

**CREATING A
COLLABORATIVE
WORKTOWN ARCHIVE:
PHOTOGRAPHY, PLACE
AND COMMUNITY**

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ABSTRACT

This practice-based thesis uses photography as a method to examine how photographic archives constitute community. It develops a case study of the Worktown photographs, which were taken by Humphrey Spender during Mass Observation's experimental study of everyday life in Bolton, Lancashire, 1937 -1938, and are now held as part of Bolton Museum's Worktown archive.

As 'old' photographs, the Worktown photographs prompt nostalgia for an idealised community of the past, destroyed through the decline of industry. In academic contexts they have been critiqued as exemplary social documentary photographs, ideologically charged visual representations of working class life which construct history as a false national memory of community and consensus. Here, I argue that this critical narrative of photographic subjugation has limited the productive potential of the Worktown photographs, and ask instead what understandings arise if we consider the photographs as material objects which constitute community in relation to place.

This theoretical perspective, derived from contemporary practices of visual and sensory anthropology, informs the practical investigation and reinterpretation of Mass Observation's experimental use of photographic and creative research methods at the intersection of art and anthropology. By responding to this archive in collaboration with local communities, I demonstrate that processes of taking, documenting, sharing and photographs generate new meaning in relation to the contingencies of place. In this way photography may be understood as an experiential form of knowledge, and the photographic archive is reactivated as an active medium creating new understandings of past and present communities.

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Fig.I.1 Children playing on a railway bridge, Humphrey Spender, 1937

INTRODUCTION

In 1937 a remarkable expedition set out to study the rituals of a strange, unfamiliar land – Bolton, an industrial town in North West England. For the duration of the Worktown study these clandestine observers combined scientific and artistic research methods in order to create an ethnography of industrial life. Their chief photographer Humphrey Spender was one of many trained and untrained participant observers to join Mass Observation (hereafter MO), an experimental research project founded to counter the misrepresentation of mass opinion by the press and politicians through the creation of an: ‘anthropology of ourselves’ (Madge and Harrison 1937: 10). Spender, well-practiced in the art of covert surveillance, deployed one of the most advanced ‘scientific instruments of precision’ (Madge and Harrison 1937: 35)—a camera able to freeze time into 1/1250 of a second—to collect precise data on the everyday lives and habits of the town, material which was intended to become part of a an experimental, collaborative and sensory museum (Madge and Harrison 1937: 35).

Eight decades have gone past and the photographs taken by Spender during the Worktown study are now on sale as jigsaw puzzles in Bolton Museum’s gift shop. The best-selling puzzle features an image of children playing on a railway bridge (Fig.1.1). The photograph has a nostalgic appeal: in it we glimpse the past, peering like the children through the fence, into the hazy distance. This is not only an image of Bolton past, but constitutes a national memory of an idealised and lost working class community. Spender’s photographs have ‘frozen a memory-image of ‘Britishness’ which has obtained an existence outside history’ and simultaneously become ‘the raw material from which we reconstruct the past in the present’ (Macpherson 1997 [1978]: 150). How has this happened? How have these photographs come to represent both a real and imagined community? As Stuart Hall (2001: 92) has observed the future of archives cannot be foreseen— the meanings ascribed to the Worktown photographs in critical contexts are very different from the radical intentions of MO’s collaborative museum, or the role of the photographs as part of the Worktown archive, a local museum collection of visual artefacts relating to the Worktown study. This research examines how this photographic archive has come to constitute community within these different contexts, and through practice explores how this understanding may enable the development of photographic tactics for engaging and developing communities.

The research takes the form of this contextual document and a series of practical experiments and outcomes developed in collaboration with Bolton Museum and local communities. The practical elements of research include photography; the curation of an exhibition; the development of a digital archive of the Worktown photographs (www.boltonworktown.co.uk); a collaborative photography project with young people, and an experimental re-enactment of the Worktown study (www.worktownobservation.co.uk).

BOLTON AS A REAL AND IMAGINED COMMUNITY

Community is, as DeFilippis and North (2004:70) have argued, an ideologically charged term, which broadly conveys two types of meaning – a community of interest gathered round shared values and activities, and a geographically defined community. This research is concerned with both these types of community, for while the Worktown photographs depict community as a property of a particular time and place—Bolton past—they have also become metaphors of ‘the loss of communal stability’ (Roberts 1998: 64) effected through the decline of industrialisation and the disintegration of British imperialism. In MO’s study Bolton became Worktown: ‘a town that exists and persists on the basis on industrial work, an anonymous one in the long list of such British towns’ (Madge and Harrison 1937: 34).

Bolton is one of a series of former mill towns which circle the twin cities of Manchester and Salford, an area rapidly urbanised during Britain’s Industrial Revolution. In 1845 Engels described the town as a ‘dark unattractive hole’ in a ‘country which, a hundred years ago chiefly swamp land, thinly populated, is now sown with towns and villages, and is the most densely populated strip of country in England’ (Engels 2009: 82-3). The damp, temperate climate of the town was especially suitable for spinning cotton and during the nineteenth century the development of mechanical spinning process transformed a cottage industry to an international centre of textile manufacturing. But by the time the observers arrived in 1937 Bolton’s industry was already in terminal decline, a process accelerated by the economic impact of the Depression. By recording the visible effects of the Depression, Spender’s photographs, and the Worktown study, may be interpreted as an attempt to construct an ‘ideology of national unity’ (Macpherson 1997 [1978]: 149). The economic crisis was depicted as the loss of community, rather than the effect of social inequality: as Roberts (1998: 64) has commented the Worktown photographs were ‘not oppositional images, but images that invoked absence of continuity or showed people “getting by”’.

The Worktown photographs prompt nostalgia for a lost community through the

representation of a particular place. Bolton stands for the idea of a local community, with traditional values, under attack from external social forces. In this way the historical representation of a specific geographical location comes to evoke a particular modern idea of community as something lost which can be recovered through the restoration of tradition, a highly desirable retrieval because: 'Community offers people what neither society nor the state can offer: a sense of belonging in an insecure world' (Delanty 2010: 155). Here the local acquires, as Massey (2005: 5-6) has suggested, a 'totemic resonance' as a place of safety and of real, authentic values. But it is not possible to return to the past of these photographs, even in Bolton, where the photographs were taken. The danger of nostalgia is, as Massey argues (2005: 124), that it 'articulates space and time in such a way that it robs others of their histories (their stories)'. If history always 'constitutes the relation between a present and its past' (Berger 1972: 11), how then can this photographic archive be used to constitute community in the multicultural Bolton of now?

THE WORKTOWN PHOTOGRAPHS AND MASS OBSERVATION

The contexts of this investigation are both particular and peculiar—both the Worktown photographs and the wider MO project hold unusual cultural resonance which extends beyond the local, and have drawn sustained academic interest since their critical 'rediscovery' in the 1970s. The Worktown photographs are iconic. They augured some of the most significant technological innovations in photography during the 20th century—the invention of rangefinder cameras, 35mm film and mass printing technologies which led to the development of mass-circulation photo magazines like *Picture Post*, *Life*, and *Drum*. As a result they are among the earliest examples of a style of documentary realism, resulting from these innovations, which would become a defining aesthetic of the 20th century, and have been understood as a British equivalent to the photographs taken by the Farm Security Administration in the USA (see for example Samuel 1994; Westerbeck and Meyerowitz 1994).

Through these associations the Worktown images have been interpreted as exemplary social documentary photographs, and in this way the history of the photographs has also become a history of the development and preoccupations of photographic theory. In particular critical discourse has drawn on the privileged background of Spender and other observers to interpret the Worktown photographs as a type of 'covert pastoralism' (Roberts 1998: 62)—the privileged gaze of the elite on to the working class 'other' acting as a form of social regulation and subjugation. But the narrow interpretation of the Worktown photographs as an act of

vision, limits the creative potential that they retain to constitute new forms of community. Here I argue that this critique has been developed in theory in response to edited selections of the photographs, and suggest instead that we should expand this interpretation by examining the material contexts of the archive more closely, and considering ‘the generative act of photography itself’ (Edwards 2014: 179) as a relational process which constitutes community in response to place.

The Worktown photographs are also culturally significant through the circumstances of their creation as part of the activities of MO. The founding principle of the organisation — the idea that the media is controlled by powerful elites who ignore the opinions, experience and suffering of the common people—is resonant in any age, and the unusual history of the organisation is a compelling narrative of the social and cultural forces at work in the 1930s. The written materials collected by MO now form a unique archive of everyday life, held at the University of Sussex, and provide a source for research across a wide range of academic disciplines. As this research is focused on the Worktown photographs, rather than the history of MO it does not seek to replicate existing studies of MO (see for example Hinton 2013; Hubble 2006; Highmore 2002; Jeffery 1999; Calder and Sheridan 1984; Stanley 1981). Yet as the discourse of power and representation which gathered around the Worktown photographs in the 1970s has also influenced critical responses to the wider MO project (Hubble 2006; Highmore 2002) this research contributes to the development of this discourse, by expanding the interpretation of the Worktown photographs.

PHOTOGRAPHY: KNOWLEDGE THROUGH PRACTICE

This thesis uses photography as a method of understanding and responding to the Worktown archive. As a photographer I understand photographs through practical processes, and therefore draw on an experience which runs counter to the dominant interpretation of photographs as visual images. I first encountered the Worktown photographs in 2009, when I was awarded the Humphrey Spender John Marriott Scholarship to create a series of photographs in response to them, which documented holidays in Bolton (Figs. 1.2-1.3). Photographing life in the town over the course of a year was an intensely physical and social experience, which involved walking for miles, serendipitous encounters, and conversations with lots of different people and groups in the community. It was a process which emphasised the ways in which Spender’s photographs were still ingrained in the physical and cultural landscape of the town—people talked to me about the photographs, and I encountered locations where they had been taken.



1.2 Children perform a nasheed during a community celebration of Eid al-Adha, 2009, Caroline Edge

1.3 Fun fair at Bonfire Night celebrations, Leverhulme Park, 2009, Caroline Edge

But this type of photography, based in the direct observation of everyday life, resists academic classification and interpretation. As photographer Paul Graham (2010) has commented: 'photography for and of itself – photographs taken from the world as it is – are misunderstood as a collection of random observations and lucky moments, or muddled up with photojournalism, or tarred with a semi-derogatory 'documentary' tag'. Therefore, one of the main problems of this research has been finding ways to theorise the, often intuitive processes, of photography and creative practice and the forms of knowledge produced through these processes. Translating photography into words is impossible; as Thompson has observed: 'Creative work in the visual arts starts with material and is consecrated in a pre-linguistic moment' (Thompson 2005: 224-5). Yet photography may be understood as a form of knowledge in, and of itself – for example Szarkowski (1988: 40) has argued that the photographs of Gary Winogrand 'were not illustrations of what he had known but were new knowledge' which 'had to be discovered through experiment and the play of intuition and luck'. The difficulty lies in articulating this as knowledge in the context of academic research, particularly as it is 'emergent, rather than prefigured or planned' (Schneider and Wright 2013: 1).

In attempting to express these personal beliefs I have drawn particularly on ideas informed by anthropological perspectives – that is by thinking about photography and photographs as part of material culture. Batchen (2008: 128) observes: 'Images are created for some purpose. Images do things. They are social objects, not simply aesthetic ones. They are meaningful only when seen in relationship to a wider social network of beliefs and practices, economics and exchanges'. Visual anthropology places photography in a global context, enabling an expanded understanding of the meaning of images. As Banks and Zeitlyn (2015: 8-9) have argued, Euro-American culture has privileged vision over other senses, but this emphasis has led to a containment of the visual which is 'largely effected by language, by placing the visual and visible aspects of culture within a language-based discourse that has primacy'. For example, drawing on understandings of images developed in India, Melanesia and Russia enables Pinney (2004: 8) to develop an alternative 'notion of "corporetics" – embodied, corporeal aesthetics- as opposed to 'disinterested' representation, which over-cerebralizes and textualizes the image'.

In this way the work of visual anthropologists has developed a sensory account of photographic meaning: as Pink (2011: 602) suggests:-

Photographs are the outcomes of multisensory contexts, encounters, and

engagements. The act of taking a photograph involves the convergence of a range of different social, material, discursive, and moral elements in a multisensory environment, rather than being a solely visual process. Likewise its presentation in a public domain involves much more than simply visual representation.

By drawing on ideas of place, developed through a common basis in phenomenology, this scholarship provides a theoretical basis for understanding in practice how the Worktown photographs embody community memory through their physical relationships with Bolton. Here de Certeau's intertwining paths of people walking in the city (1988: 93), Ingold's concept of place as a meshwork of lines (Ingold 2007) and Massey's (2005: 151) understanding of place as event—'an ever-shifting constellation of trajectories'—inform Edwards' (2014: 181) assertion that photography 'implies a bodily connection with the landscape' and Pink's (2015:49) account of a sensory ethnography in which the embodied experience of the researcher produces 'emplaced' knowledge. As a photographer my focus here is not on addressing the philosophical basis of this theory in, for example the work of Husserl or Merleau-Ponty, but on the knowledge produced through the experimental application of theory in practice.

EXPERIMENTAL ARCHIVES

This is an approach which interprets MO at the intersection of art and anthropology, and acknowledges the experimental, creative impulses at work in the production of the Worktown archive. MO's collaborative, interdisciplinary, experimental research methods have been interpreted and critiqued as a type of surreal ethnography (Highmore 2002; MacClancy 1995). This research returns to this idea in response to current exchanges between ethnographic research methods and collaborative arts practice (Hjorth and Sharp 2014; Bishop 2012; Kester 2011; Bourriaud 2002 [1998]) and the ideas that emerge concerning the relationships of place, community and photography. By examining how MO's visual research methods may be reinterpreted in practice, I also seek to restore them to the history of such practices. The limiting definition of the photographs as social documentary and an academic mistrust of Surrealism has obscured how many of the strategies deployed during the organisation's early incarnation are now common practice in social science research: documentary photography, repeat photography, drawing, data visualisation, the collection and interpretation of found visual materials, visual elicitation. The types of research contexts in which MO applied these methods – studies of everyday life, urban and domestic spaces, attitudes to culture— again reflect contemporary applications. Yet MO is not

afforded the same status as Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead's later photographic study of Balinese culture (1942) or John Collier's work on the use of photography as a method in anthropology (Collier and Buitrón 1949, Collier 1967), and is largely absent from histories of visual methodologies (see for example Rose 2016; Banks and Zeitlyn 2015; Margolis and Pauwels 2011).

The future potential of MO's collaborative methods has been massively expanded by the development of digital technologies which have democratised the way we share, access and interpret archives. Digital imaging has altered photographic meaning: 'Electronic information is subject to new methods of ordering and management, but also new modes of access and interaction between other kinds of archive, or information' (Cross and Peck 2010: 132). This has led to the evolution of projects such as *Photogrammar* (2014), a web-based platform for searching the FSA photographic archive, developed by Yale University. The website incorporates experimental tools for visualising the photographic archive through mapping, metadata and classifications. The Museum of London's free *Streetmuseum* application for mobile phones, also changes the sensory experience of photographs, connecting them with place, by overlaying historical images when the phone camera views the present day location of the photographs. By changing the ways we access photographs, digital processes can change how we think about photographs. The digitisation of photographs by the Smithsonian Institution revealed that photography was ingrained in all disciplines across multiple collections, prompting curators to think about 'the medium's active role in our lives and world' (Heiferman 2012: 15) rather than defining photographs according to their status as art or history. In response to this insight the *Photography Changes Everything* project drew together personal testimonies of how photography had changed the life or professional field of people from a wide range of backgrounds and revealed that 'far from being a passive recording technology, photography is catalytic' (Heiferman 2012: 17). In practice these new ways of working, and creating public engagement, with museum archives demonstrate a theoretical shift, from thinking about the work of photographs in museums through critical responses to image content, to exploring photographic meaning through social, cultural and institutional processes (Edwards and Morton 2015: 4).

RESEARCH AIMS AND THESIS STRUCTURE

Through this critical appraisal and in practice this research aims to use photographic methods to address the following questions:

What are the historical, critical, material and social processes by which the Worktown archive constitutes community in relation to place?

How can understanding how this photographic archive constitutes community inform new ways of interpreting, accessing and using it collaboratively in practice?

How can the forms of knowledge generated through responding to the archive photographically be understood and interpreted as forms of community engagement?

Through this exploration the research raises and addresses wider questions concerning the role of photographic archives in constituting community, how we may mediate between the performance of the photographs in academic and community contexts, how digital technology affects the ways in which communities access and use photographic archives and the value of creative and experimental responses in expanding the productive potential of photographic archives.

Chapter 1 examines the critical and cultural history of the Worktown photographs. It asks how the photographs have been interpreted in academic contexts, the means by which these interpretations have been prompted and facilitated, and how these interpretations relate to the function and future potential of the photographs in relation to the local community in Bolton.

Chapter 2 develops a parallel history of the Worktown photographs through the material analysis of the archive as a local museum archive and in relation to their intrinsic connection with Bolton as a geographically located place. This research informed the development of a practical project, in collaboration with Bolton Museum and the local community, which used photographic methods and digital technologies to document the Worktown photographs and find their locations in the contemporary landscape of the town. This chapter critically appraises how this process informed the development of an exhibition and digital archive of the Worktown photographs (www.boltonworktown.co.uk).

Chapter 3 explores how MO's use of photography in research may be reinterpreted as a contemporary method of community engagement through the development of a collaborative photography project with young people in Bolton. This chapter examines how collaborative photography methodologies produce evidence of community engagement

and empowerment, in relation to the political co-option of community as a policy of social integration and considers how the processes of collaborative photography manifest community engagement in relation to the contingencies of place.

Chapter 4 is an account of the *Worktown Observation Centre*, an experimental and collaborative re-enactment of MO's study of everyday life in Bolton as a mass street photography project. This project may be understood as a practical conclusion to the research drawing together recursive, surreal and sensory ethnographies which emerged through the preceding practical and theoretical investigations in order to consider how accessing and interpreting the Worktown archive as emplaced produces new forms of experiential knowledge of the relationships between past and present communities.

The final chapter, **Conclusions**, summarises the methodological and theoretical approaches of this research in order to consider how it contributes to the development of academic knowledge and to suggest potential theoretical and practical expansions.

1. THE WORKTOWN PHOTOGRAPHS: HISTORIES, CONTEXTS AND POTENTIAL

This chapter examines the critical history of the Worktown photographs. It focuses on a substantial body of literature, relating to both the photographs and MO, which demonstrates the enduring cultural influence of the photographs beyond their role as a local museum archive. My analysis of this literature is structured around three contexts in which meaning has been particularly ascribed to the photographs – the context of their production during MO's Worktown study (in the late 1930s), the rediscovery and critique of the photographs as social documentary (in the 1970s) and the reappraisal of MO as an experimental, surreal ethnography (in the 1990s). In this history I will examine how these interpretations inform contemporary academic perspectives on the Worktown photographs and consider the means by which these readings are facilitated—the technical characteristics of the photographs, the circumstances of their reproduction, the currents of academic trends, their function as historical documents. How do these academic interpretations relate to the functions and meanings of the photographs in the context of Bolton's local community and how can the shifting function of the photographs over time and space inform practical strategies for understanding and developing their relationship with this local community?

It is clear throughout their history that the Worktown photographs retain an energy which continues to shape their function and interpretation. The photographs have always functioned at the vanguard of culture—for example the use of photography in the Worktown study pre-empted the visual dominance of a social documentary aesthetic in photography in the mass media of 20th century Britain. Accordingly the historical trajectory of the photographs has coincided with what David Bate has termed 'outbreaks of theory' (Bate 2016: 12). In particular in the 1970s the rediscovery of the photographs helped to enable the development of photographic theory, provoking discourse around photography's function in society and institutional role in shaping our shared perception of history and community. It is impossible to ignore the legacy of these influential ideas in any critical account of the Worktown photographs, as they have informed a predominant interpretation of both the photographs and the wider MO project which has passed into mainstream culture. Clearly such critiques must inform the theoretical basis of this research, as I aim to explore the relationships between the Worktown photographs and the local community.

