary
photography. It will be interesting to gauge that.
We will know whether the gamble pays off by
whether or not they print a second edition in a
few years' time. If not, then it's a case of: *Blink*
and you might miss it.

David Brittain

TOUR OF DUTY

Matthew Sleeth
Aus\$49.95
Hardie Grant
ISBN: 1-74064-066-7

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Melanie Friend
£29.95
Midnight Editions
ISBN: 1-57344-119-8

*'I believe that until I am dead, I will never forget.
This memory will never come out of my brain.'*

These are the words of Shefqet Avdia, a Kosova
(sic) Albanian, who witnessed the massacre at
Recak. It was a pivotal event in the Kosovo crisis.
When Slobodan Milosevic was indicted for war
crimes, it was cited. Shefqet Avdia, however, is
left to contend with his memory: the hearts and
eyes of the dead cut out with a knife, and laid

upon their bodies.

The subject of *No Place Like Home* and *Tour of Duty* is war: in Kosovo and East Timor, respectively. However, although Melanie Friend and Matthew Sleeth photograph war-zones, I would hesitate to call either of them war-photographers. Friend and Sleeth, it seems, are not in the business of providing immediate and potentially-iconic images that stand alone as monuments to the evils of humanity, and the corresponding efforts to overcome them. Rather, they are concerned with providing a commentary on conflict and the manner in which it is reported; a visual and textual critique which – however incomplete and deliberately unresolved – is about something other than the searing, single image. As Friend acknowledges in her introduction, 'I wanted to try a different strategy from straightforward photojournalism.' She does not show us corpses at Recak. She photographs a dry, stony, up-hill path.

Thus, in opposition to Robert Capa's famous dictum that 'if your pictures aren't good enough, you aren't close enough', Friend and Sleeth have deliberately stepped back from the action. Rather than elbowing their way into the spotlight of war's 'theatre', they prefer to work behind the scenes.

Sleeth's target is the Australian propaganda machine that 'carefully orchestrated and milked for every patriotic possibility' the country's leading role in the International Force for East Timor (InterFET), following East Timor's ballot for Independence from Indonesia in 1999. The disparate collection of photographs acts as a metaphor for the medley of outsiders and corresponding paraphernalia that 'invaded' East Timor in a bid to provide humanitarian support. We are shown Kylie Minogue wielding a gun, and Santa Claus working the crowd: crass and loud. But there are images which become extremely troubling in the noisy context of the Australian army at rest and at play. Bleached bones, barbed wire, a small boy who looks terrified by the toys and goodwill being urgently pressed upon him.

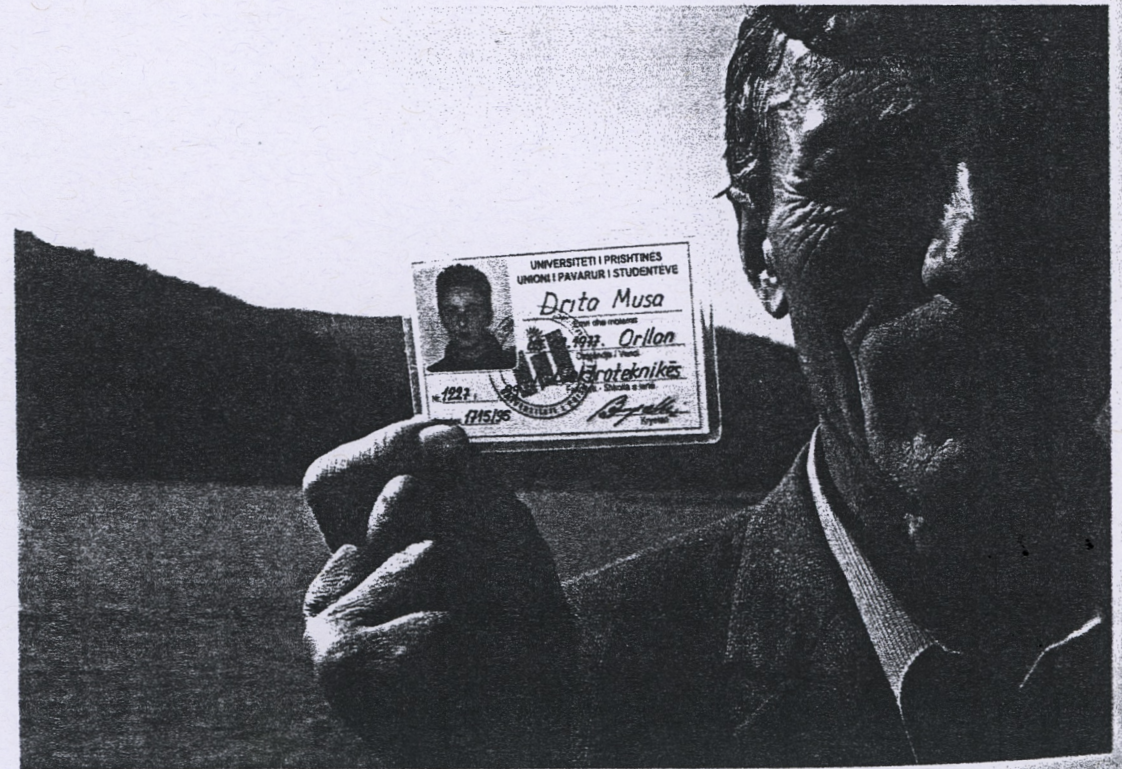
Friend's photographs are quieter and stiller. She attempts to reveal the humanity of those trapped in inhumane circumstances as a result of conflict between the Serbs and the Albanians in Kosovo. The book comprises seven sequences of photographs made over a decade: people's homes, people's possessions, the pain of memory inscribed in people's faces. Massacre sites are documented, and the testaments of those she interviewed are transcribed. In both books, then, combative action is not the focus, even though the horrors of war haunt the images.