Yet as the photographs were theorised their academic interpretation became increasingly abstracted from their relationships with, and the meanings they held in Bolton. The discourse on representation and power which gathered round the photographs has formed a block to ways of thinking about their potential more expansively and progressively. Therefore the final section of this essay explores how the Worktown photographs may be understood as productive 'ways of doing history' rather than passive historical 'sources' (Edwards 2010: 27). This section considers ways of accessing the photographs as part of a surreal ethnography through material and sensory engagement with the Worktown archive, and asks how these understandings may enable the development of theoretically informed practical strategies for working with and through the photographs in the local community of Bolton. Is it possible to harness and reactivate the original creative impulses bound up in the Worktown photographs?

1. MASS OBSERVATION: CONTEXTS OF PRODUCTION

I begin by considering the contexts of production—how and why were the Worktown photographs taken? Although the limits of an intentional analysis are evident, here I wish to suggest, as other writers before me (see for example Walker 2007; Hubble 2006; Highmore 2002), that the photographs (as part of the wider activities of MO) have a latent energy ingrained in the circumstances of their creation. It is, in any case, probably impossible to entangle the intended functions of photography within MO's wildly disparate and highly experimental research activities. The photographs have multiple sites of meaning—as Langford has observed, any 'close reading of a photograph is like a stone dropped in a pond, with its ever expanding inclusions, occlusions, and allusions' (2001: 4) and MO similarly resists singular definitions. Mellor suggested, for example, that MO 'was an episode that can perhaps be understood as a complex of contemporary forces: populism, statistical social surveys, Surrealism, naïve Realism, anthropology, investigative reportage and Documentary impulses' (Mellor 1997 [1978]: 134). Similarly historian Samuel Hynes characterised MO through a series of dualisms: 'it was at once literary and scientific, realist and surrealist, political and psychological, Marxist and Freudian, objective and salvationist' (Hynes 1976: 279). This inherent mutability may be traced through the history of MO. Over time the organisation has shape-shifted in response to cultural forces. The original organisation was co-opted to the Ministry of Information at the outbreak of World War 2, became a market research company in the 1950s, was revived as a life history project in 1981 and is now an internationally renowned archive of everyday life held at Sussex University. As Highmore has

commented MO exists 'on the fault-line between science and art, objectivity and subjectivity, rationalism and irrationalism' and as a result 'there is something necessarily unstable about the project' (Highmore 2002: 77).

The difficulty of reading MO's intentions is exacerbated by the organisation's lack of hypothesis. In MO's manifesto co-founders Charles Madge and Tom Harrison proclaimed that: 'Our first concern is to collect data, not to interpret them' (Madge and Harrison 1937: 34). This focus on collecting information was, as Nick Stanley astutely observed, 'a method not a theory' (Stanley 1981: 264). This method essentially consisted of using every method participants could think of, including but by no means limited to:- participant observation, following people and writing down what they did, writing down overheard conversations, dream diaries, poetry, gathering of statistics through counts, drawing, painting, making collages and art. The interdisciplinary marriage of science and art, subjectivity and objectivity in MO was reflected in the various backgrounds of the participants which were as disparate as these methods: observers in Bolton included local people, trained scientists, writers, students, poets, photographers and artists. MO intended that both untrained and trained observers would 'collaborate in building museums of sound, smell, foods, clothes, domestic objects, advertisements, newspapers, etc.' (Madge and Harrison 1937: 35).

This insistence on collecting data, seems to suggest that one of the main principles of MO was realism, a belief that: 'the world was productive of facts and that those facts could be communicated to others in a transparent way, free of the complex codes through which narratives are structured.' (Price: 90). Yet any reading of MO must also account for the continual reflexive negotiation of mass and individual, and subjectivity and objectivity within the project. Madge noted that it was 'left to any member of the group to draw his own implications [about the purpose of MO]' (Madge 1937b). So we may read, for example, Harrison's obsession with collecting facts as a 'relentless empiricism' (Hinton 2013: 31), or Spender's self-avowed desire to 'expose truths' (Spender 1982: 16) as evidence of humanistic social concern. But according to the logic of MO, we can no more assume that any participant held the capacity to understand what they were actually doing, than they did of the people they observed, hence the emphasis on observing rather than interviewing. Yet, as Highmore (2002: 78) has argued, subsequent critical interpretations of MO have 'tended to reinforce and fix one side of the dynamic that the project tried to negotiate'. In re-examining the contexts in which Spender took the Worktown photographs I wish to consider why they have been predominantly interpreted as an attempt to document 'truth' and explore the creative potential of this unstable dynamic.

VISUAL RESEARCH METHODS IN THE WORKTOWN STUDY

It is a little easier to draw out the intended function of photography in MO by examining the organisation's practical application of visual research methods during the Worktown study. Although Humphrey Spender has become known as *the* MO photographer (see for example Meyerowitz and Westerbeck 1994: 192) he was not the only photographer in Worktown. Artists Humphrey Jennings, Julian Trevelyan and Michael Wickham also photographed (and produced paintings) during their visits to the town, and painters William Coldstream and Graham Bell made studies of the townscape. Although Spender's photographs are the main holding in the Worktown archive, the collection also includes paintings, collages, prints and a sketchbook. These artefacts are now held together as a fine art collection, but to an extent this classification obscures the dual function of photography in the Worktown study as both art and science.

As a method, photography so perfectly reflected the inherent dualism of MO, and in particular the tension between art and science, that it became (and remains) a metaphor for the project:-

The Observers are the cameras with which we are trying to photograph contemporary life. The trained observer is ideally a camera with no distortion. Mass-Observation has always assumed that its untrained Observers would be subjective, each with his or her own individual distortion. They tell us not what society is like, but what it looks like to them. (Harrisson and Madge 1938)

MO's manifesto proposed that cameras could be used as 'scientific instruments of precision', suggesting that they were objective recording devices (Madge and Harrisson 1937: 35). But simultaneously this manifesto admitted the artistic function of photography, and accorded artists the status of visionaries able to illuminate the confusion of society:- 'whenever it becomes historically necessary for man to view the world in a new way, artists will arise who are sensitive to the change and will display to man the world which science will then proceed to classify and interpret' (Madge and Harrisson 1937: 26-27). Artists were to be regarded as 'experts in the conscious use of images' which were defined as being: 'something between an idea and a sensation. It is more vivid than an abstract idea; it is more intangible than a concrete sensation ... Pictures have this power of suggesting images; so have words. For example: A HOUSE WITH BROKEN WINDOWS' (Madge and Harrisson 1937: 38). MO wanted to use such 'images' to reveal the unconscious desires of both the individual and the mass – participant observers were to receive training in order to strengthen their imagination and

receptivity to images.

There is a clear relationship between these ideas, and those developed by Walter Benjamin in the same era. As Highmore has observed 'such an understanding of "the image" connects powerfully to Benjamin's notion of the "dialectical image" as a dynamic moment capable of interrupting historical narrative of progress' (Highmore 2002: 93). The idea of the 'image' reflects a shared understanding of the interrelationship of magic and technology. MO's manifesto suggested that: 'the steam railway, the spinning jenny, electric power, photography, have had so great an impact on mental and physical behaviour that we are barely conscious of it' (Madge and Harrison 1937: 15). In relationship to the nature of photography, Benjamin similarly observes that : 'a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye – if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man' (Benjamin 1999 [1936]). As Pinney has argued 'Benjamin wants to place magic and technology on the same spectrum, the one fading into the other, and each having the potential to erupt into each other's time' (2011: 13). The same impulse is evident in the original activities of MO – the desire to examine the 'irrational residue' of superstition as manifested within modern society through 'such phenomena as the collective image, the coincidence and all manifestations of art not fully socially responsible' (Madge 1937a: 36). In practical terms MO's use of visual research methods were not confined to the collection of visual information but encompassed a series of experimental investigations into the nature of media, audience, and creativity.

In particular the ability to communicate research findings rapidly, and in plain language through the new mass paperback editions was of central importance to the organisation. Tom Harrison, was an early adept of media promotion; he deliberately seeded one of the defining images of MO as covert surveillance in a *Daily Mirror* article illustrated with an image of an observer, eye pressed to keyhole noting down other people's business (Fig. 1.1). Similarly the few contemporary publications of Spender's photographs show Harrison experimenting with different strategies to explore photography's potential for mass communication. In *Geographical Magazine* Spender's photographs of Blackpool are used primarily as illustrations with jaunty captions alongside the images (Harrison 1938a). In contrast in one the earliest uses of the photographs they are deployed as visual propaganda against the Conservative party in Bolton's Labour newsletter, *The Citizen* (Fig. 1.2). MO's explorations extended to the nature of creative process. For example Harrison investigated public perceptions of contemporary art by asking four artists to paint pictures of Bolton, and then showing photographs of these paintings to people in the town in order to



find out ‘What they think in “Worktown”’ (Harrison 1938b). Artist Julian Trevelyan was also asked by Harrison to create his art works in public places in Bolton - a performance of the act of creating ‘images’ through public observation:-

I carried a large suit-case full of newspapers, copies, of Picture Post, seed catalogues, old bills, coloured bills and other scraps, together with a pair of scissors, a pot of gum and a bottle of indian ink.... It was awkward, sometimes, in a wind, when my little pieces would fly about, and I was shy of being watched at it; but it was a legitimate way, I think of inviting the god of Chance to lend a hand in painting my picture. (Trevelyan 1957: 85)

In this account the act of creative observation becomes a social and surreal event. Trevelyan’s personal expression as a self-avowed Surrealist is clear, but also illustrates the consistent thread running through MO’s operations in the idea of the serendipitous ‘image’, and in the suggestion that the collection and creation of such images—the self-expression of art—could release the repressed consciousness of the public masses.

This idea is similarly evident in the visual artefacts collected by the Worktown study - for example, in the collection of children’s drawings (Figs. 1.3-1.4), or Spender’s photographs of graffiti (Figs. 1.5-1.6). The Worktown observers also took a great interest in the ‘unprofessional painting’ of a group of miners in Ashington, Northumberland (who have become known as the Pitmen Painters). Participants from the Worktown study visited the group and organised an Unprofessional Painting exhibition. This fascination with the artistic expression of working class people, making their ‘livings by the ordinary jobs of industrial civilization’ (Harrison: 1938c) suggests what Foster has termed a ‘*primitivist fantasy*’ (Foster 1995: 303). Here the oppressed working class ‘Other’ is seen to have ‘access to primal psychic and social processes from which the white (petit) bourgeois subject is blocked’ (Foster 1995: 303). This type of interpretation subsequently became the predominant critique of MO, following the rediscovery of Spender’s photographs in the 1970s.

Yet the Worktown photographs may be seen to exemplify the privileged gaze of an individual; despite MO’s interest in the public’s creative self-expression, I have found no evidence of any attempts to develop a mass photography involving the general public during the Worktown project. This may have been due to the financial costs of photography at the time – only the rich elite had access to the type of rangefinder cameras used by the visiting observers in 1930s Bolton. Spender’s expensive camera appeared to be an ‘almost sci-fi contraption’, and marked him out as a privileged stranger in the town (Spender 1987). It is, however,

the specific capacities of this camera that informed Spender's methods of photographing everyday life in Bolton and subsequently informed both the uses and critical interpretations of the Worktown photographs: any analytical reading of the Worktown photographs must therefore examine the nature of Spender's act of photography.

THE ACT OF PHOTOGRAPHY

The Worktown photographs were taken at a time when innovations in camera technology and mass printing revolutionised photography. The historical and cultural importance of the photographs is intrinsically linked to the development of small 35mm cameras (in particular rangefinder cameras), fast film emulsions and mass-circulation photo magazines, like *Life* and *Picture Post* (where Spender was the first staff photographer). The impact of these changes altered the physical and temporal nature of photography, creating new ways of taking and distributing photographs. In contrast to the single photograph and static viewpoint of large format cameras, photographs taken with rangefinder cameras mirror the physical movements of the photographer and are part of a sequence of images. In photo magazines these capacities informed the function of photography as reportage; an eyewitness account told as a story through sequences of photographs laid out as page spreads.

Spender primarily used a Contax II rangefinder camera (Fig.1.7) with a Biogon wide angle lens to photograph for MO. In a 1970s interview he recalls using the characteristics of this camera to capture naturalistic photographs of people - for example pretending to photograph something else and then turning around at the last minute, or concealing his camera at waist height underneath a raincoat (In Fig 1.7 you can see that the camera has been fitted with two straps so it can be operated at different heights). The Biogon wide angle lens was capable of a great depth of focus. By pre-setting focus Spender was able to take photographs which contained a lot of information in the frame- that is to say that they are of an intended subject but also invoke photography's characteristic excess. So while the Worktown photographs 'signal an ostensibly straightforward objective: to convey content first and foremost' (Curzon 2011: 316) they are simultaneously more. Spender's camera could, for example, take photographs at a shutter speed of 1/1250 second, freezing a fraction of time previously unseen by the human eye and seemingly disrupting the surface of reality - Benjamin's 'optical unconsciousness'. Spender sought to use this quality by using his camera to become an 'invisible spy'. He believed that he should obtain more 'truthful' photographs if people did not react to his camera. Yet this was, he recalled, 'an impossibility which I didn't particularly enjoy trying to achieve' (Spender 1982: 16).

Although Harrisson offered some directions about what Spender should photograph, this was suggestive rather than prescriptive, reflecting MO's paradigm of subjective objectivity:-

there was a daily session which usually took the form of Tom seizing about half a dozen national newspapers, reading the headlines, getting us laughing and interested, and quite on the spur of the moment, impulsively, hitting on a theme that he thought would be productive. For instance, how people hold their hands, the number of sugar lumps that people pop into their mouths in restaurants... Anything. Every day started with a kind of lead, and then you were working on your own, and one thing led to another. (Spender 1982: 15)

In the resulting negatives Harrisson's direction is evident; their primary content roughly correlates to thematic strands within the Worktown study and the subject matter of planned publications. There are photographs of pubs, leisure, politics, work, sport, shopping. But viewing the photographs as sequences of images, according to the order they were taken in on 35mm films, reveals a different logic at work in the act of photography. These sequences trace a series of meandering journeys through the physical landscape of Bolton, as Spender wandered the streets looking for photographs. So here intimations of both documentary and surrealism are bound up together in the images, revealed according to the context in which they are read. In the first reading they are realist, an attempt to collect information, in the second they are surreal, Spender as flâneur seeking moments of photographic serendipity. Yet the predominant interpretation of the Worktown photographs has constituted them as exemplary social documentary photographs, despite the evident traces of other impulses ingrained in the material form of the negatives.

Through a definition as social documentary, the Worktown photographs have faced a damning critique. Indeed, as Hubble has observed, the photographs have also drawn criticism to the wider operations of MO (and qualitative sociology in general) as a form of 'sociological voyeurism' (Hubble 2006: 139). A defining image has emerged of Spender stalking the natives in a grubby mackintosh, stealing snapshots of their lives with a hidden camera: 'The point of view was covert: that of the voyeur, the eavesdropper who overheard and oversaw' (Mellor 1997: 137). As Highmore (2002: 78) has argued this has become a dominant critical narrative:-

Most frequently asserted is the idea that Mass-Observation continues the kind of social exploration practised in the nineteenth century, where the "scientific" objectifying gaze, which had been aimed at colonized cultures, was turned towards the bodies and everyday life of the poor

and marginalized who live in the physical centre of Western metropolitan society.

Yet, as Walker has observed, this reading has been perpetuated through the limited evidence of edited selections of Spender's photographs in publication (Walker 1998: 117). If we examine the photographs in the Worktown archive holistically they provide evidence to both support and counter this interpretation. There are photographs evidently taken from a concealed viewpoint; Spender peering from behind a post, snatching a shot of a conversation from a parked car (Figs. 1.8-1.10). There are also many photographs where people look directly into the camera, sometimes in surprise, sometimes smiling (Fig. 1.11). Here rather than reading the photographs as Spender's gaze on to the impoverished, working class other we may, as Banks has suggested, see the act of photography as a collaborative act involving a 'a series of social negotiations' (Banks 2001: 119). In the next chapter I will develop this holistic analysis of the archive by examining the material evidence of the negatives in detail, a process which reflects how photographs may function as 'socially salient objects, as active and reciprocal rather than simply implications of authority, control and passive consumption on the one hand, or of aesthetic discourses and the supremacy of individual vision on the other' (Edwards and Hart: 2004: 15). Here, however, in the following section I will continue to concentrate on the critical history of the Worktown photographs and interpretations which have been primarily, and mostly erroneously, informed by visual content analysis.

2. THE CRISIS OF SOCIAL DOCUMENTARY

The interpretation of Spender's Worktown photographs as an early example of social documentary photography draws primarily on the evidence of visual content and historical context. They are, like most photographs, a '*kind* of documentary' in the sense that they are a direct transcription of whatever was in front of the lens when the film was exposed (Price 2000: 69). This capacity to 'trace' reality directly suggests that photographs are a type of 'truth' (Sontag 2002: 154). As I have previously outlined, this seeming 'truth' was emphasised through the technical characteristics of Spender's camera and disseminated as popular culture in the form of photo magazines. The Worktown photographs helped to define the aesthetic of social documentary; black and white photographs, slightly grainy, shot from the hip, eyewitness.

However the term social documentary extends beyond the visual aesthetic, to place the Worktown photographs in a tradition of social reform. The term 'documentary' was first





Opposite page, clockwise from top left:

1.8 Group of women outside post office photographed from a car, Humphrey Spender, 1937-8

1.9 Blackpool promenade from a concealed viewpoint, Humphrey Spender, 1937

1.10 Shoppers at quack medicine stall, Bolton open air market, Humphrey Spender, 1937-8

This page:

1.11 Montage of people looking straight at Spender's camera lens, details from Worktown photographs

coined by film-maker John Grierson in the 1920s. Grierson, who ran the GPO Film Unit, thought of documentary practice as an educational project which, through the naturalistic depiction of everyday life, would lead to 'the creation of a socially inclusive humanism' (Roberts 1998: 60). Some of the Mass Observers had direct professional connections with Grierson; for example Humphrey Jennings worked for the GPO Film Unit and Spender made an unsuccessful application to work there as a stills photographer. There has a retrospective shared association of purpose, between Grierson's project and MO, leading to the latter being regarded as 'the focus and climax of 1930s Documentary in Britain' (Mellor 1997: 134). The Worktown photographs may appear to correspond to the aims of Grierson's documentary project, but this of course depends on the context of the reading. The photographs may easily be presented, and read, as a humanistic account of the havoc wrought on working class communities in the North of England by the global depression of the 1930s: 'disused factories with forlorn figures, empty streets, children playing in rubbish, houses in severe disrepair, dreary vistas, the crisis of capitalism were rendered as the demise of shared values' (Roberts 1998: 64).

This association fits MO, and Spender's photographs into what Batchen has termed 'a coherently linear narrative' of modern art history: 'in general the art history of photography celebrates singular achievements and their moment of origin, so that even objects having multiple manifestations and meanings are treated as unique and individual events' (Batchen 2008: 125). This is to say much of what has subsequently been written about the Worktown photographs, and the wider MO project, centres on the backgrounds, influences, intentions and achievements of remarkable individuals. The critique of Spender's Worktown photographs as documentary, whether warmly assessing his 'exceptional contributions to the genre' (Frizzell 1997: 9) or problematizing the images as 'a colonial-bourgeois gaze on to the anthropological other' (Evans 1997: 145), centres on Spender's personal characteristics and achievements within a modern tradition.

As I have previously argued (Edge 2015), the critique of the Worktown photographs as social documentary has been particularly shaped by the evidence of two publications: *Camerawork* (No.11, 1978) and *Worktown People*. Although MO planned to use Spender's photographs in four books informed by the Worktown research, the onset of World War II intervened. Only one book was published (*The Pub and the People*) and cost prohibited the inclusion of photographs. Spender's images were never used as intended, and remained in obscurity until they were rediscovered in the 1970s by David Alan Mellor, who was in charge of organising the MO Archive following its donation to Sussex University. In 1977 Mellor worked with

photographer Derek Smith to curate the first exhibition of Worktown photographs in the Gardner Centre at the University of Sussex, and the following year contributed to a special MO themed edition of *Camerawork* (1978). In a series of essays this publication initiated the critique of Spender's photographs as social documentary and a form of surveillance, and, as Evans (1997: 146) has observed, pre-empted the influence of Foucault on photographic theory and the development of a hegemonic 'radical Left critique of documentary'.

The magazine *Camerawork*, which was published by the Half Moon Photography Workshop, was central to the development of photographic theory in the 1970s, drawing on the techniques of semiotic analysis in response to debates emerging from cultural politics. The pre-existing 'theory' of photography, which was centred on practical techniques and technologies, was replaced with a 'theory' which examined how photography functioned as a 'practice of *signification*' (Burgin 1982: 2). This process moved critical analysis beyond the image level of photographs (and the notion of the 'good eye') to consider how the contexts in which they were produced and presented constructed meaning. Through this analysis photography was theorised 'as complicit in the discourses which function to exert social control' (Price 2000: 105). Emerging debates within the new theory of photography questioned the nature of photographic truth, the construction of documentary realism and the forces exerted by 'privileged ideological apparatuses' such as state archives on these meanings (Tagg 1982: 117).

Within this analytical framework Spender's Worktown photographs could not be understood as 'truthful' information, but rather were read as a mediated representation of the past. Don Macpherson's (1997 [1978]: 147) essay in *Camerawork* established the terms of this discourse, questioning:

Looking at these images from Mass Observation the question must be asked—what is at stake politically in our fascination with these dead images? It would be merely cynical to leave them as either a spectacle of the past, or another chapter in art history. Now, as then, the images and texts of Mass Observation form vital parts in the memory-image of the British nation, and together they demand serious questions about the terms which relate photography to a politics of representation

Macpherson interrogated the role of Spender's photographs in supporting social hierarchies, and their contribution to the development of a "'national" aesthetic of "realism"' (1997 [1978]: 147). His focus, therefore, was on the institutions which enabled the photographs to gather cultural resonance as images of the 'ebb and flow of a mythical past' (1997 [1978]:

145). He suggested that the function of the photographs as a mechanism of ideological control was not fixed, questioning whether it was possible to 'return to those images and reorder their economy?' (1997: 148). Yet as the photographs became more widely accessible through exhibitions and publications the ideas of a nascent theory of photography travelled with them and began to shed both the subtlety and cautious optimism of Macpherson's interpretation. As Burgin observed, although photographic theory is in essence an interdisciplinary project, there is a danger that misunderstandings arise through the process of 'simply *juxtaposing* one pre-existing discipline with another' (Burgin 1982: 2).

WORKTOWN PEOPLE

In interdisciplinary academic contexts Spender's photographs began to be critically evaluated as historical and cultural documents, and the critique of the photographs as ideologically charged representations began to become received wisdom in accounts of the Worktown study. This process was facilitated through the publication of *Worktown People: Photographs from Northern England 1938-38* in 1982. The book was part of a wider trend for 'rehabilitating old photographs' which occurred at this time in both academic and local histories (Sontag 2002: 71). The book included an edited selection of around one hundred of Spender's photographs which were thematically arranged (Street Life, Work, Sport, Parks, Drinking, Elections, Blackpool, Funeral) and presented with an introduction, interview with Spender and minimal captions. Although editor Jeremy Mulford was cautious in his presentation of the images, noting that it would be a 'major research enterprise' to document the photographs and warning against an impression of comprehensiveness in a 'reconstruction of a piece of the past' (Spender 1982: 9) criticism inevitably emerged based solely on the evidence of the book.

For example the historian Raphael Samuel found evidence in *Worktown People* to prove photographic 'entrapment'. His argument, that the photographs had become iconic visualisations of a false past, reframed photography's crisis of representation within a historiographical context. Yet while Samuel's argument relied on visual content he failed to interpret the specifics of the photographic medium. In stating a 'long shot of a woman whitening the doorstep has her face- and that of a watching child- a mere blur' (Samuel 1994: 331) he suggests the removal of identity but does not appreciate the technological limitations on Spender's photographs. It is apparent even in the reproduction on page fifty five of *Worktown People* that the negative is 'thin': in response to low light conditions Spender has had to push the limits of the film emulsion and print on high contrast paper,

resulting in an image where the faces are grainy rather than blurred. His analysis conflates working class experience even as he condemns Spender for doing the same, making all Northern towns the same town populated by a miserable working class 'gazing on life's meagre chances and going uncomprehendingly about their daily tasks' (Samuel 1994: 325). For further example, as his argument drew on incorrect factual information from *Worktown People* he has assumed photographs of 'whippet-like men' watching greyhound racing taken in Ashington, were taken in Bolton. As Highmore has commented, in such arguments 'Bolton itself is not allowed to have any class complexity, being seen as made up entirely of workers with their 'flat caps or curlers' (Highmore 2002: 81). Samuel's interpretation typifies the theoretical dispersal of meaning from the photograph as archival object and the contexts of its production. The emphasis of his argument asserts a static function of the photographs as historical documents rather than considering their capacity to gather and shape new meanings and ideas now, or in the future.

In Bolton, of course the photographs were not constructed representations of a mythic past, but of *the* past. Through the publication of *Worktown People* the photographs returned to the town for the first time and began to be incorporated into local histories. Book shops in the town sold the book as a collection of 'old' photographs – naturally local people were more interested in how the images connected to their own experience than critiquing the contextual framework of MO's activities. The presentation of the photographs in a book gave authority and status to community memories. In an interview in January 2013 a Bolton resident explained how she first saw *Worktown People* after a neighbour brought it to her house (Shaw 2013). She immediately recognised herself and younger brother as the children sitting on the election cart in the photograph on page ninety nine, and her father leading the horse drawing the cart on the next photograph. She was pleased to see the photograph despite remembering nothing of the event, and joked that the book brought her: 'Fame at last!' As she had few photographs from her childhood (because of the expense of photography in the 1930s) she copied the photograph of her brother and her and kept it in a frame on her bedside table (Figs. 1.2-1.4).

A similar account of the local, domestic meanings of the photographs was evident in the comments posted on a slideshow of Spender's photographs on the Guardian's website in July 2013. One commenter's suggestion that: 'Spender's photographs are so patronising. They say "Oooh, look at the poor!"' was immediately refuted by another commenter with a personal connection to the photographs: 'Absolute rubbish. My Grandma appears on page 60 of *Worktown People*. No way was she being patronised. Spendor's [sic] photographs show it



Clockwise from top left:

1.12 Photograph of Annie Shaw as a child

1.13 Detail from photograph showing Annie Shaw and her brother on a cart during local council election in November 1937, Humphrey Spender

1.14 Annie Shaw with her framed copy of Spender's photograph, Caroline Edge, 2013

like it was'. The commenter went on to recall that: 'It was a wonderful time, a homogenous stable society, imbued with mutual trust, which I look back on with a pleasant warm glow of nostalgia'. Do such comments reveal the space between academic and local interpretations of the Worktown photographs, or do they provide evidence for the argument that these are constructed images of idealised past? As Evans (1997: 146) has questioned, is 'the only contemporary reading of these pictures that they produce a myth of a cohesive Englishness? Can they only ever be sources for nostalgia?'

Yet the nature of these engagements suggests, at the least, methods of moving from reactive to productive interpretations of the photographs. As the photographs are intertwined with the physical landscape and community memory of Bolton, their return to the town—even in the mediated form of reproductions—enables their function outside of institutional discourses, and a shift in the assumed power structures ascribed to the photographs. In such personal accounts the Worktown photographs are revealed as memories from personal histories rather than functioning as iconic representations of a shared history and national identity. This meaning is manifested through access to, and material engagement with, the photographs. The photographs become part of social processes through sharing and discussion, enabling memories and a sense of personal ownership within the community of the town. This is evident in both of these accounts although the online commenter refers to a digital reproduction. As Edwards has suggested digital photographs may be understood to have 'their own sets of embodied relations with a material culture' (Edwards 2005: 35). By responding to these insights and drawing on the material interrelationship of photographs, place and community the photographs may become more than merely 'sources for nostalgia' (Evans 1997: 146).

3. SURREAL ETHNOGRAPHIES

In the final section of this chapter I will trace the development of an alternative critical reading of the Worktown photographs— as a surreal ethnography. Although in 1937 MO's experimental research seemed to some commentators to be 'scientifically, about as valuable as a chimpanzee's tea party at the zoo' (Letter to *The Spectator* in 1937 quoted in Jeffery 1978), by the 1990s the interdisciplinary potential of MO's methodology began to gain scholarly credence, particularly within the field of anthropology. The aftermath of the crisis of representation prompted a shift from textual and comparative accounts of culture, provoking new explorations and reconsiderations of interdisciplinary research methods as 'a tightly defined scholastic community predominantly concerned with achieving a

methodological consensus' became a 'much more heterogeneous discipline relatively open to experiment' (MacClancy 1995: 510). In particular, as Pink has observed, mainstream anthropology responded to new theoretical developments relating to the body and phenomenology by developing new ways of representing culture through sensory embodied and visual accounts (Pink 2006: 14). These ideas mirrored a wider change in academic culture leading to the emergence of sub-disciplines such as everyday life studies and visual anthropology. Within these context the photographic and artistic practices that once seemed illustrational adjuncts to the flawed social science of MO became the focus of 'thriving interdisciplinary interest' (Pink 2006: 15) and the organisation's inherent subjectivities and eclectic methods received new interest as strategies to destabilize hegemonic narratives within history, culture, and academia. Therefore, drawing on these ideas (and particularly those emerging from current practice in visual anthropology) suggests both a theoretical framework for reinterpreting the Worktown photographs, and practical methods of working with the photographs and the local community.

In particular the methodological possibilities of MO were developed through anthropologist James Clifford's proposal of an ethnographic surrealism. Clifford suggested the potential of an 'ethnography as collage', a strategy to address the issues of power and representation which beset anthropological discourse. He outlined a methodology which would 'leave manifest the constructivist procedures of ethnographic knowledge; it would be an assemblage containing voices other than the ethnographer's, as well as examples of found evidence, data not fully integrated within the work's governing interpretation' (1991: 563-4). MacClancy (1993: 510) responded to this proposal by observing that such a project merely replicated the aims and insights of MO, and outlined the characteristics of this project as:

the creation of a plural text, the questioning of ethnographic authority, the recognition of the need for reflexivity, the realization of the subversive potential of anthropology, the irreducibly literary nature of ethnography, the study of Western industrialized societies and the recognition of the essentially contested nature of the codes and representations which compose culture.

Here MO may be seen to retain the potential of a surreal ethnography as enacted through the material practices of collage and collaboration. In MO these practices may afford, as Highmore has suggested, 'the most appropriate form for representing everyday life as the pell-mell of different worlds colliding' (Highmore 2002: 93). Highmore argued that MO's use of montage resulted in a 'critical totality of fragments' through which different representational modes could coexist without becoming a 'homogenous whole' (Highmore

2002: 93-94). Highmore suggests that the form of the MO archive as a collage of fragments affords three particular capacities: the shock or charge released when different fragments are brought together; the simultaneity of different temporalities, and the refusal of the archive to organize these fragments into 'resolved and meaningful unity' (Highmore 2002: 93-94).

However, Highmore has also argued that the Worktown study failed as a surreal ethnography because the published materials did not 'challenge the authoritative power of ethnography' (2002: 104-5). He suggests that the project may have been successful in this respect if it had continued to explore the 'more productive forms of presenting the material' such as 'a continuation of montage practice' (2002: 104), which are most clearly evident in MO's early publication, *May the Twelfth: Mass Observation Day Surveys*. This book recounts the coronation day of George VI through a collage of individual reports from hundreds of volunteer observers and newspaper clippings detailing the preparations for the event, and was edited by Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings. *May the Twelfth* is a divisive example of the influence of surrealism within MO among critics. In particular the artist Humphrey Jennings has come to personify the use of surreal strategies within MO and a similar strategy of montage is evident in his book *Pandæmonium*, but critical opinion is divided over the extent and relevance of his contribution to the organisation. Hinton, for example, has argued that Jennings was not a key figure in the organisation beyond his initial role in conceiving the project and editing *May the Twelfth* (Hinton 2014). Other writers (see for example Hubble 2014; Hubble 2006; Walker 2002) have emphasised the latent surrealism of MO—Hubble for example has argued that the 'modernist and poetic impulses' embodied by Jennings remained 'implicitly embedded' within the project after his departure (Hubble 2014). This idea of an ingrained energy within the MO archive is much more pertinent to the aims of this thesis—and the development of creative and practical research methods—than the impossible attempt to define exactly the influence of any individual within the organisation. In practice both MO's participatory methods and the resulting archive resist notions of singular authorship. The MO archive is collaborative, and this intrinsic nature is made evident through the active processes of accessing and interpreting its materials.

MATERIAL ENGAGEMENT

The understanding of the Worktown photographs as part of a surreal ethnography only becomes evident through the act of material engagement with the archive. Accessing the MO archive is, as Tormey has suggested, a form of montage: 'a methodology that resists definition, minimizes the author's voice and demands active participation of the reader/

viewer in response' (Tormey 2013: 219). As Pollen has similarly observed the retrieval and interpretation of the materials held in the MO archive resists any singular methodological approach. This, she suggests, is precisely the value of MO (Pollen 2013: 223-4):

it is the push and pull of singular and collective, part and whole, fragment and mass that makes MO so complex and so dynamic, along with its distinctive position as a historical research resource that so tantalisingly appears to offer both longitudinal and cross-sectional, quantitative and qualitative dimensions.

Exploring the materials collected during the Worktown study (within the MO archive) is an experience of strange juxtapositions and serendipitous discoveries – a finely sketched portrait on the back of an envelope, a promotional photograph of a wrestler, multiple hand and type written voices, municipal proceedings alongside children's drawings. The archive reflects the collaborative methods of its creation: although the materials within have been archived and organised through thematic strands, the sprawling and random nature of MO's interests resists the imposition of dominant narratives upon the archive.

Each encounter with the MO archive feels charged with the potential of new discoveries: the inherent subjectivity of MO makes each encounter with the archive a unique experience for the researcher. Moor and Uprichard (2014) have suggested that such subjective encounters are prompted by the sensual and material characteristics of the MO archive. They argue that it is as important for researchers to pay attention to the form as the content of information: to be aware of the 'materiality of method' throughout both the process of research and in the collection new data from respondents (Moor and Uprichard 2014: 2). This consideration, they suggest, is necessary to preserve the layers of meaning embodied in the material form of responses, particularly as the processes of accessing and contributing to the archive become increasingly digital.

How can we draw on these insights in relation to the Worktown photographs? The photographs are held in a separate archive housed at Bolton Museum, and the experience of accessing the photographs in this archive is not comparable to the process of researching in the MO archive. Although many of the visual materials created during the Worktown study, and held at Bolton Museum hold direct relationships with many of the (primarily textual documents) held in the MO archive there is a different rationale in organising and accessing a local museum's fine art collection. The material characteristics of the Worktown photographs differ substantially from the paper based artefacts held in the MO archive, and this affects

the processes of accessing and using the photographs in research; for example it is not possible for negatives to be removed from the temperature controlled store and handled directly because of their archival instability.

Perhaps most significantly, of course, the Worktown archive comprises visual images, not texts. Schwartz has argued using image based archives demands 'tailored visual, rather than hand-me-down textual approaches' (2004: 109). Such an approach, she suggests, must recognise that archivists 'not only acquire and preserve visual images; we also produce, manipulate, and disseminate them in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons' (2004: 110). Spender's photographs cannot be read in the same way as texts, without risking serious misinterpretations. The narrative history of the Worktown photographs as the privileged gaze of a poverty tourist or pioneering social documentary has been perpetuated by the presentation and selective reproduction of the photographs. Extending Schwartz's (2004: 110) observation 'that archivists can no longer naïvely collect, use, and create visual images as if we were neutral, detached observers', the same is clearly evident for anyone working with photographic archives. Researchers, curators, photographers also need to be aware that in working with historical photographs, and more particularly by making material interventions into photographic archives, they may alter, create, or distort meanings.

Recent scholarship in the history and theory of photography suggests that researchers should be sensitive to this potential meaning-making by paying attention to the unique characteristics of photographs as objects within material culture. As Edwards and Hart (2004: 1) have noted 'photographs are both images *and* physical objects that exist in time and space and thus in social and cultural experience'. This interpretation of photographs as visual and social objects reflects both the growing influence of ethnographic methods on photographic theory and the increasing adoption of visual research methods in the social sciences (see for example Edwards 2001; Pinney 1997; Chalfen 1987). Cultural geographer Gillian Rose (2016: 275) terms these photographic ethnographies a 'techno-anthropology'. She suggests that there are four elements of this type of critical method: the materiality of the visual object (what it is), performativity of the object (how the object intervenes in the world), the mobility of the object (how the object changes according to context), and the interpretation of the effect of the visual object by bringing together the first three elements (2016: 278-282). This approach to understanding photographic meaning, reiterates Moor and Uprichard's emphasis on the importance of material engagement with the MO archive, but suggests the development of a theoretical framework which reflects the particularities of the Worktown archive: an archive of photographic negative and prints, but also of other

types of visual artworks and textual information: a local museum archive, but also an archive of national historical importance.

Although there are no pre-existing studies using this method with the Worktown photographs, Anabella Pollen's account of researching into the related *One Day for Life* archive suggests strategies for approaching this task. The *One Day for Life* archive is a collection of photographs taken for a charity mass photography competition in 1987, and forms part of the MO archive's supplementary holdings. Drawing on anthropological approaches to photographs, Pollen (2016: 11) argues that thinking about what they are 'for' or 'do' is a more productive method of accessing photography archives than subject based quantitative analysis, which cannot account for the ambiguities and excess of photographs. In thinking about photographs as social objects they may then be understood as 'tangible and purposeful performances with work to do as well as images to show' (Pollen 2016: 13). This method suggests, as photo historian Edwards (2011: 47) has argued, a means to 'stop thinking of photographs and their archives simply as passive "resources" with no identity of their own' and instead understand them 'as actively "resourceful"—a space of creative intensity, of ingenuity, of latent energy, of rich historical force'. In this way, then, it may be possible to develop an interpretation of the Worktown photographs which productively integrates the creative energy of MO's archival intentions with their continuing role in the local community.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have considered the history of the Worktown photographs, examining the tensions between academic interpretations, and their physical and social relationships within Bolton. Through this history it becomes apparent that the received meanings of the Worktown photographs have been constructed within the contexts of their reproductions. The rediscovery and subsequent role of the photographs in shaping the development of photographic theory reveals interpretations developed in reaction to currents of academic thought. Here issues of access distort the interpretation and function of the photographs, theoretically abstracting them from their original contexts and dispersing the meaning ingrained in the photographs as archival objects. The resulting classification of the photographs as social documentary limits their capacity to exist simultaneously as multiple modes of representation. By outlining a history which explores the evolving role of the photographs in social and cultural processes plural meanings and functions are revealed. The photographs are social documents but also part of personal histories within Bolton: they

were created to be fragments of an experimental surreal archive, and retain this ideological potential.

The question then, is how to develop methods of accessing and interpreting the photographs which enable and harness the potential of this innate mutability. Shifting attitudes to the status of visual methods in research have prompted the reconsideration of MO's experimental interdisciplinary strategies and collaborative archive. Thinking about the Worktown photographs through material engagement provides a theoretical framework through which to understand and access the photographs as part of a surreal ethnography, tracing a circle back to the original impulses of the organisation, and the historic interrelationship of anthropology and art. In effect the means to 'reorder their economy' (Macpherson 1997: 147-8) has always remained within the photographs, ingrained through the contexts of their production, and their intended function in MO's collaborative museum. The following chapters explore how this ingrained potential may be reactivated through practical methods of working with the photographic archive. Responding to the Worktown archive photographically—through engaging with the photographs as material objects, drawing inspiration from the experimental use of visual research methods in MO and using photography as a creative strategy for connecting archive to place—enables the development of a framework for accessing and interpreting photographic archives in collaboration with communities.



2.1 Bob Harwood and Billy Doeg playing with other children on Davenport Street, September 1937, Humphrey Spender

2. DOCUMENTING THE WORKTOWN ARCHIVE

In late September 1937 Humphrey Spender returned from photographing a church harvest festival service to Mass Observation's headquarters at 85 Davenport Street in Bolton, Lancashire. He stopped at the junction of Davenport Street and Snowden Street and took two photographs of children playing outside Union Mill. The first photograph showed best friends Bob Harwood and Billy Doeg, playing with two other boys (Fig. 2.1). The exposure was made in a split second but 80 years later a connection between time and place remains inscribed on the photographic negative. As Sontag has observed 'a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real, it is also a trace, something directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask' (Sontag 2002: 154). Such 'traces' form tangible threads between past and present place. This chapter examines how, through the material analysis of the Worktown photographs, it is possible to pull on these threads and draw the photographs and community closer towards each other again.