Sleeth's photographs are bold and arresting and, as the sub-title of his book suggests, infused with irony. Irony is cruel. It is disturbing to discover that the generic redeemer-soldier entrusted with the job of 'winning hearts and

minds' is a young lad with a fascistic tattoo prone to scrawling crass, sexually-explicit graffiti across the cellophane packaging of a Barbie doll. But the most important, recurring element in Sleeth's sequence of brightly coloured, strangely-seen photographs, is the omnipresence of the media, signified by microphones, cameras and sound equipment which intrude upon the scene. Real life created for television. It starts to feel like we're all conspiring in a military version of *The Truman Show*.

At the back of *Tour of Duty* are four meditations on war, photography and the media, written by Paul James. They are engaging fragments of a larger discourse: like snapshots. Nevertheless, I found myself scouring his text for precisely that which the photographs do not

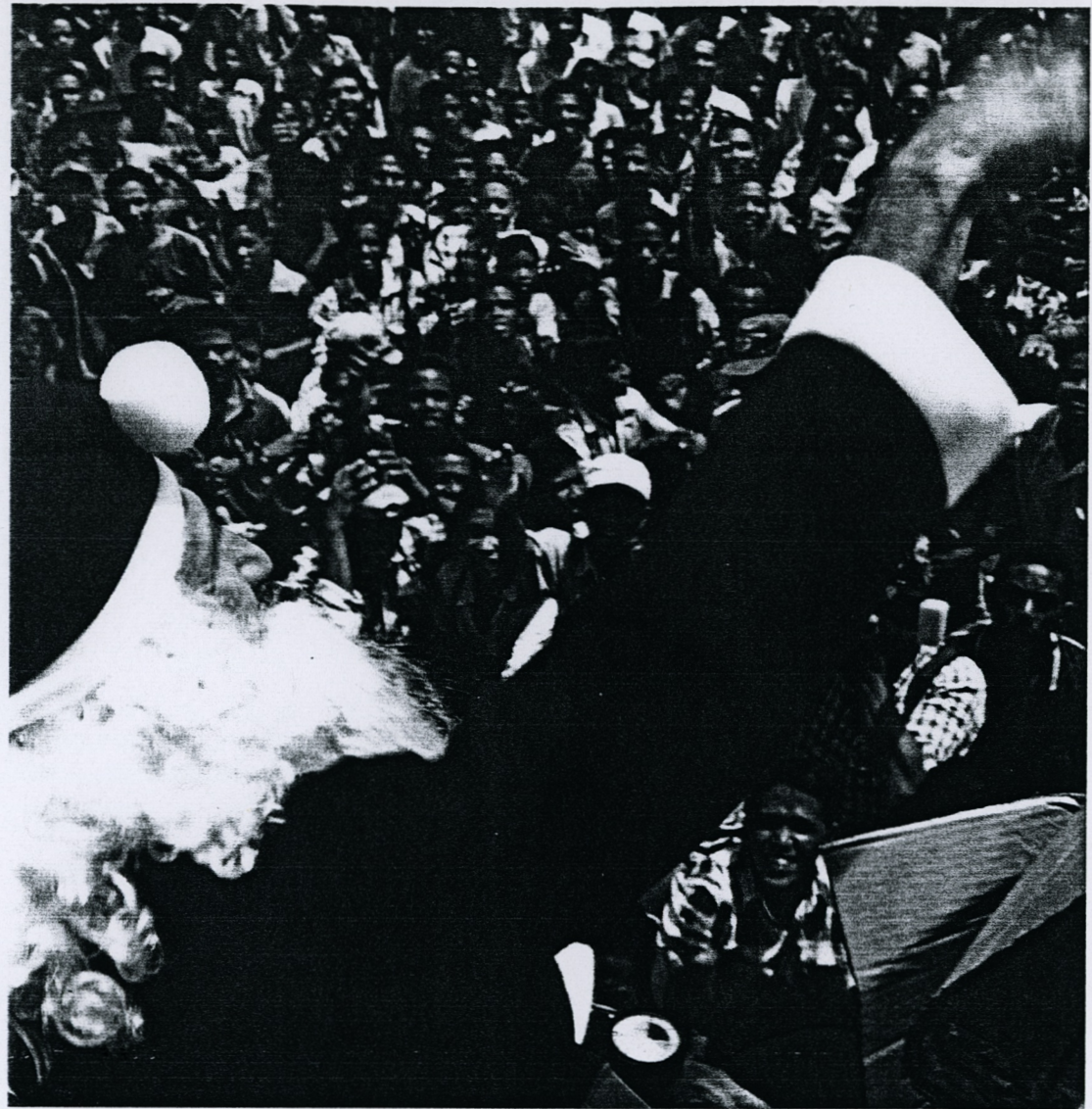
Mustafë Musa, age 32, Albanian
Orlan (Orlane), October 14, 2000



(cannot) provide: a concise chronology of the political and military manoeuvring in East Timor. Thus, while the editorial tactic of presenting a series of full-page, full-colour photographs uninterrupted by text is powerful, if not original (thumbnail images with captions are provided at the back), it remains difficult for the uninitiated to grasp the circumstances which culminated in the documented events. While 'the photographs challenge any sense that the official story about East Timor is sustainable', *Tour of Duty* tends to privilege an Australian audience.