It was apparent early in the development of this thesis, that although the Worktown photographs were regarded as having significant cultural and historical importance, they had never been fully documented—critical analysis was based on edited selections of the photographs, distorting their theoretical interpretation. In response, this chapter critically analyses a collaborative project to document and locate the photographs in the contemporary landscape of the town, and widen both public and academic access to them. This documentation was identified as a primary aim of research by the collaborating institution, Bolton Museum. The photographs had been catalogued, but the museum wanted to understand and extend their relationships with the local community. This project was intended as a museum based exercise, yet as we began to restore the original contexts of the photographs, reconstructing Spender's negatives into 35mm films and rediscovering where they had been taken, connections between the photographs and Bolton were strengthened and the research evolved into a collaborative process involving members of the local community.

In one sense the Worktown archive is endless. In 1936, the year before MO was founded, Walter Benjamin examined the strange power of photographic reproduction, which: 'substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction

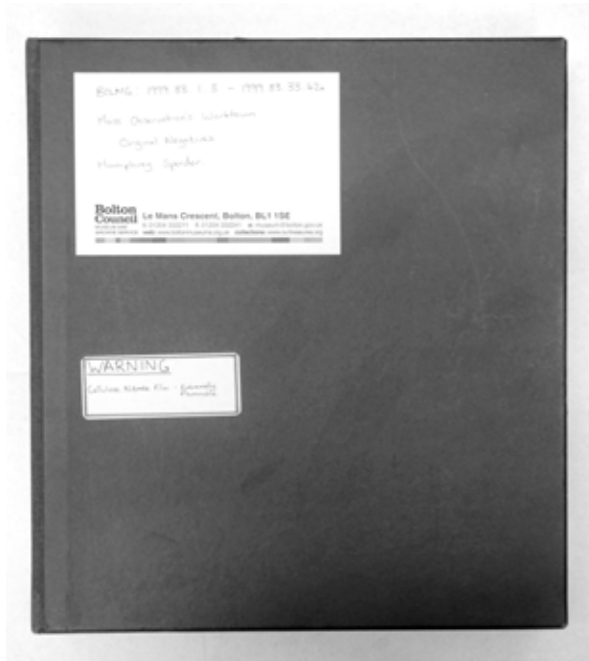
to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced' (1936: 215). The essence of the Worktown archive fits in a small box on a shelf in Bolton Museum (Fig. 2.2). In this box are 930 negatives held in archival sleeves—a collection of unique and interrelated objects. But through reproduction these negatives have proliferated, far exceeding the physical constraints of the museum store. The images held on these unique negatives now take multiple forms in multiple locations as archival silver gelatin prints, reproductions in books, photocopies, digital files, inkjet prints, jigsaw puzzles, postcards, family photographs. To work with such a photographic archive demands, as Edwards and Morton (2015: 10) have suggested, 'a new and expanded methodological space':

The temporal linearity of the social biography model does not sit well with such a complex network of multiplicities; the interrupted and extended temporalities of photographic reproduction, with its family tree of optical reproduction, tend toward a less linear form of historical narrative with frequent branches, diverging and converging points of visual and material connection.

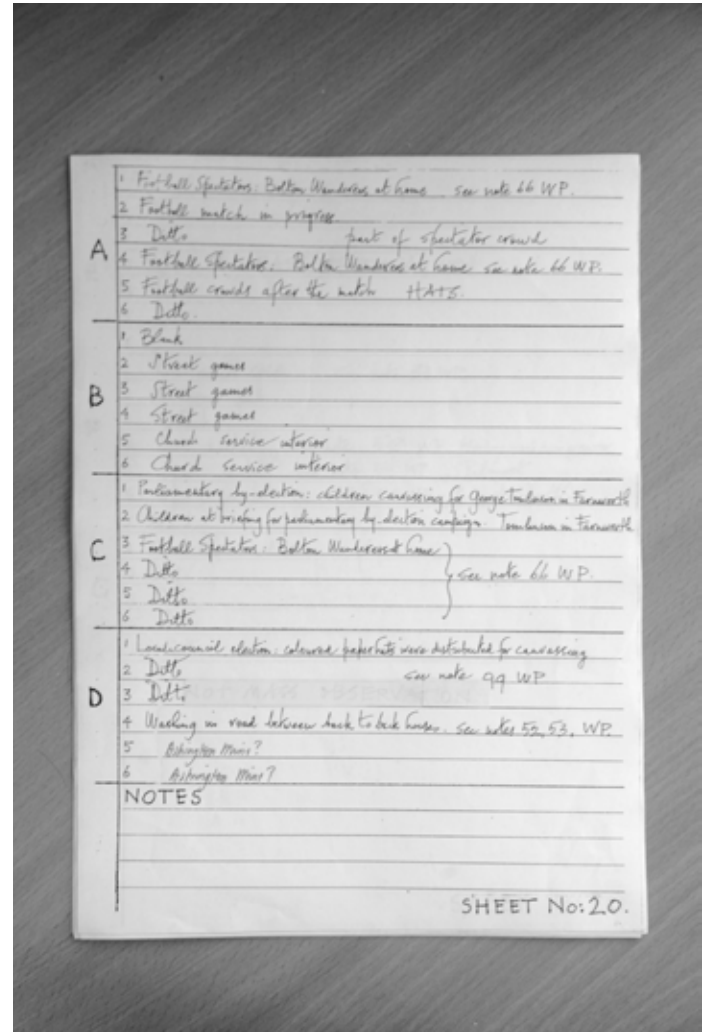
This chapter explores how we responded to this challenge, developing methods of working with the photographs informed by museum practice, applied photographic techniques and the relationship of the archive with place. These research methods respond to the particularities of this photographic archive, but relate to recent scholarship understanding photographs as material and relational objects (see for example Edwards 2012; Batchen 2008; Edwards and Hart 2004; Pinney 2004). This account of the documentation process extends this understanding through practical application, suggesting strategies with wider applications to the tasks of working with photographic archives, and interpreting and developing their relationships with communities.

1. THE FORM OF THE ARCHIVE IN THE MUSEUM

It is, of course, possible to define the Worktown archive through the limits of Bolton Museum's holdings—the negatives, related photographic prints and art works. But in so doing it is necessary to appreciate the ways in which the archive is a construct of the museum, shaped through institutional policies and protocols; as Sekula (2003: 447) has observed; 'photographic archives by their very structure maintain a hidden connection between knowledge and power'. The form of the Worktown archive within the museum extends to these systems of classification and order, encompassing for example: the museum's accession registers; letters between Spender and the museum; grant funding



Top:
2.2 The archival box which holds the negatives of the Worktown photographs, Caroline Edge, 2015



Right:
2.3 Sheet from Spender's hand list which captions the photograph of Bob and Billy as 'Street Games'

requests for the acquisition of objects; loan requests from other museums. Such documents are, as Swinney (2011: 32) has argued, simultaneously material objects, technologies through which the museum is constructed and performances of rituals which confer museum status onto an object. This institutional status is embodied in the archive; the transformation of Spender's negatives into a local museum collection was marked through a series of material interventions, systematically recorded by the museum.

In 1994 the museum acquired the Worktown negatives (and intellectual rights) from Spender. Bolton Council, the local authority, planned to open a museum dedicated to the town's industrial heritage in which Spender's photographs would be exhibited alongside early manufacturing artefacts. The negatives arrived in a state of physical disorder- they had been cut into short strips of film which were held in 25 archival sheets, and were no longer ordered according to their original film sequences. It is unclear when the negatives were processed and cut into strips (presumably for printing and storage as is standard darkroom practice), although this material intervention began a process of abstracting photographic meaning from the archival object. In a letter to the museum (dated October 4 1994) Spender said that the negatives 'had been in uncut continuous rolls' until they were rediscovered and taken to Sussex in 1973. Memory however is not as precise as photographs and there is evidence to suggest his recollections are incorrect. Some of the films were certainly processed, cut and printed shortly after they were taken since Spender's Worktown photographs were published during the Worktown study in the *Bolton Citizen*, *The Geographical Magazine* and *Picture Post*. The only accompanying information from Spender was a written hand list based on his memory of what the images depicted (Fig. 2.3).

The negatives were catalogued using the museum's content management system, given accession numbers, sent to be copied as enlargements on film, and finally placed in archival sheets in a solander box in a temperature-controlled fine art store. In this store the negatives were reunited with their progeny—boxes of photographic prints made from them—and also other visual artefacts created during the Worktown study. Bolton Museum began a policy of acquiring artworks relating to the Worktown project in the 1960s; their collection already included photographs, collages and prints by Julian Trevelyan; photographs and paintings by Humphrey Jennings; a sketchbook by artist Graham Bell and photographic prints created in response to the Worktown photographs by John McDonald in the early 1990s. The acquisition and classification of Spender's negatives alongside these artefacts both restored and obscured original contexts; as Edwards has argued institutions are in many ways complicit in restricting the potential meanings of photographs (2012: 254). In

Bolton Museum the Worktown photographs have meaning as artworks of local and historical importance, related to the industrial heritage of the town. But this function conceals the plural histories of the photographs and their ideological potential within MO's collaborative museum (as explored in Chapter 1), and it does not account or adapt for the continuing lives of the photographs, constantly reproducing and gathering new meanings outside the physical confines of the museum.

RECONSTRUCTING NEGATIVES

We began the process of documenting Spender's Worktown negatives by examining the evidence of the unique original object- the photographic negative. The negative is at once an image and an object, and in each of these forms holds information about the context of its production. As an object negatives retain the physical evidence of the photographer's intent and process (exposure number, choice of film type)— for example Spender's choice of the fastest film available indicates the necessity of working with limited light and an intention to freeze movement. They also bear the marks of their own journey through place and time—cuts marking precisely the separation of each film into strips of negatives, yellowed tape mending cracks in the film. Each negative is also an image, and as this image is formed directly by light and time it is a direct transcription of the place where it was taken. Although it has been argued that Spender's photographs have become anonymised through time (Newbury 1999: 38) or have lost their original contexts (Taylor 1994: 166), the continuing and tangible relationships between the Worktown negatives and Bolton contradict these arguments. In effect the images held by the negatives are imprinted in the physical landscape of the town: as Mulford remarked in the introduction to *Worktown People*: 'Travelling around Bolton you continually come upon bits of Humphrey Spender's photographs' (Spender 1995:10). The process of documenting the archive cross-referenced the evidence of the negative as object and as image.

As the photographs were taken on 35mm film and cut into strips for printing, each negative is not necessarily a singular object but part of a sequence of images. For example the photograph of Bob and Billy is fourth in a strip of five negatives (Fig. 2.4). The first two negatives show a church service, the altar decorated with flowers for the harvest. The third shows three children playing with a pile of stones, in the background of the shot the gates of Union Mill are visible behind a small group of people. The next negative is the image of Bob and Billy; Spender has moved into the horizon of the preceding image. The final negative in the sequence is taken a moment later; the eye of the camera has angled to the left following



2.4 Strip of five negatives containing the image of Bob and Billy

the boys' movement. The little boy in the big shorts is now smilingly aware of the camera and two smaller children are now also in the frame.

Reading the negatives as sequences rather than single images reveals not just a transcription of place but of a physical journey through place. Spender's passage through the split seconds of time traces a visual chain of thought, through the material form of the film. We move with Spender from the surreptitious, shaky photographs of the church's dim formality to the spontaneity of the children's games outside. You can almost feel him breathe a photographic sigh of relief as he comes into the light and can lift the camera up to his eye to compose. He sees the potential photograph of children playing and pursues it through the next three frames. It is the photograph of Bob and Billy which captures the 'decisive moment' of the sequence, captured in the split second after Billy has thrown something at the boys on the left. His hand is blurred by movement; they are fixed permanently in time dodging towards the edge of the frame.

The strips of negatives were reconstructed into 33 individual rolls of film by documentation assistant Ian Trumble, who examined the evidence of the negative in forensic detail—looking at the numbers on the film rebate, sequences of images, film types and the cuts at the end of each strip. Each negative was then assigned a new accession number relating to the film and exposure number. The photograph of Bob and Billy was given the accession number 1999.83.08.35 - the 35th negative on film 8. As this process restored negatives to their original order, it also revealed the impossibility of completing this task—incomplete films, and negatives from unrelated projects lost and confused in the archive. Yet this reconstruction of the films also restored temporal relationships within the archive, making each negative part of a longer sequence of time, encompassing the entire period that Spender photographed for the Worktown project. Therefore each strip of negatives became productive of information about the others. Some sequences of images linked the end of one film to the start of another, so we could work out which order some films were taken in. For example the last photograph of film 3 and the first photograph of film 12 are almost identical and part of the same sequence of images; both were taken in St Peter and St Paul's Church. Even the absence of negatives revealed information that this or these negatives were indeed missing, enabling us to reconstruct the history of the archive, as we reconstructed the films.

Following the reconstitution of the films I created digital surrogates for each negative—jpeg files with the same accession numbers— using scans which the museum had previously made of Spender's films. Here the use of digital technologies enabled archival limitations

to be overcome. The original negatives are fragile and should not be removed from the temperature controlled store, or directly handled. Although enlarged copy negatives had been created shortly after the acquisition of the archive, digital scans were far easier to view, much more productive of information and could be accessed outside of the museum. Sassoon (2004: 199) has cautioned that such a digital translation of images is a 'profoundly transforming' act: 'This digital shadow obscures the carefully documented balance of power between materiality and context that is critical to the determination of photographic meaning'. Yet, as Edwards (2005: 35) has argued, digital photographs have their own forms of materiality. The experience of zooming into or panning across a photograph is reflected in an intuitive movement of the hand, and the uncanny sense of being almost within the photograph. Viewing the photographs in this way revealed details which were imperceptible in the small scale of a negative. Street signs and architectural features helped us to locate photographs in the physical landscape of Bolton. The detail of other photographs held hidden information which profoundly altered their interpretation. In the background of a photograph of women at work in a mill a concealed photographer aims his camera directly back at Spender's lens; his face is obscured by the camera - who is this unobserved observer? (Figs. 2.5-2.6).

The process of reconstructing the films enabled a holistic view of Spender's Worktown photographs, a very different way of accessing the photographs than through curated selections of the photographs in books and exhibitions. Viewing the photographs in this way demonstrated the problems inherent in reading from limited and edited evidence. We could read for example the frozen expression of a woman talking to a couple on their doorstep as shock or even anger at the intrusion of Spender's lens (Fig. 2.7). But in the wider context of the film we see the woman in earlier photographs posing for, and smiling directly at, the camera—she is the wife of the Labour candidate in Bolton's January 1938 by-election, and Spender has accompanied her as she canvasses on a newly built local estate (Fig. 2.8). In effect, reconstituting the films and reading the negatives holistically as sequences of images emphasised their physical and temporal connections to Bolton. In this way whole films could now be read as an extended trace of Spender's movements through the town, a map of his interactions with place and community.

2. POINTS OF CONNECTION: PRINTS, ARTEFACTS AND OTHER ARCHIVES

One of the problems of documenting photographic archives is working with an infinitely

reproducible medium; as Edwards and Morton (2015: 10) have observed, the 'scale of the points of connection can be massive'. For example there are prints made from the Worktown negatives in Bolton Museum's collection, in the MO archive at the University of Sussex and in Spender's personal archive, which remains in his darkroom at his former home—and these are only the prints that I am aware of. With the Worktown negatives the task of tracing related artefacts was complicated by MO's experiments with interdisciplinary research methods. The photographs are interconnected with all the texts, artefacts and artworks of the wider MO project, but these are not all held in the MO archive. Visual art works produced during the Worktown study have travelled to collections in different countries—Graham Bell and William Coldstream's paintings are held in respectively in the Yale Center for British Art and the National Gallery of Canada. There are also related visual works created by participants in MO, which are held in other personal and institutional archives. For example Humphrey Jennings' acclaimed short film *Spare Time*, which examines leisure in working class communities includes footage of Bolton, but is not part of the Worktown archive. So where does the process of documenting such an endless archive end? Working with the particularities of the Worktown photographs gave a specific advantage in managing the scope of this task, as we able to restore some of the original conditions of the images. Spender's use of 35mm film, and access to his negatives, enabled us to reconstruct the temporal order, and photographic logic of the original films. This fixed point of meaning allowed us to trace the dispersal of the photographs outwards, beginning with the most closely related artefacts: photographic prints made from the negatives.

In the fine art store, alongside the box of negatives, are larger boxes containing prints (Fig. 2.9). The museum's collection currently comprises 156 vintage prints and 152 contemporary prints. As with the negatives, these prints hold information about their provenance as both image and material object. Both vintage and contemporary prints are window mounted on acid free board. There are three distinctive types of prints in the museum's collection: prints made by the museum following their acquisition of the negatives, signed and stamped prints produced by Spender after the critical rediscovery of the Worktown photographs and small prints (6 x 4 inches) which had been mounted in thematic groups on single boards. There is no documentation which explains the provenance of these small prints although I suggest that they may have been produced as 'test' prints during the Worktown project as many correspond to images published during this time period. Some of these small vintage prints have captions either on the board that they are mounted on, or on the reverse (Fig 2.10), which gave, sometimes misleading, clues about the subject matter and location, as they mostly corresponded to the information on Spender's hand list.



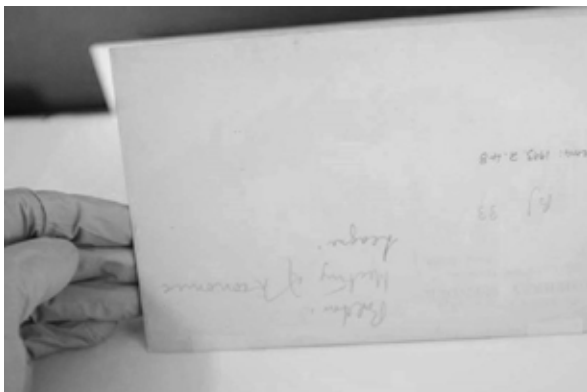
2.5 Women at work in a textile mill, 1938, Humphrey Spender

2.6 But who is the photographer photographing the photographer?



2.7 Spender's intrusion seems to have upset this canvasser for the Labour Party in the 1938 Bolton Parliamentary by-election

2.8 But in a later photograph, Mrs Tomlinson, the wife of the Labour candidate, poses and smiles for his camera



This page:

- 2.9 Archival boxes of prints of the Worktown photographs in Bolton Museum's fine art store
- 2.10 The reverse of a vintage print of a photograph by Spender. It is incorrectly labelled.

Opposite page:

- 2.11 Tom Harrison among the chimney pots of Bolton
- 2.12 William Coldstream painting on the roof of Mere Hall, Bolton, April 1938
- 2.13 Graham Bell and Humphrey Spender on the roof of Mere Hall, April 1938



By referencing against the reconstructed film sequences we could see that not all prints corresponded to negatives. As I have previously noted, it was evident that negatives were missing following the reconstitution of the films, and some of the prints seem to show these missing photographs. In one of these images (Fig. 2.11) Tom Harrisson sits hunched next to some chimney pots on a rooftop, framed against an industrial landscape of terraced houses and smoking chimneys. Here the bright, low light (evident in the angled shadows of the chimneys on the roofs behind) lends an unreal clarity to the scene, as if Harrisson has been superimposed upon it. The photograph may have been taken at the same time (April 1938) as images of artists Graham Bell and William Coldstream painting on the roof of Mere Hall (Figs. 2.12-2.13) – but in the absence of the negative it is impossible to determine exactly when this photograph was taken. Such anomalies speak of the way in which photographic archives resist the imposition of a perfect order and how this fragmentation becomes more pronounced the further photographs become separated from the physical connection to place ingrained in the negative.

As we traced the Worktown photographs out beyond the institutional constraints of the museum archive the growing physical distance was matched by a dispersal of meaning. During the documentation project I examined two related personal archives of Spender and Trevelyan's photographs. In non-institutional contexts the photographs were shaped by different processes. In the working environment of Spender's darkroom (Fig. 2.14) photographic prints are stored with contact sheets, the remains of his creative practice, acting as experimental studies of the roles that photographs can play in communication and design. Experiments with solarisation (2.15) and masked prints used to create collages of image and text (Figs 2.16-2.18) for the limited edition publication of *Britain in the 1930s* (Harrisson and Spender 1973) suggest the influence of Surrealist techniques on Spender's photography. Other oddities were intermingled with Spender's working prints, prints which did not match any of the Worktown negatives but were clearly part of sequences of images from the project: a bird alighting on an out-stretched hand (Fig. 2.19), interesting for its expressionistic deviation from Spender's wide angle, extended depth of field, get as much information in the frame as possible tactics in Bolton; a cat surveying two little girls in fancy white dresses from the back gate of a terraced house intriguingly labelled on the reverse as Michael Wickham's photograph (Figs. 2.20-2.21).

A collection of Trevelyan's art works produced for the Worktown project, still in the possession of his family, was even more fragmented, reflecting the variety of his artistic interests. Contact sheets of photographs showed images held as prints in Bolton Museum



2.14 Humphrey Spender's home darkroom, 2012, Caroline Edge



Clockwise from top left:
 2.15 A solarised print of church goers in Bolton in Humphrey Spender's darkroom

2.16 A masked print of Labour candidate George Tomlinson taken during the 1938 Bolton Parliamentary by-election

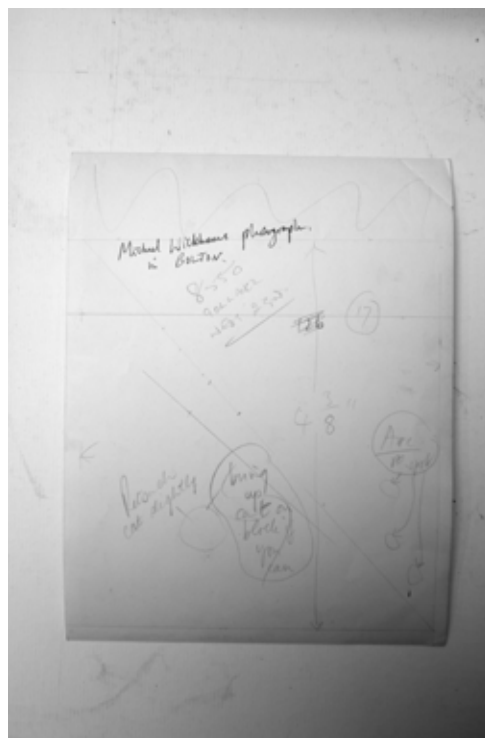
2.17 The masked print of George Tomlinson as used in the book Britain in the 1930s

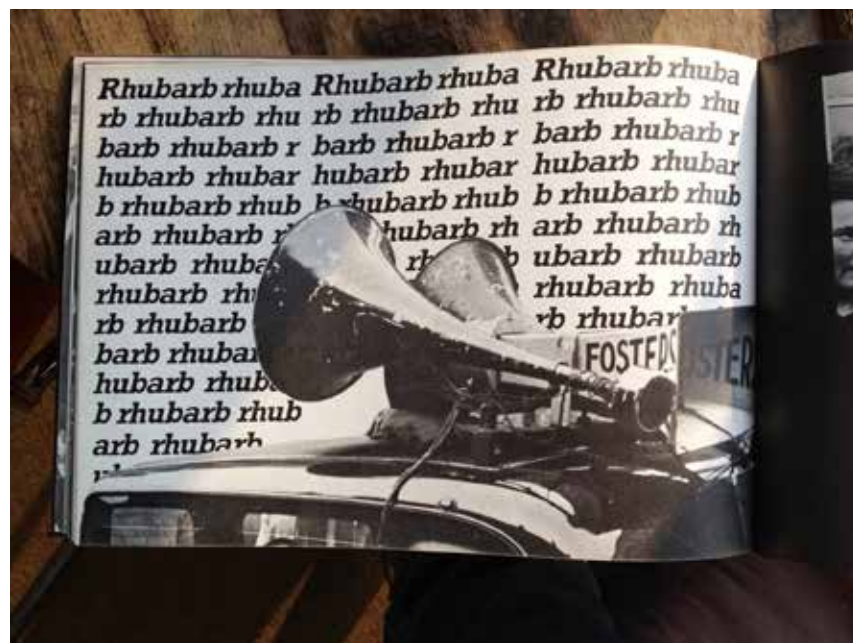
2.18 An example of how photographs were juxtaposed with text in the book Britain in the 1930s

2.19 A photograph of a bird alighting on a hand in Bolton's Queen's Park does not correspond to any negative in Bolton Museum's collection

2.20 Two girls play in a back alleyway watched by a cat, Michael Wickham, print photographed at Humphrey Spender's home darkroom

2.21 The back of the photograph of two girls playing in an alleyway, which is labelled as being by Michael Wickham, print photographed at Humphrey Spender's home darkroom





interspersed with photographs taken in Whitehaven, and other unidentified places which could be Bolton or Blackpool. A painting by one of the Ashington miners presented another oblique connection, of the relationship between MO's visual research and the development of community art. Most remarkably the suitcase of scraps of collage materials, which Trevelyan had hauled round the windswept streets of 1930s Bolton, had survived, seeming to possess a particularly corporeal connection to the past, because of the tactility of the creative process it evoked and the materials it held (Figs. 2.22-2.23).

As I examined related collections I realised that what was getting lost from view were not only photographs and paintings and prints, but also information and research connected to these visual artefacts. In Spender's studio I read an account of one of the most famous Worktown photographs, an image of two boys pissing on a waste ground which was used on the sleeve of an album by the band Everything But The Girl, and writer Bill Naughton's autobiographical book *Neither Use Nor Ornament*. The article, written by Bolton librarian Ken Beevers (1996), recounted how a lecture by MO archivist Dorothy Sheridan had prompted the identification of the location and one of the little boys in the photograph. But this information was not recorded in the museum's content management system. Documenting the Worktown photographs demonstrated how such research, like the written texts of the MO archive, was very easily detached again from the photographs and lost, so that researchers travelled the same ground as others over and over again.

THE MASS OBSERVATION ARCHIVE & THE WORKTOWN ARCHIVE

The Worktown archive is intrinsically connected with the MO archive and many researchers have worked to restore connections between image and text and archive (see for example Walker 2007; Calder and Sheridan 1984; Stanley 1981; Mellor 1977). Spender's photographs were taken to be part of this archive, and to provide an objective record of written observations (Madge and Harrison 1937: 35). This meant that the MO archive provided valuable information about where photographs were taken and what they were of. For example Spender made written observations to accompany at least four of his sequences of photographs, which were dated (a quack medicine stall at Bolton Market, a performance of *Madame Butterfly*, an altercation in a pub, and Conservative canvassers at work during an election). These observations enrich the photographs, revealing Spender's completely subjective and often humorous responses to situations and people. His comments on a performance of *Madame Butterfly* are accompanied by a programme and ticket (Figs. 2.24-2.29), and demonstrate his acute awareness of cultural misrepresentations (Spender 1937a):



2.22 Julian Trevelyan's collage suitcase

2.23 A collage of Bolton by Julian Trevelyan

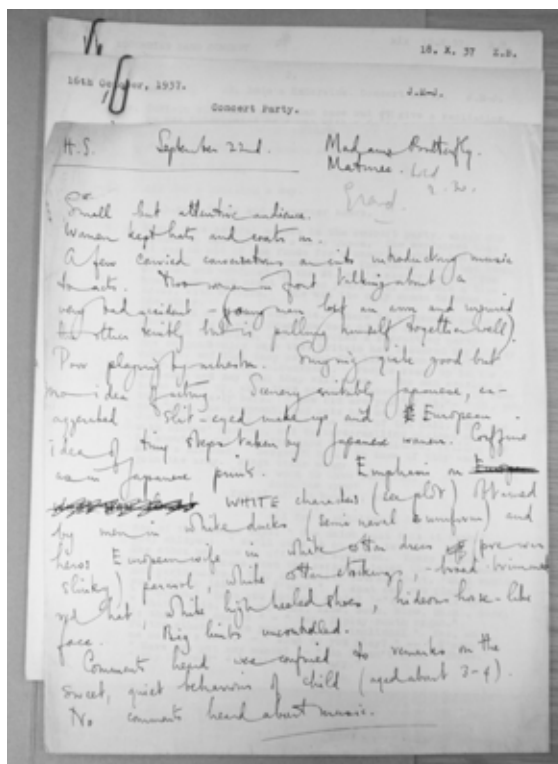
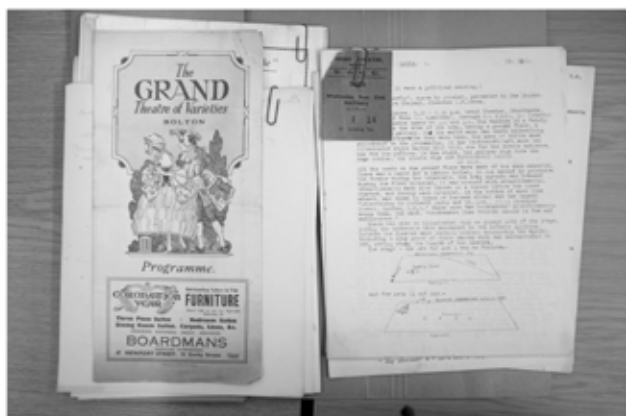


This page, clockwise from top:

2.24-2.26 A performance of *Madame Butterfly* by the Universal Grand Opera Company at the Grand Theatre, Bolton, 22 September 1937.

2.27 Humphrey Spender's written observation of the performance of *Madame Butterfly*

2.28-2.29 Ephemera relating to the performance of *Madame Butterfly* including an observation by observer Brian Barefoot as if it was 'a political meeting'





This page:
 2.30-2.31 A queue of men at Bolton's Labour Exchange and written observation : 'what's the bloody use of coming here when there's thousands signing on. I said I'm bloody fed up of coming here for bugger all'

9/11/37 !! April 2-37.
 Labour Exchange.
 ♂ of 55 in his line in front of his box.
 'We're adraping on the Bilbao front, why they are getting them now' (imitating a stout spirit.)
 ♂ of 40 in reply, standing at the back, 'shut up - you silly bugger you're in the bloody ranks now!
 ♂ of 55. "Oh ?! like hell & air!
 Behind me at no 11 box, 'he's bloody slow this morning! he's a snotty devil & suppose he getta out of bed on the wrong bloody side this morning. you're only to get on the wrong side of his own and your for it!!'
 in, time at no 11 box 11.15 a.m. raining outside. 15 ♂. 10 overcoats, 5 raincoats none without coats.
 ♂ "he said, 'what's the bloody use of coming here when there's thousands signing on here & said I'm bloody fed up of coming here for bugger all.'
 "he said, 'Have you been up round (vacancies)
 - & said which bloody side?' that, (pointing up to vacancies) there's only bloody jobs selling & ice cream!

Poor playing by orchestra. Singing quite good but no idea of acting. Scenery suitably Japanese, ex-aggerated. Slit-eyed make up and European idea of tiny steps taken by Japanese women. Coiffure as in Japanese prints. Emphasis on WHITE characters (see plot) obtained by men in white ducks (semi-naval & uniform) and Lews European wife in white cotton dress (pre-war slinky), parasol, white cotton stockings, broad brimmed red hat, white high heeled shoes, hideous horse-like face.

Other connections between the photographs and the MO archive were more oblique.

Texts written by other observers documented the same events or subject matter as the photographs. Snape (2012) has argued reading the photographs and texts together gives 'visual access to the immediate physical and social environment of the observed subject'. Each gives the other greater interpretive and sensual meaning—so that we hear the despairing commentary of a long and doleful queue of men in the Labour exchange and the emotive power of the photograph is stronger (Fig. 2.30-2.31)—'what's the bloody use of coming here when there's thousands signing on. I said I'm bloody fed up of coming here for bugger all' (MOA TC WC Labour Exchange 42/C). These juxtapositions also provoke a visual tension between photographs and documents, a kind of archival aesthetic prompted by the different ways they manifest information and history.

Cross-referencing the photographs with documents from the MO archive and local museum archives enabled us to precisely date many of the photographs. Many observations included the date that they had been made (and the prevailing weather conditions), and documents collected by observers also provided information. We were able to date the photograph of Bob and Billy because MO had collected the 1937-8 annual report for Bolton Girl Guides. The report described the formation of a human Union Jack for a Coronation rally on Saturday 25 September 1937, an unusual event recorded on negative 19 of film eight (Fig 2.32). Checking the local newspaper archives for that day enabled us to identify the preceding sequence as a football match between Bolton Wanderers and Wolverhampton Wanderers on the same day. As we had dated another film to 27 September, the moment that Spender photographed Bob and Billy could be placed within a short time period. Triangulating the photographs against the MO archive and another source, like the local newspaper archives, enabled us to check dates, locations and names but, more than this, it facilitated the photographs as historical sources (Fig. 2.33-2.34). Although the photographs had been taken as information, this capacity was seriously discredited through the 'crisis of representation' (as I have recounted in Chapter 1). Although the photographs provide useful evidence of chronology of the



Top:
2.32 Girls Guides form a human Union Jack, Hollinhurst, Chorley New Road, 25 September 1937



Left:
2.33 Rounders Chadwick Cup Final between Tootals and Ragley Mills, Heaton Cricket Club, 11 August 1937, Humphrey Spender
2.34 Rounders Chadwick Cup Final featured in the Bolton Journal and Guardian, 13 August 1937

JOURNAL AND GUARDIAN, FRIDAY, AUGUST 13, 1937

News

ROUNDERS CHALLENGE CUP FINALISTS

The final for the Mrs. J. W. Chadwick Challenge Cup in the rounders competition of Bolton Sunday Schools' Social League, was played on Wednesday at Heaton cricket ground. In our photograph are the teams, Engley Mills, runners-up (on left), and Tootals, winners (right). In centre are the Maynees, Mr. A. Greenhalgh (chairman of League) and Mrs. Chadwick.

Bradshaw Gala
Brilliant Weather Brings Financial Success

Thanks chiefly to ideal weather at BRADSHAW AND HARWOOD

ECHOES of the WEEK

Drinnan—Firth

A pretty wedding of much local interest took place at...

ROU

BRIDGE
Over Rose Queen...
Lawn on Saturday...
Mrs. J. Naughton...
The...

Worktown project, and the presence and interactions of observers in the town (for example with the local Labour party), they are not used as historical documents—James Hinton’s (2013) extensive history of the early Mass Observation project barely refers to Spender, and does not use the photographs as historical sources.

Looking specifically at photographs and references to photography dispersed through the MO archive placed the Worktown photographs in the context of the organisation’s wider investigations of the medium— both as a visual research strategy and method of communication. The archive holds many references to photography and photographs. Prints include: photographs made from the Worktown negatives; photographs related to other studies, such as Michael Wickham’s study of queues at the *Britain Can Make It* exhibition (Victoria and Albert Museum, 1942), and studio photographs of objects featured in this exhibition; photographs produced in response to directives from the modern MO project; and related collections of photographs such as the *One Day for Life* archive. The full investigation of these references extends far beyond the scope of this research, but it is relevant to briefly outline some of the ways in which the MO archive’s related holdings broaden the interpretation of the Worktown photographs, as this has informed the work of relating them to the community.

Firstly MO’s studies of public attitudes to photography expand and challenge theoretical perspectives on the meaning and use of photography within the organisation and beyond. For example an investigation of audience responses to an exhibition of war photography (MOA 1942: FR 1378) found considerable public scepticism about photographic truth—‘you can make a photograph look like anything, - a clever photographer can’—and that one of the greatest interests in photographs was prompted by the seemingly familiar place or face— ‘Isn’t he just like Ronnie? It couldn’t be Ronnie, could it?’ Such insights are relevant to understanding and developing the relationships between the Worktown photographs and the local community, as they support the findings of critical analysis of related literature, countering the assumption of public naivety and emphasising the importance of engendering personal connections.

Secondly, they challenge the critical emphasis on Spender’s personal vision as the Worktown photographer by revealing a plural account of photography within the organisation. The MO archive contains the half-forgotten photographs (and negatives) taken by Michael Wickham during MO’s revisit to Bolton in 1960, and an intriguing reference to Wickham photographing for MO in the 1930s, during an interview with Nick Stanley conducted in

1979. On seeing Wickham's 1960s photographs, I felt strongly that they deserved wider recognition. Some were acutely observed studies of human interaction—a sad photo of a stripper waiting tensely outside a show in Blackpool watched by a man in the foreground, while behind her another man, leaning, smokes casually as if he owns the show, and her (Fig. 2.35). Another depicts a pub interior during the Keaw Yed Festival (Fig. 2.36). This annual event in Westhoughton, a small town on the outskirts of Bolton, celebrated the legend of a local farmer, who cut off the head of a cow which was stuck through a gate. The photograph, more than any other taken for the Worktown project, seems to satisfy Harrisson's desire to discover 'savage' communal rituals still ingrained in the everyday life of Bolton (see for example Spender 1982: 16). As a number of Wickham's photographs were taken in the same locations as Spender's (Figs. 2.37-2.38), looking at them emphasises MO's intended use of photography (and observation) as an iterative research process:

Ideally it should be possible for another observer to go back to the same place at the same time on the same day of the year, years later and *repeat* the same observation, whether in words or film, thus measuring change in a way that cannot be theorised about or preconceived. (Harrisson and Spender 1975)

In this way looking at the MO archive demonstrates that photography in the early incarnation of the organisation was plural, not only in that there were at least four photographers contributing to the Worktown project, but that the act of photography itself was intended as plural, to be repeated over and over again.

3. CONNECTING ARCHIVE AND PLACE

Documenting the photographs – trying to figure out where and when they had been taken and what they depicted- was a tremendously compelling activity, like being a photographic detective. Colleagues at Bolton Museum and University were drawn into the process, and started small personal investigations of particular photographs. The location of some images, like this photograph of a Conservative speaker on the town hall steps (Figs. 2.39-2.40), was obvious to anyone who had ever walked through Bolton's main square. But recognising other locations required a deep and extended knowledge of the town and its geography—years of witnessing physical and social change. This was testament to the intrinsic connection of place and photograph and made it clear that we should find ways to access local knowledge of the photographs. In this way the investigation of the Worktown archive began evolve through collaboration with the local community, so that the processes of documentation and



This page:

2.35 A photograph by Michael Wickham of a show in Blackpool, 1960 (the poor quality of this image is because it is a photograph of the image on a contact sheer)

2.36 Pub interior during the Keaw Yed Festival, Westhoughton, Michael Wickham, 1960

Opposite page:

2.37 Colonel Barker side show, Blackpool, 1937, Humphrey Spender

2.38 Détranges Desmoiselles side show in the same location as the Colonel Barker side show, 1960, Michael Wickham







2.39 Conservative speaker on the steps of Bolton Town Hall, 1937, Humphrey Spender

2.40 Digital montage of Spender's photograph at the same location in 2012, Caroline Edge

dissemination became the same.

We used both physical and digital methods to share the Worktown photographs with the community and access their help in identifying places. Through Bolton Museum's partnership with local befriending groups ran by the charity Help the Aged, we visited coffee mornings to share the photographs and collect memories prompted by them. We also initiated a social media campaign, *Lost Locations* (2012), by placing an album of around 200 of the photographs on Bolton Museum's Facebook page and asking the museum's followers to help identify the photographs by leaving comments on them. Members of the public suggested possible sites and also began to share and discuss memories prompted by the photographs. These methods were very effective – by working with the community we have now identified the locations of over ninety per cent of Spender's photographs. But what became particularly apparent, was the way in which the photographs prompted dialogues, and how these dialogues began to activate the photographs in processes of remembering. This destabilized the theorised function of the images as iconic visualisations of poverty: as Annette Kuhn has suggested 'memory work can create new understandings of both past and present, whilst refusing a nostalgia which embalms the past in a perfect irretrievable moment' (2002: 10).