No Place Like Home is an impressive piece of work. It provides a clear explanation of the political context in which Friend's photographs were made, as well as a glossary of terms and abbreviations. Friend is careful to state her intentions, and to elucidate the methods she used to achieve them. She asks the question: 'How could you visually represent fear and repression in picturesque villages where roadblocks and surveillance of foreigners' movements made it impossible to witness such events?' Friend's solution to the problem was to talk to people. She would arrange several meetings (often with an interpreter), and she would take a picture. As 'the situation' escalated, she continued to meet with Albanians, Serbs, Roma and Turks. While most of the people she engaged with were Kosova Albanians, Friend (like Sleeth) is keen to emphasise the plurality of accounts, the differing versions of history. She does not attempt to correct discrepancies. Instead, she concludes that 'what is important is what the interviewees themselves believe.'

Friend's photographs are thoughtful and handsome, like the people that she depicts. The domestic interiors and back gardens are beautifully composed. The portraits never deprive the subject of his or her dignity, despite the desperate conditions in which they might be taken. While a transcribed conversation or statement accompanies each portrait, the words of those who wished to remain anonymous are



InterFET Santa Claus
Diii, 1999

juxtaposed with a different kind of picture: a view from a window; a still-life with coffee cup, glass, and cigarette burning in the ash-tray.

Bombardment is a characteristic of war. In the West, we are bombarded with news bulletins, and newspaper pictures. The reports are brief, the images throw-away. The importance of books

like Friend's and Sleeth's are that they endure as evidence, long after the majority of us has forgotten who was fighting whom.

Jane Fletcher