These dialogues were prompted by the recognitions which passed between the community and the photographs, through the indexical connection of place and image. As I have previously demonstrated (in Chapter 1), in Bolton the photographs were simultaneously historical documents and family photographs: creating public access to and dialogue around the photographs enabled these dual functions. Langford has argued that conversations are central to the meaning and form of family photo albums and that 'the separation of the album from its community casts it into an unnatural silence' (2006: 224) and the same is apparently true of the Worktown photographs, when they are enabled as a community photo album, holding shared memories of place and personal memories of loved ones. And so the photograph of Bob and Billy was quickly located as the corner of Union Mill by two comments on Facebook. One commenter recalled that he 'used to use the gates as goals'. This identification was followed by a comment from Norman King who said his uncle Bob Harwood was the 'lad on the ledge' (Figs. 2.41-2.42). Norman provided a photograph of Bob and his best friend Billy Doeg who were easily recognisable from Spender's image and told us that this was the first time his family had seen the photograph. They were not aware of the Worktown project, or the time a famous documentary photographer had come to photograph everyday life on their street. His grandparents had never mentioned it – 'because who would, this man just walked about taking photographs' (King and Pilling 2011).



2.41 Repeat photograph of Bob and Billy in Davenport Street, 2011, Caroline Edge

2.42 Norman King and Dennis Pilling where the photograph of their uncle was taken on Davenport Street, 2011, Caroline Edge



We invited Norman and his brother Dennis to participate in an interview about the photograph at Bolton Museum. Talking about the photograph of their Uncle prompted both memories of him, and of their own experiences growing up on Davenport Street. Bob was redefined as an individual with a life outside the photographic moment. The brothers could not identify the other children in the photograph but Norman remarked: 'if I knew who they were I probably would know them'. As they looked at the photograph the brothers' response took on the form of a conversation, confirming each other's memories: 'everyone used to play on that one didn't they? On that step' (King and Pilling 2011). Their conversation demonstrated, as Banks has suggested, that photographs used in interviews may 'exercise agency, causing people to do and think things they had forgotten' (2007: 70). This was even more evident during a conversation with a woman at a Help the Aged session. Although she had dementia one particular photograph, of ballroom dancers at the Palais de Danse, prompted a series of lucid memories. She recalled dancing in Bolton in the 1930s, dates to the cinema with favoured dance partners, her mother saving to buy her singing lessons, her career as a singer in a travelling theatre company, the death of her fiancé in the war.

In this way we can see that creating community access to, and enabling conversations around, the Worktown photographs may enable them as sensory and relational objects; 'not merely the result of social relations but active within them maintaining, reproducing and articulating shifting relations' (Edwards 2005: 29). Through this understanding interpretation may shift from representational, visual analysis 'in which photographs are simply the result of abstract concepts vested in power relations or semiotic codes' (Edwards 2005: 29) and become part of 'active sensory, experiential reiterations of history-telling' (Edwards 2005: 38). If, as anthropologist Christopher Pinney (2004: 8) suggests, we approach photographs through 'embodied, corporeal aesthetics', the potential of understanding and developing relationships between the Worktown photographs and the community is massively expanded: 'The relevant question then becomes not how images "look", but what they can "do" (Pinney 2004:8).

THE ARCHIVE AS MEDIUM

The process of documentation disrupted the archive, which began to fluctuate between states: analogue and digital, domestic and institutional, past and present. In practical terms these fluctuations prompted the application and development of working methods which productively deployed these interchanges and exchanges. In particular I used photography

as a means of mediating between states, developing working practices which paralleled traditional techniques in analogue photography. I created and printed digital contact sheets for each film (Fig. 2.43) as a method of visualising large quantities of images simultaneously and understanding the relationships between the films. Similarly I used repeat photography as method of understanding the relationship between the images and the physical landscape of Bolton (Fig. 2.44), checking locations of photographs by retracing Spender's paths through the town. Repeat photography (or rephotography) is typically understood as a strategy for documenting and interpreting social and cultural change over time (Tinkler 2013: 138). But as Smith (2007: 189) has suggested repeat photography also enables 'access to the historical conditions' of photographs. Holding up prints in order to align them with the contemporary landscape of Bolton, reconstructed Spender's viewpoint, showing that he had predominantly held the camera up to his eye to compose. This revelation undermined the enduring trope of the spy with the secret camera in the theoretical narrative of the Worktown photographs, emphasising the importance of thinking about archival photographs through the act of photography.

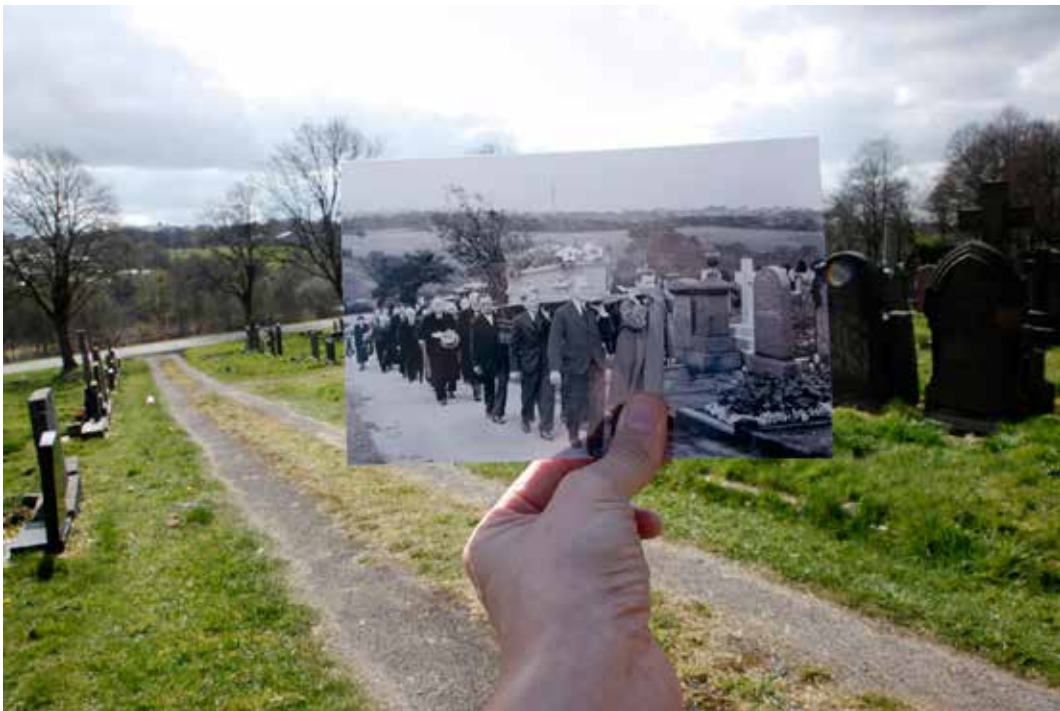
By this I mean firstly that technical understanding of photography, such as the effects of certain lenses or experience of framing compositions, enables an informed interpretation of photographs. For example, a man in a pub holding up a palm seems to be warding off an intrusive lens (Fig. 2.45). The photograph has been connected to Spender's recollection of an altercation with an angry landlord (Spender 1938a). John Taylor draws on the arguments of other academic writers to argue that this photograph records an angry gesture and concludes that 'the promise of knowledge in the photograph was uncertain, more open to ambiguity than even a verbal account of the same scene' (Taylor 1994: 163). But this is not true: a photographic interpretation tells us many things about how the photograph was taken and what it shows such as the downwards angle of the lens which suggests that Spender was standing on a chair or table in full view. By dating other negatives and films we can tell that it is not the photograph referred to in Spender's account of an argument with a pub landlord but a picture of a man waving at the camera in a different pub at a different time of year (Figs. 2.46-2.47).

Secondly, I mean through understanding photographs as the result of the act of photography. Shusterman (2012: 68) has suggested that we should pay attention to 'photography's dimension of somatic, dramatic, performative process'. He argues that theoretical approaches to photography have tended to a 'one-sided concentration' on the photograph which is 'only part of a larger complex of elements that constitutes photography as an

activity'. Reiterating the act of photography was a performative engagement between image and place; as Smith (2007: 190) observes:- 'A key aspect of the practice of locating a historical vantage point is that it is an embodied process that requires presence in, and engagement with, the world'. In this way repeat photography created an embodied account of Spender's experience photographing in Bolton, and constructed new meaning around his photographs by connecting past to present place. But taking photographs was not only a logical response to the task of understanding photographs, also a way of reactivating the inherent impulses of these photographs, as they were created to be re-photographed.

Inevitably such mediating strategies involved practical compromises, retrospectively suggesting more efficient methods of research. For example, as the negatives revealed clues to their provenance I recorded this information, adding to a spreadsheet previously created by the museum. This spreadsheet catalogued information relating to each negative: accession number, title, caption, theme, keywords, date, copy negative information, vintage print, contemporary print, and negative strip number. It would be more typical and practical, as a working photographer, to use dedicated digital photography software, and embedded metadata, to view and manage large volumes of image files. It is possible, even, to generate spreadsheets of metadata using this type of software. But still there is a disconnection between the systems of working photographers and the systems of museums, with different hierarchies and categories of documentation. Information does not pass fluidly between these systems, a separation exacerbated by the use of proprietary software for the management of photographic archives.

At a practical level this suggests work to be done in bridging practices: that working photographers should consider the future and organisation of their photographs as an archive, and museums should allow for the impact of working practices on the creation, presentation, and subsequent interpretation of photographs. Theoretically the processes of mediating these exchanges reveal the archive itself acting as medium for exchanges between states. Osthoff has suggested that the 'performances in, with and of the archive' of contemporary artists and curators are capable of 'producing an ontological change—from the archive as a repository of documents to the archive as a dynamic and generative production tool' (Osthoff 2009: 11). Through the 'contamination of artwork and documentation' the archive is reconfigured as artwork, challenging 'the notion of history as a discourse based primarily on chronology and documentation' (Osthoff 2009: 11-12). But in the strange case of MO disruption prompts not an ontological change, but a return to the original ideology of a collaborative, fragmentary archive.



2.43 Print outs of digital contact sheets of the Worktown photographs

2.44 Repeat photograph of Spender's image of a funeral parade, Caroline Edge



2.45 Photograph of man holding up a hand towards the camera

2.46-2.47 Photographs which correspond to the date and description of the pub of the pub in Spender's account of an argument with a landlord

DISSEMINATING THE ARCHIVE

When Mellor rediscovered the Worktown photographs in the 1970s, he spoke of them as being ‘homeless photos’ (Mellor 1997: 141). By this, he meant that the photographs had been separated from the statistics and observations which they were created to complement. But, as we have seen through the process of documentation, the photographs were also ‘homeless’ in the sense that their intrinsic connections with place and community had been severed: a separation which shaped their consequent performance and interpretation within theoretical narratives. So how could the understandings engendered by the process of documentation inform the subsequent role of the Worktown Archive within Bolton Museum? Is it possible to draw out strategies for connecting community and photographs through responding to and enabling these photographs as sensory and relational objects? How can institutions enable multiple meanings within, and uses of, photographic archives?

Therefore the conclusions of the documentation took the form of two practical outputs—an exhibition celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Worktown project at Bolton museum and an online archive of Spender’s Worktown photographs (www.boltonworktown.co.uk). Both functioned as outputs in the sense that they summarised, rationalised and communicated the results of research to public and academic audiences, acting as a way to focus the task of documenting an endlessly proliferating archive. But both were also integral to the wider research process and aims of this thesis. By revealing further understandings of the connections between photographs and community, they informed the on-going development of practice-based methods of investigating and developing relationships.

In curating the exhibition and digital archive I drew on the insights prompted by the critical review of related literature and through the material analysis of the Worktown archive. Therefore in evaluating these practical conclusions, I will focus particularly on how these forms communicated these understandings and advanced the aims of this thesis, rather than attempting the grand tasks of interrogating the nature of curatorial practice, or addressing the politics of display within museums which extend far beyond the scope of this thesis. In response to the critical history of the photographs I wished to address the imposition of theoretically derived narratives, presenting them as part of a collaborative and mutable archive. The process of documenting the archive suggested practical tactics for approaching these tasks: - by addressing the dispersal of artefacts and information; by creating wider

access to all of the photographs, their multiple histories and potential meanings; and by enabling the archive to act as a medium through sensory engagement. But in developing both exhibition and website, these strategies had to be balanced with the institutional status of the Worktown archive, the role of the museum within the local community and practicalities such as cost and time.

WORKTOWN 75TH BIRTHDAY EXHIBITION

It is clearly evident in installation views (Figs. 2.48-2.53) that the *Worktown 75th Birthday* exhibition did not challenge current conventions of museum display: photographic prints and other artefacts were displayed in standard black frames using a grid formation in a white cube space, visually reiterating the imposition of institutional order. The exhibition was necessarily mediated— through practical limitations of cost and time, and museum protocols, such as guidelines relating to the length and reading age of display text. This meant responding creatively to the resulting limitations, and attempting to use them productively as a strategy for communication. For example the photographs had to be protected by frames and since the museum's prints were already mounted on 20 x 16 inch archival board, it was economical to use existing frames, and display new prints made for the exhibition at this size. This uniformity became an asset in reflecting the original function of the photographs as information, privileging no image over another.

The exhibition acted as a survey of photographs and visual artworks relating to MO's study of Bolton; a gathering together and recording of artefacts and documentation in order to address the dispersal of information. I wanted to demonstrate the multiple meanings and interconnections of the Worktown photographs, and so included over a hundred artefacts: texts and ephemera from the MO archive and the museum's local history archive, Spender's camera, and responses by contemporary photographers and artists to the archive. Therefore one of the primary tasks of curation was to balance this scope with accessibility—to create multiple ways in which the artefacts could be accessed as appropriate to local, historical, artistic and academic communities.

I approached this at a practical level as a design task related to the organisation and communication of information, using interconnected thematic groupings to organise the artefacts. Large display panels gave overviews of different aspects of the Worktown project, collecting together small groups of photographs and artefacts which related to this theme through subject matter. For example 'The Worktown Observers' theme included



Both pages:
 2.48-2.53 Installation views of the Worktown 75th Birthday Exhibition at Bolton Museum, September 2012 – January 2013



photographs and visual artefacts relating to the everyday life of the observers living at 85 Davenport Street. These subject based groupings emphasised visual categorisations of the photographs, and therefore risked what Schwartz (2004: 12) termed ‘the misguided historiographical approach...which conflates content and meaning’. I was able to mitigate this by establishing other types of relationships within the theme, drawing on the insights of the documentation process. Individual artefact labels drew out other meanings beyond visual content, relating to the history of the photographs, the sensory experiences of the observers, and the relationship between past and present place. I included photographs taken of the street in the 1960s by Wickham, and during its demolition in the 1980s by Spender to reference the plurality of photography in MO. A typographic piece *In Darkest England* (1997), by David Jury, spoke of the ways in which the Worktown project continues to inspire new artistic practice, and simultaneously presented its own multiple layers of meaning through interlinking thematic texts— ‘85 Davenport Street, Pre-Mass Observation, Anti-establishmentarianism, Class, The Tough Detective, Surrealism, Anthropology and After Bolton’ (Jury 1997).

I attempted to enable various modes of sensory engagement within the exhibition, including an audio post with excerpts from interviews with Spender and members of the local community, a screen displaying Humphrey Jennings’ film *Spare Time* (the sound of a kazoo band echoing through the gallery), an interactive digital display which allowed the viewer to look through Graham Bell’s sketchbook and the inclusion of tactile objects such as Trevelyan’s collage suitcase and textual documents from the MO archive. But of course these latter archival artefacts could not actually be handled by the general public, and were placed in display cases with a shiny clear barrier between them and the community they represent. Although viewing the exhibition impelled a physical interaction with the artefacts as visitors moved round them in three dimensional space this was hardly a material engagement with and through the archive, as sensory engagement with the artefacts was limited by archival restrictions.

Recent curatorial strategies, such as the deluge of a million photographs uploaded to the internet in a single day presented by artist Erik Kessels, suggest ways of prompting sensuous and active engagement with the processes of photography. Such contemporary strategies correspond to ideas present in early MO—the presentation of research as a collaborative museum, imagined by Harrison and Trevelyan as an exhibition summing up the sights, smells and sounds of Bolton with reconstructions of pubs, toilet walls, mantelpieces. Although this type of interactive display is now common within museums, an experimental

presentation is not easily achieved in the context of an exhibition of archival photographs in a local museum, as it demands significant resources in terms of cost and time. Still I felt that the exhibition barely started to explore the creative potential of MO's collaborative museum. The surreal and sensory possibilities of 'fish and chips frying continually, and soot falling constantly' (Harrison quoted in Hinton 2013: 52) were barely hinted at through servings of fish and chips and a pint of real ale on the opening night of the exhibition.

THE DIGITAL ARCHIVE

In contrast the *Bolton Worktown* website (www.boltonworktown.co.uk) presents a more fluid encounter. This digital archive makes all of Spender's photographs publicly accessible for the first time and was built using open source WordPress software. The design of the Bolton Worktown website sought to respond to the issues raised by the process of documentation, enabling multiple and collaborative methods of viewing and contextualising the photographs. As Pink has suggested, new media technologies may encode reflexivity in both the creation and use of hypermedia (2007: 191). The 'multi-linear' nature of websites resists the imposition of dominant interpretive narratives: the 'researcher's account no longer has privileged status' (Murdock and Pink 2005: 159). Hyperlinks facilitate multiple interconnections allowing the viewer to shape their own interpretations and interactions, enabling the performance of photographic archives beyond the physical boundaries of the museum.

To demonstrate these possible interactions I return once more to the photograph of Bob and Billy. The image is titled 'Children play street games on Davenport St' and captioned with information about the location and the identification of Billy and Bob. It is presented visually within the "Street" theme but tagging connects it to photographs depicting "play" and "children" or taken in the same location. A hyperlinked blog post gives expanded information about the image (other photographs are linked to scans of documents from the MO archive to demonstrate their intertextuality). The photograph is also geo-tagged so that it can be viewed on Google Maps or Streetview, connecting it to contemporary Bolton. As I commented in the Introduction to this thesis, this type of function reflects a growing awareness of the value of sensory experience in museum practices, which has been facilitated through the development of new media technologies.

The digital archive continues to evolve as visitors to the website are able to comment on the photographs, sharing alternate individual histories prompted by the images, in response to

the success of this strategy during the *Lost Locations* campaign. In particular photographs prompting memories of childhood draw comments. An image of children outside St Peter's and St Paul's Primary School is one of the most commented photographs on the site, drawing shared recollections from former pupils of school days, Christmas plays, processions and Connie's sweet shop. I would argue that, as with the Facebook campaign, these comments demonstrate more than the shared observation of 'the ebb and flow of a mythical past' (Macpherson 1997: 145): memories of the brutality of corporal punishment in the school are hardly the recollections of halcyon days. But more than this, the photographs begin to act in new ways, prompting new relationships within the local community, enabling other researchers to interact with the community through the photographs and prompting new and expanded curatorial approaches to the Worktown photographs. There is a shift in power from the institution to the local community, who as 'experts' on the photographs are able to challenge and add to information about the photographs.

However as Tinkler has observed digital photographic archives are still mediated through institutional processes of selection, description, presentation, and navigation (2013: 117-9). The presentation of the photographs is affected by the museum's policies and the necessity of policing comments to prevent spam which could potentially crash the website. The logical extension of Harrison's original methods suggests that he would have seen comments promoting porn websites to be just as valid in terms of factual data as personal memories, and the same is true for the comments left by bored children on a digital audience survey of the exhibition. Online the Worktown pictures become enmeshed in new cultural forces, which do not necessarily relate to their historic role as old photographs yet reveal a great deal about everyday life. How does the hacking of the website in early 2017 (Fig. 2.54) by a sympathiser of the Kurdish peshmerga attacking the jihadist organisation 'ISIS' (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) relate to the interpretation and meaning of these photographs, if at all? In placing these photographs into the public digital domain we need, as W.J.T. Mitchell (2005: 10) has argued, 'to account for not just the power of images but their powerlessness, their impotence, their abjection. We need, in other words, to grasp both sides of the paradox of the image: that it is alive—but also dead; powerful—but also weak; meaningful—but also meaningless.'

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has explored methods of understanding the relationship between the Worktown photographs and Bolton, using material analysis, photographic techniques and



2.54 Screenshot of hacked BoltonWorktown website

working in collaboration with the local community. These strategies have enabled the documentation of the archive, revealing connections, meanings and alternate domestic histories beyond the institutional constraints of the archive. The practical aim of identifying the locations and subjects of photographs has been successful, confirming the validity of visual research grounded in material context. But what is the wider relevance of these small discoveries? The empirical revelations of this process are micro-details seemingly only of relevance to this community and archive – who was in this or that photograph, how a streetscape has changed over the years, how a camera was held and operated. However, these fine points plot a wider shift in ways of accessing and interpreting photographic archives. They run counter to the narrative of photographic exploitation imposed on these photographs through cultural theory, emphasising the importance of trying to respond to photographs in accordance with their mercurial nature. As Schwartz (2004: 121) observes archivists must shed a tendency to ‘view photographs as materially stable and describe them in terms of their subject content in favor of an approach which follows their performative trajectories, maps their social biographies, and acknowledges the primacy of context for grappling with the mutability of their meaning.’

Disrupting the institutional form of the photographic archive enables it to become a collaborative and active medium between community and image, past and present place. The use of photographic and digital technologies facilitates this exchange, enabling multiple histories to coexist but also creates unexpected performances of the photographs as they are shifted by unanticipated cultural forces. As Edwards (2005: 41) has noted the emotional desire to materially experience a photograph, remains, even in the digital age— the power to share and comment on the new digital archive gathered a community of interest around the photographs. Most of the commenters are prompted by a feeling of recognition: the embodiment of their own histories and experience of place in the photographs. In this way the images still tend to function as old photographs of bygone Bolton. Can they ‘only ever be sources for nostalgia?’ (Evans 1997: 146) or can the impulses of this particular archive be used to articulate new understandings of the relationships between photography, community, history and place?

3. OBSERVE BOLTON: USING PHOTOGRAPHY AS A COLLABORATIVE METHOD OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

It will encourage people to look more closely at their social environment than ever before and place before them facts about other social environments of which they know little or nothing. This will effectively contribute to an increase in the general social consciousness. It will counteract the tendency so universal in modern life to perform all our actions through sheer habit, with as little consciousness of our surroundings as though we were walking in our sleep. Even the drab and sordid features of industrial life will take on a new interest when they become the subject of scientific observation.

(Madge and Harrison 1937: 29-30)

MO was envisaged as a collaborative method of self-representation. By increasing the 'social consciousness' of the observer, the act of observation would have a transformative effect on the individual and, by extension, their community. Observers would be 'the meteorological stations from whose reports a weather-map of popular feeling can be compiled' (Madge and Harrison 1937: 31), providing a means not only of understanding the influence of the media on the public but of resisting this influence, and the social control of a dominant elite. These ideas are reflected in contemporary participatory research methodologies, which similarly seek to enable transformation through self-representation and give voice to the socially-excluded. The use of photography in established methodologies such as Photovoice is intended to be 'a process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique. It entrusts cameras to the hands of people to enable them to act as recorders, and potential catalysts for change, in their own communities' (Wang and Burris 1997: 369). This chapter explores how in relation to these contemporary methods, MO's use of photography in research may be reinterpreted as a collaborative method of engaging with place and community, through the practical development of *Observe Bolton*, a photography project with young people (11-23).

It is necessary to return right to the origins of this thesis to explain the collaboration with young people and the particular emphasis within this chapter on photography's capacity for social transformation. This PhD was funded by the AHRC, under the original title 'Using social documentary photography to promote community cohesion', with the proposed aim of using photography as a means of enabling young people (14-19) to record and critically

reflect upon their everyday lives. The underlying idea here is that taking photographs, in response to the Worktown archive, would be a means of discovering shared values between young people from differing social and cultural backgrounds, thereby demonstrating that participatory photography is a way of addressing a lack of cohesion within communities. If the Worktown photographs have constructed an enduring image of community, can they be used to empower socially excluded groups to construct their own positive, 'authentic' image of community?

During the development of this thesis with this focus became apparent, as both the terms 'social documentary' and 'community cohesion' became problematic for very different reasons. Therefore through the process of research, and in reaction to external political forces, the focus of my research changed, as is reflected in the final title of the thesis and through the theoretical and practical basis outlined in the Introduction chapter. This shift took place during the development of *Observe Bolton*, which was intended as a scoping exercise for a larger study. As a result, elements of the research are legacies of this previous intention— in particular the involvement of young people, and the emphasis of using photography to do 'good' in communities. This does not mean that these elements are extraneous to the research, but rather that they are part of a journey. This critical appraisal of this project therefore is an attempt to contextualise how and why in practice, this shift occurred and the outcomes of this project became very different from those envisaged at the start. As I have examined issues relating to the analysis of the Worktown photographs as social documentary in depth in previous chapters, I will begin by outlining the shifting and politicised context of community cohesion, before considering how participatory and collaborative photography methodologies produce evidence of community engagement. Finally I examine how these contexts have informed the development of a collaborative photography project which constitutes community by using photography as process of engaging with past and present place.

1. USING PHOTOGRAPHY TO DO 'GOOD' IN COMMUNITIES

The term 'community cohesion' has been affected by the waxing and waning of political forces external to, but impacting on, the focus of this research. The term first emerged following a national review into the causes of 2001 riots in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford. The report produced by the Community Cohesion Review Team (Cantle 2001) linked unrest to ethnic segregation, and 'urged an emphasis on commonality and shared values and experiences, rather than on continued reification of distinct ethnic and faith identities'

(Thomas 2014: 475) leading to the development and implementation of community cohesion policy. Critiques around community cohesion have suggested the policy is 'the death knell' of multiculturalism (Kundnani 2002), marking a return to policies of assimilation and shifting responsibility to local communities rather than addressing structural inequalities in society (Flint and Robinson, 2008). Counter arguments have also emerged—for example Thomas (2011) has drawn on empirical evidence of policy in practice in Oldham and Rochdale to argue that community cohesion is an approach which rebalances, rather than rejects multiculturalism. But community cohesion was a concept developed directly in relation to the New Labour government's (1997-2010) wider cultural policy (Levitas 2005), and successive changes in government have shifted the term to fit their political agendas.

The development of community cohesion in ideas like former prime minister David Cameron's 'Big Society' (Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition government 2010-2015) may be read as an extension of the New Labour's neoliberal agenda (Bonefeld 2015), but also demonstrates how rapidly political terms become dispensable and suddenly vanish from the lexicon. First the ground level delivery of community cohesion initiatives by local councils was subsumed by implementation of the Coalition government's counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST) through the Prevent programme leading to 'to an enhanced securitisation of community relations' (Thomas 2014:489). Then the newly elected Conservative government (2015-2017) implemented a review of community cohesion, leading to the publication of *The Casey Review* which repositioned the concept as part of a multi-stranded approach intended to counter religious extremism and particularly targeted at 'towns and cities where the greatest challenges exist' (Casey 2016: 167). The redefined community cohesion strategy was only one of twelve recommendations made by Casey; the report placed greater emphasis on the development of 'British Values' and the structural role of housing and education in promoting integrated communities (Casey 2016: 168).

Evidently these are complicated and rapidly changing political contexts. An in-depth history and critical analysis of cultural policy in the UK is well beyond the scope of this thesis and my specialism as researcher, and yet these political shifts have impacted on the terms of this research. The continual redefinition of community cohesion became a moving target, making it difficult to ascertain what exactly developing a collaborative photography project in Bolton was intended to achieve. Can photography create cultural integration? Can photography stop teenagers acting like teenagers? Can photography promote British Values? Can photography prevent terrorism? Or is it enough that photography is seen to be

doing these things?

Putting photography to work for state ideology in this way inverts its original function within MO as part of a collaborative means of destabilizing the 'mechanism of repression' (Madge 1937). Here Spender's photographs would 'give voice to the concerns of the underclass, which had been excluded from all debate and decision-making positions' (Frizzell 1997: 15). But as we have seen through the history of the Worktown Archive (Chapters 1 and 2) photographs will always exceed their intended meanings, in unpredictable ways. In the 1970s, through the politics of representation, MO became itself critiqued as the 'mechanism of repression'. The observers were seen as 'ambassadors from one class to another' using photography to create an 'ideology of national unity' in order to protect the inequalities of Britain's class structure (Macpherson 1997 [1978]: 149-150). Through publication in the radical photography magazine *Camerawork* the Worktown photographs became 'evidence of the need for a contemporary community photography' which would challenge 'the orthodox account of working-class history' (Myers 1986: 88). As Pollen (2014) has commented it is not surprising that the revival of MO 'corresponded to developing interest in new practices of self-representation, whether in terms of 'history from below' or the upsurge in radical "community" or "committed" photographic projects.' For community photography organisations such as the Half Moon Photography Workshop (the publishers of *Camerawork*), the South London Photo Co-Op and the Tondu Photo Workshop photography was a practice of social resistance and self-empowerment (Evans 1997:20).

Yet as Bishop has observed this radical 'discourse of participation, creativity and community' is no longer 'a subversive, anti-authoritarian force' but is now 'a cornerstone of post-industrial economic policy' (Bishop 2012: 14). Since New Labour, strategic arts funding in the UK has reflected a political desire to 'steer culture towards policies of social inclusion' (Bishop 2006: 179). The question has become: 'what can the arts do for society? The answers included increasing employability, minimising crime, fostering aspiration – anything but artistic experimentation and research as values in and of themselves.' (Bishop 2012: 13). Here culture becomes an extension of government: 'a crucial component of democratic life, parallel to the formal structures and institutions, such as parliament, by which democracies shape their law and administration (Matarasso 2006: 6-7). In this way arts practice and creative research may be valued according to their social and economic impact, as is reflected in calls for the development of an evaluative framework for measuring impact (Ings 2012; Joss 2008; Arts Council England 2006). Yet as Bishop (2012: 279) has argued 'models of democracy in art do not have an intrinsic relationship to models of democracy in society'

and there is a danger that community arts practices are now valued according to ethical frameworks. If we put to one side the sheer absurdity of attempting to measure artistic value in terms of social good, what is that collaborative and participatory projects with communities now being asked to achieve?

In 1976 Raymond Williams (1976: 76) suggested that community was a 'warmly persuasive' term which was almost never used negatively, but the co-option of community by government as a strategic social policy for social integration means that community now carries connotations of difference. There is the community, and those outside the community who should become part of the community. As Delanty has suggested, this revival of community in a globalized world experiencing mass migration is 'undoubtedly connected with the crisis of belonging in its relation to place' (Delanty 2010: 158). Here community becomes an idea around which to organise place-based forms of social cohesion (DeFilippis and North 2004), and collaborative practices in arts and research, like participatory photography, become strategies for place-making (Loopmans et al 2012: 699). The Warwick Commission's 2015 (2015: 66) report on the future of cultural value draws on a paper by Taylor and Devaney (2014: 6) to recommend that cultural organisations should become strategic partners in place-shaping by 'building and moulding local communities and identities'. So as Kester (2011: 2) has warned the use of words like collaboration and collectivism carry the shadow of a second meaning, a suggestion of betrayal. In relation to community these terms still suggest a 'cooperative and harmonious ideal' (Gujit and Shah 1998: 8), yet as I argued in the Introduction to this thesis, it is impossible to return to or resurrect the ideal of community represented by the Worktown photographs—so why are we still encouraged to try? The new kinds of community are, Delanty (2010:155) suggests, too fragmented and too individualised to offer 'enduring forms of belonging' and be the basis for social integration. Does the ideal of community, as a shaping of mass identity, now take the form of 'coercive consensus or radical plurality' (Kester 2011: 2)?

PARTICIPATORY PHOTOGRAPHY: VISUAL EVIDENCE OF ENGAGEMENT

So what exactly is the evidence that collaborative photography can be used as a method of positively engaging communities, and young people? Participatory photography methodologies, such as Photovoice, have been used globally in qualitative research studies with young people (Woodgate et al. 2017; Spyrou 2011; Joanou 2009; Woodley-Baker 2009) and demonstrate positive community engagement by young people in urban contexts (Winton 2016; Delgado 2015; Lowozy et al. 2013; Wang 2006; Bolton et al. 2001). Positive

empowerment is intended to be implicit in Photovoice. This action research method, which uses photography to promote social change through advocacy was developed by Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris (1997), and is underpinned by feminism and Paulo Freire's influential theory of critical consciousness (2000 [1970]). Photovoice projects are typically developed in partnership with community stakeholders in order to advocate on social issues relating to health, community and representation. Cameras are given to members of a community affected by the particular issue, who take photographs in response to a mutually agreed theme. Researchers and participants meet to discuss the photographs being produced and work together to prepare a final output such as a photo book or exhibition which gives voice to under-represented participants.

But the evidence of engagement and empowerment produced by participatory research methods is not straightforward. Critical responses have questioned participation's claims to empowerment in research contexts, suggesting that the seeming appearance of authentic representation masks continuing imbalances of social, cultural and political power (see for example Hickey and Mohan 2004; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Gujit and Shah 1998), or suggested that the practice is a form of social regulation (Gallacher and Gallagher 2008). The use of photography in contemporary participatory research raises particular concerns relating to the characteristics of the medium. Spyrou has argued, for example, that participation does not simply 'overcome the problems associated with representation' (2011: 155), and Prins (2010: 427) has drawn on Foucault's discourse on power and surveillance to suggest that participatory photography 'has countervailing potential as a technology of surveillance and a way to recover subjugated knowledge.' What is particularly interesting here is how, despite the passage of time, critical concerns raised by the use of photography in contemporary participatory research return to the same discourse of representation and power which gathered round the Worktown photographs in the 1970s, to emphasise again the ways in which photographs construct reality and play a role in the surveillance and control of populations.

Such discussions show how the evidence of empowerment and engagement in participatory photography is typically sited in the visual content of photographs produced by participants. This is demonstrated in research studies through the application of content analysis to categorise, code and interpret photographs as forms of textual data (see Byrne et al. 2016 for an extensive survey of content analysis in participatory photography methodologies). Returning to the argument developed in the Introduction of this thesis, this then places 'the visual and visible aspects of culture within a language-based discourse' (Banks and Zeitlyn

2015: 8-9). As Rose (2014: 10) comments, although visual research methods 'are centrally concerned with the visible' they 'do not assume or create an understanding of social life conducted through culturally-mediated visual materials'. This then results in the production of 'a social that is visible rather than visual', and research participants whose images record objects rather than engage in 'symbolic and communicative activities' (Rose 2014: 11). The problem is, as Pauwels (2011: 13) has observed, that researchers using visual methods 'limit themselves to the analysis of the depicted, whereas the level of the depiction—which often proves much harder to investigate, since it falls outside the scope of expertise of most social scientists—may reveal particularly relevant data: for example, about the norms and values of the image makers or their commissioning institutions'.

Participatory visual methods produce research outcomes which seem to communicate social impact, and are accessible to both public and policy makers. But the fluid nature of photographic meaning makes it easy to construct such affirmations: exhibitions and books are typically curated by researchers in order to communicate positive outcomes which directly relate to the research question. The 'evidence' of these outputs reveals that participatory methods in social science are still developing from a position of 'methodological immaturity in research, which admits to vulnerability and fallibility' (Gallacher and Gallagher 2008: 500). Ideas emerging from photographic theory are rarely referenced, and as a result there remains no 'clearly established methodological framework to discuss the uses of photography in social science research' (Rose 2016: 309). Social scientists are only beginning to expand the interpretation of photographs beyond visual content and explore how they circulate and gather meaning in other contexts. Recently Mitchell (2015) has reflexively examined the audiencing of a participatory photography exhibition held at several different sites. Drawing on a study by Zuromskis (2013) of the aesthetics of displaying snapshot photography, Mitchell (2015: 58) suggests that there is a need to develop new methods and tools for studying the audiences of community photography exhibitions, in order to develop research which will effectively promote social change. Her study widens the scope of critical analysis to start thinking about photographic affect, but is underscored by an assumption of photographic realism and an assertion of documentary humanism. Yet as methodologies are critiqued and evolved, researchers are beginning to understand and express that what photographs do will always exceed intentions, and that as a method 'participatory photography may have unanticipated, contradictory consequences' (Prins 2010: 227).

This theoretical expansion is shaped in practice by creative experimentation; as research methodologies using photography gain critical rigour, practitioners respond by testing

established structures, developing related models of practice and shifting their explorations to the social and cultural structures of photography. For example, Gullemin and Drew (2010: 175) have argued that ‘we need to give as much attention to the processes of image production as to the image itself’ in studies of visual methods in health, and Winton (2016), has responded to calls for greater experimentation by Kullman (2012) and imagination (Clover 2006) in collaborative photographic methods, by emphasising the importance of creativity. These projects mark a shift, from thinking about photography as form of visual representation, to thinking about photography as a social process.

This suggests new ways in which we can understand the possibilities of collaborative photography to create community engagement. In another recent study with young people in Fort McMurray, Canada, researchers emphasised the process of collaborative photography as a means of engaging community (Lozowy et al. 2013). This study is particularly of interest to this research as Fort McMurray, like Bolton and Worktown, is a town preceded by photographic representations—photographs of vast oil sands surrounding the town by Edward Burtynsky and in a feature in *National Geographic*; documentaries about the ‘scarred and social environment’ (Lozowy et al. 2013: 195). The researchers interpret the use of collaborative photography in the study as ‘a catalytic agent providing an occasion for assembling community: the collective learning and walking, the sharing of images in public exhibits and personal websites and informal workshops, the composing and configuring of relations of people-place-feeling in the images themselves’ (Lozowy et al. 2013: 202-3). Here collaborative photography offers the possibility of acting as a productive process of constituting community in relation to place.

2. OBSERVE BOLTON

This section examines the development of a collaborative photography project with young people in Bolton. Over the course of 8 weeks I worked with young people (aged 11-23, as I extended the upper age limit) , meeting for three hours every Saturday afternoon at Bolton Museum. In the project the Worktown photographs became both a resource for photographic skills training and an inspiration for the methodological development of street photography as a process of community engagement. The project was intended as a scoping exercise for a larger scale study (detailed in Chapter 4), and had two primary aims: to understand practically how the Worktown photographs could be interpreted as a collaborative method for community engagement; and to consider the nature of this engagement. In response to the political and methodological contexts outlined above,

and through the theoretical basis of this thesis, I have sited this investigation around the understanding of photography as a relational and embodied process. Here community is understood as something constituted within the processes of collaborative photography, rather than an external, politically defined ideology which collaborative photography produces visual evidence of. I describe the development of the project here in depth, because as a practitioner I am bound to agree with Pauwels' (2011: 14) assertion that 'all technical or medium-related decisions have epistemological consequences'—the outcomes of collaborative research using photography are shaped by the practical applications of method.

RECRUITMENT

As Spyrou (2011: 155-6) has observed institutional contexts may impact on participatory research projects by regulating social relations and may constitute the voices of young people in participatory research: for example, Pollen (2014) notes that the photographs produced by participants, photographing like Spender, for a recent *Mass Education* project developed by MO are mediated by public policy. I did not want to recruit participants through other community organisations as I was conscious of how pre-existing relationships with community organisations could shape the nature and findings of the research. Developing an alternative strategy to recruit participants involved a different type of compromise (albeit one which Tom Harrison would have approved of): deliberately caricaturing MO as a type of proto-surveillance to make the project seem intriguing. I designed flyers and posters (Fig. 3.1) to particularly appeal to the target group of young people, marrying the idea of surveillance to community engagement by marketing the project as 'urban observation' with the title *Observe Bolton*. I used one of my own photographs on this material—a photograph of a man holding a smart-phone with a photograph of an eye on the screen, deliberately given a gritty aesthetic through a series of analogue and digital processes. The photograph hints visually at some of the cultural layers of meaning which have gathered round the idea of photographing in public places and the distribution of such photographs—surveillance and self-surveillance, the ubiquity of smart phones. This promotional material was distributed through the Museum's marketing channels (which included the local newspaper), and at locations in the town where young people who were not necessarily connected to existing community organisations gathered: music and role-playing games shops, skateboarding shops and parks.

This recruitment strategy drew thirteen registrations for the project with eight participants



Bolton Library and Museum Services

Observe Bolton

Aged 14 - 23 and interested in developing your creative skills? Learn the art of urban observation on our ten week course with Caroline Edge.

Observe Bolton is an exciting new project for young people. You will have the opportunity to develop skills in photography, audio recording, editing and blogging whilst discovering Bolton's secret life.

If you are an independent thinker, aspiring artist or writer, then this project is for you.

The project is inspired by Mass Observation's 1930s study of life in Bolton.

For more information contact Caroline Edge on ce1art@bolton.ac.uk.

The course runs for 10 weeks from May 11th at Bolton Museum. Advance booking required as places are limited. To book call 01204 332209.

**Bolton
Life!**

**Bolton
Council**

www.boltonmuseums.org.uk

3.1. Observe Bolton promotional flyer

actually attending the first session. Two of the participants were younger than the target age group (11 and 12); I was contacted by their parents who asked if they could participate as they were extremely interested in learning about photography. I also extended the upper age limit of the target group initially identified in the funding bid for this thesis from 18 to 23. My experience of teaching 11-18 year olds made me aware that it may be difficult to recruit and maintain attendance, not only because this age group is focused on developing their independent social culture, but also because the course would run at a time which would clash with national examinations. Over the course of eight weeks only four of the cohort continued regular attendance, and these included the two youngest participants (and the oldest who was 23). The duration of the project clearly impacted on regular attendance, as participation had to be balanced with other commitments. The youngest participants, who were not old enough to fully manage their own time or travel independently to Bolton Museum, had the best attendance, demonstrating the influence of parents and carers on participation; access to a regular, free and educational activity was clearly useful to managing their own time. Although an alternative course structure with longer sessions over a shorter period of time may have addressed this problem, missing a single session would have affected engagement, development of skills and the group dynamic more substantially.

The primary motive given for participating was shared by all the young people: the desire to learn more about photography. Secondary reasons for participation varied. Older participants were concerned with enhancing career prospects, while for the youngest participants the project connected to other community and educational activities. One participant gained a Scouting badge for photography after attending the project and another successfully enrolled for a Key Stage 4 qualification (four years early) by using photographs from the project as his portfolio and asking me to contribute a reference. Evidently although I tried to avoid recruiting participants through community organisations I still recruited participants who were involved in organised activities. Although recruitment was not successful with respect to the number of participants in the target age range or representing the ethnic diversity of Bolton, it was successful in attracting creative, committed and individual young people. The unpredictable outcome of the recruitment strategy, and the admission of younger co-researchers, was how playful our experimentation with the potential of photography as a method of observation became, generating new ways of thinking about and responding to the Worktown archive.

RESOURCING

The availability of resources shapes the form and resultant meaning of any collaborative photography project. Resources typically include a physical space in which to meet and discuss photographs, cameras, and the means of viewing photographs taken by participants (as prints, on digital camera displays or computers). As access to computers was limited, beyond the use of my own laptop and digital projector, sessions had to be planned within these limitations. In the particular context of this research the Worktown photographs and public spaces in Bolton were also primary resources. We were able to use a learning studio at Bolton Museum, which was centrally located enabling access to Bolton town centre, making it easy to go out and photograph in the town centre, in the same places where Spender had photographed. This physical and sensory encounter with the Worktown photographs through place was central to the project, but in response to the understandings developed through critical and material analysis of the archive (Chapters 1 and 2) I also created multiple ways for participants to access the Worktown photographs in order to experience different forms of meaning. For example the photographs were used as practical examples for technical exercises; Spender's photographs of graffiti became inspiration for learning about shutter speed through creating light 'graffiti' (Figs. 3.2-3.4). Other encounters with the photographs moved beyond visual interpretations to a sensory account of their function as material artefacts within the museum, and relationships with the MO archive; the cool, dim space of the museum store where we viewed negatives, prints and related artworks; participants whirring so rapidly through microfilms of the MO archive that one got motion sickness and we had to go and sit outside for a while.

I place particular emphasis on the selection of camera type as this choice shapes not only the aesthetic of the photographs, but by extension their interpretation (as the Worktown photographs have been read as social documentary). However many studies using participatory photography do not explain the type of camera used (Holgate et al. 2012; Woodley-Baker 2009; Gant and Shimshock 2009), use disposable compact cameras (Singhal et al. 2007; Croghan et al. 2008; Prins 2010) or digital point-and-shoot cameras (Ward et al. 2016; Allen 2012; Lykes 2010). Here the limitations of poor lens quality and no technical control ensure that photographs taken with these cameras conform to a snapshot aesthetic, resulting in a visual affectation of authenticity—although the intention may be to empower the participant, the sophistication of their self-expression will always be constrained. They will always remain an amateur participant in relation to the expert researcher.



3.2.-3.4 Light graffiti inspired by Spender's graffiti photographs

The selection of cameras was also very important in enabling participants to understand and experience the embodied physicality of Spender's act of photography in relation to public space in Bolton. The cameras used had to be, like Spender's rangefinder camera, lightweight and capable of freezing fast movement: using a single lens reflex or disposable camera is a very different sensory experience of place than photographing with a rangefinder. I also felt that it was ethically imperative for these cameras to facilitate technical training in photography, through control of aperture, shutter speed and ISO, as this was of primary importance to participants. I researched and purchased digital compact cameras with manual controls. These cameras produced good quality photographs through a combination of lens quality and image resolution, and also had the capacity to shoot high definition video.

PROJECT DESIGN

The development of *Observe Bolton* reflected that 'pragmatic realism' (Knowles and Sweetman 2004: 6) is essential in planning collaborative visual research. At a practical level planning must account for, and adjust to all sorts of variables, which in this project included but were not limited to: wildly varying numbers of attendees; school holidays; the weather; lack of access to computers; a lost key to the cupboard where cameras are stored; the necessity of thinking about the physical wellbeing of participants by providing access to drinking water, snacks and toilets. Flexibility was also necessary in order to respond to the interests of participants and develop the outcomes of our practical investigations. For example participants who had missed the original session, wanted the chance to learn how to create light drawings so we repeated the activity but led by the participants who had already learnt the technique. Therefore the overview of *Observe Bolton* that I present here (Fig. 3.5) was not fixed until the conclusion of the project.

Over the course of eight weeks the project became increasingly open, moving from structured skills training and looking at the materials in the archive, to experimental practical investigations which explored how Spender would go about observe Bolton in today's society. Preliminary sessions focussed on the development and understanding of photographic skills, using practical exercises to explore the effects of composition, flash, shutter speed and aperture. Ethically this training was essential, as learning photography was the primary motive for participation in the project, and it was also integral to participants understanding of how Spender photographed and his embodied experience in relation to the contemporary landscape of the town. As the skill level of the participants increased we began to practice camera skills in public spaces, visiting sites where Spender had taken



3.6 Queen's Park, 1937, Humphrey Spender

3.7 Photographing at the same location with the Observe Bolton group, 2013, photo by participant

OBSERVE BOLTON: WEEKLY OVERVIEW

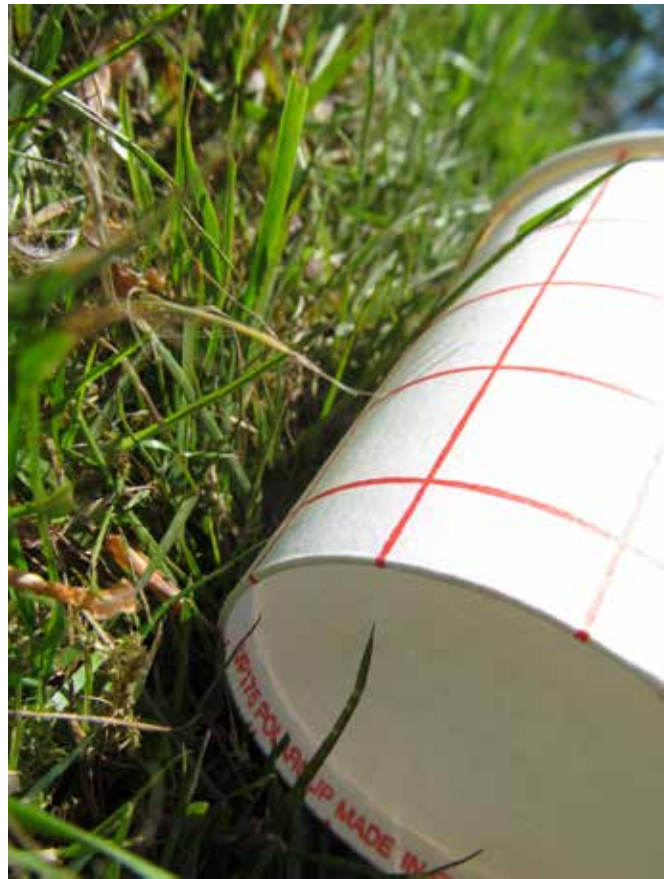
RESOURCES:

Consent forms, Information sheets, Digital presentations, printed examples of Worktown photographs and observations, Laptop/digital projector, Software – Adobe Photoshop/GIMP/Windows Movie Maker, Audacity, Digital compact cameras, spare batteries, SD cards, Audio recorders, headphones, Spy cameras – pen and smiley face cameras, pens and paper, refreshments

WEEK	ACTIVITIES
1	<p>Introduction – informed consent, discussion of participant expectations of project Very short introduction to MO digital presentation – collecting information about everyday life Basic camera operation – taking photos with/without flash Visit to Worktown Archive (museum store) Refreshments Photography task – collecting in the Museum Session summary May 12th Day Diaries task – keep a diary for MO archive</p>
2	<p>Introduction- Day Diaries review Basic camera operation – using shutter speed to freeze movement/capture motion blur Light graffiti task – response to Spender’s graffiti photographs Refreshments Basic audio recording Audio recording task – collecting sound in the museum Session summary</p>
3	<p>Introduction- review of light graffiti photographs – technical emphasis Basic camera operation – review of controls, experimenting with pre-set filters and white balance Photographing in public places – ethics and law group discussion Look at Spender’s Queen’s Park photographs Visit to Queen’s Park – composition task – high/low, near/far away, big/small, moving/still Refreshments Return to Museum -session summary</p>
4	<p>Introduction- review of Queen’s Park photographs – how do these photographs communicate? Which do they think are best and why? Look at and discuss MO written observations and photographs of Town Hall Square – ethical implications Town Hall Square surveillance task (written) – reminder of personal safety – make a written observation Return to Museum – discussion of what they have noticed – how would you use photography to record these things?</p>

3.5 Observe Bolton project overview

	<p>Refreshments</p> <p>Town Hall Square surveillance task (photography)</p> <p>Return to Museum – how to upload and rename photographs</p> <p>Group discussion of what they photographed and why – each choosing 5 photos</p> <p>Session summary</p>
5	<p>Introduction – surveillance and sousveillance</p> <p>Hassan Elahi TED talk video – group discussion of sousveillance, ethics – set individual sousveillance task – 5 photos a day for a week – avoiding risk</p> <p>Mass Observation archive – looking at micro-fiche in local history archives – ask them to pick out things they find interesting – discussion</p> <p>Refreshments</p> <p>Introduction to file management – file types, organisation, embedding copyright and watermarking</p> <p>Introduction to digital editing – look at famous examples of edited images, what is ethically acceptable? - Adobe Photoshop and freeware alternatives – image enhancement</p> <p>Session summary</p>
6	<p>Introduction – sousveillance review and audio recording</p> <p>Spy camera operation and experimentation – how to use pen and smiley face camera</p> <p>Following in Spender's footsteps – town centre walk and repeat photography</p> <p>Refreshments</p> <p>Return to Museum – uploading and editing photographs</p> <p>Group discussion of what they photographed and why – each choosing 5 photos</p> <p>Session summary</p>
7	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Spare Time film screening - discussion</p> <p>Home-made drone – helium balloons and smiley face camera – two trips to film in Town Hall square with interim review</p> <p>Refreshments</p> <p>Captioning and presenting photographs – What is the relationship between text and image?</p> <p>Examples of captioned photographs – Who, What, Where, Why, When?</p> <p>Model releases and online safety with digital photographs- group discussion</p> <p>Session summary</p>
8	<p>Introduction</p> <p>A Cannibal Comes to Bolton – what do they want to show about how they see Bolton?</p> <p>Selection and captioning of final images (8-10)</p> <p>Create slideshows using Windows Movie Maker</p> <p>Refreshments</p> <p>Film showing</p> <p>Course evaluation through group discussion (audio recording)</p> <p>Session summary</p>



Clockwise from top left:
3.8 -3.9 Freezing movement
3.10-3.11 Photographing at different heights
3.12-3.13 Photographing things near and far away



photographs. In Queen's Park, at a site where Spender had photographed Boltonians at leisure in the 1930s (Figs. 3.6-3.7), we experimented with freezing movement, photographing at different heights, photographing things near and far away (Figs. 3.8-3.13). Later we began to retrace Spender's paths through the town, as I had done during the documentation project (Figs. 3.14-3.15). Here we used repeat photography not to determine location but rather, as Klett (2011: 126) has suggested, using the capacity of the technique, to place our photographs in relation to the Worktown photographs and physical space.

Tinkler (2013: 156) has suggested that there are four possible approaches to determining the subject matter of collaborative photography projects: giving an open brief; providing a general theme in order to contain an open brief; providing a shooting script; and asking participants to develop a shooting script. *Observe Bolton* sits mainly within the second of these categories: as we responded directly to the Worktown photographs the general subject matter of photographs was pre-determined—whatever we observed in public spaces in Bolton. The photographs produced by participants are therefore personal responses to, and explorations of, how people use these spaces. But these photographs are secondary outcomes of research, a product of our investigations into the act of observation, and their visual content was determined through our experimentation with technique in response to the archive.

One of the most productive strategies we tried was combining written and photographic observations, which enabled participants to create their own shooting scripts. I showed the participants written observations made by MO in Bolton town centre. Then we sat on the steps of the Town Hall and made our own written observations of the things that drew our attention in Victoria Square (Figs. 3.16-3.17). We returned to the learning space in the museum and discussed these observations, before returning to photograph the things we had noticed during our written observations (Figs. 3.18-3.23). Here what was particularly of value was taking time and thinking about what we were observing. Although cameras seem to facilitate looking, they actually facilitate taking photographs, which is not at all the same thing. The storage capacity of digital cameras can prompt people to take hundreds of photographs at one time, making the act of pressing the shutter a physical reflex rather than a considered representation.

The conclusion of the project returned to a more conventional project design, drawing on standard practices on participatory photography methods, which in retrospect was not necessary but rather reflected some methodological timidity on my own part. I asked



3.14-3.15 Playful repeat photography

Town Square

Weather: warm and bright

Binman empty bin takes and replaces.
Many babies in prams. Groups of people.
Dike paramedic. loud conversation 2 boys
about videogames "No it's better cause
the graphics and action are good."

Screaming children. Lots use litterbin
Skateboarders, town clock rings. Man
on phone 2/wife saying "Tea"!
Many Smokers.

Weather: overcast/sunny

Time: 13.50

Date: 01/06/13

~~TRUCKS~~
making beeping noises
Paramedic on a bike
hotdog stand (mmm!)
second-hand stall
2 guys arguing and swearing
person eating waffles
TOWN HALL CLOCK IS OUT OF SYNC
person buying a ¹¹⁰⁰ holiday at Thomas
COOK

3.16-3.17 Written observations of Victoria Square



3.18-3.23 Things that we observed in Victoria Square

participants to choose a selection of their favourite photographs (8-10) taken during the project, to be presented with written captions as a final outcome. The process of combining text and photographs together was valuable in exploring how photographs represent place, and these selections are also interesting in demonstrating the subjective insights and motivations of the participants. But this did not contribute directly to the primary aims of the research, and in an evaluative discussion with participants at the end of the project it emerged that it was not integral to their positive experience, rather they enjoyed, and placed most value, on our most playful and creative experiments around MO as a photographic method.

ETHICS

There are significant ethical and safeguarding issues raised by photographing in public spaces, particularly as part of a project with young people. Anticipating and exploring these issues was not only necessary for ethical approval of the research, but was also integral to understanding the Worktown photographs in relation to our contemporary society. The rigorous ethical frameworks developed by Photovoice practitioners, in order to safeguard vulnerable participants and address imbalances of power, were particularly useful for developing an appropriate framework for *Observe Bolton*. In order to mitigate against risk PhotoVoice projects typically begin with a group discussion of issues related to photography, ethics and power, use informed consent forms, and ensure the right to withdraw is available to participants (Wang & Redwood-Jones 2001) and I incorporated these elements into my own planning (see project overview). It was also essential to address the particular issues raised by the Worktown photographs, and before we began photographing in public spaces we discussed the ethics of Spender's photographic tactics. I also gave participants training about laws relating to photographing in public spaces in the UK, and guidance on personal safety. As I had young participants I did not allow them to go out of my sight when we photographing in public spaces.

Our response to these ethical issues was also integrated in to our methodological explorations. As I have previously discussed (in Chapter 1) both MO and the Worktown photographs hold an association with surveillance, and participatory methods have faced a similar critique. Responding to the Worktown photographs by photographing in public space in Bolton, inevitably infers this association, and becomes a practical engagement with this discourse. As I have previously demonstrated, Spender's use of a concealed camera in 1930s Bolton has been over-stated, but tactics such as MO's use of 'follows', where an observer



3.24-3.25 Experimenting with observation: shooting from the hip and holding the camera upside down



This page:
3.26-3.27 DIY drone camera using
lightweight novelty spy camera and
helium balloons

Opposite page:
3.28-3.35 Stills from DIY drone
video. The date and time are
incorrect.





would pursue a particular individual or group through the town, writing down what they said and did, are clearly problematic in contemporary research. This is tricky ethical territory in a collaborative photography project working with young people, and placing the emphasis of our investigation on the act of photography as observation was, in part, a deliberate attempt to address and navigate the issues raised: as Luvera suggests the consideration of ethics may become a 'productive force' in collaborative practice (Luvera 2013: 48).

We explored ethical concerns through practical experiments. Ongoing discussions of the implications of this activity then fed back into further experiments. Participants tried out 'shooting from the hip', a standard technique in street photography of taking photographs without raising the camera to the eye, and played with other ways of holding the camera to photograph (Figs 3.24-3.25). We experimented with using cheap novelty 'spy' cameras and used one to create our own DIY drone, in response to the participants' fascination with surveillance technology. Although I explored the possibility of hiring a drone operator to deliver a session, this was impossible due to cost and legal restrictions on flight paths. Instead we developed our own DIY drone using our lightweight 'spy' camera and helium balloons (Figs. 3.26-3.27). The videos we produced were terrible quality because of camera movement caused by the wind, but there were some moments of strange beauty when the wind dropped and the video became an eerily weightless and random act of observation (Figs. 3.28-3.35). The video exists, as all of our observations did, in relation to the Worktown photographs: the camera scuttling into the stone of town hall steps is an uncanny account of Spender's photographs of speakers, taken in the same place but in the past. This was also unanimously the participants' favourite part of the project.

Although neither participants in the project or members of the public who appeared in our photographs were the primary focus of our investigations, the tendency to interpret the outcomes of collaborative photographic research as personal self-expression, leads to the suggestion that participatory photography is a type of social surveillance (Prins 2010). This prompted me to ask the participants to think about who or what was actually under observation. I introduced the idea of 'sousveillance' to the participants, using the work of artist Hasan Elahi (2016) as an example. After Elahi was placed on a 'watch' list by the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (as he had the same name as a known terrorist) and told to advise the agency of his travel arrangements, he responded by starting a programme of sousveillance, using his website to upload a daily stream of images and maps showing his location. I asked the participants to undertake a programme of 'sousveillance' for a week, and did the same myself and we discussed our photographs in relation to issues of digital

surveillance and personal privacy. Interestingly participants did not feel that surveillance was an intrusion of personal privacy, as long as the intentions of whoever was doing it were 'good'—'it is like that saying 'whatever they don't know won't hurt them' (evaluative discussion with project participants 13/6/2013). In this way participants understood MO's methodology of covert observation to be 'charitable', perhaps demonstrating how much surveillance has become ingrained in British culture.

3. THE EVIDENCE OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ENGAGEMENT

Observe Bolton explored how the Worktown photographs could be practically interpreted and applied as a method of community engagement, and asked what the nature of this engagement with community was. Therefore in critically appraising the outcomes of the project I am also attempting to move the interpretation of participatory photography beyond the level of visual depiction, in order to understand how the processes of photography constitute engagement with community. I begin by considering the practical application of method, which was, like MO, actually a profusion of interrelated methods. We combined elements of archival research, repeat photography, street photography, written observations, surveillance, and sousveillance. The common strategies connecting these methods were derived from the Worktown study: engagement with a contained geographical location, creative experimentation. Archival research was an integral part of the project—in a final evaluative discussion participants said that the project had made them more observant, attaching more importance to this than the technical skills they had learnt in photography, and said that it came about not only from the 'taking but the looking at the photos' (evaluative discussion with project participants 13/6/2013). Here then, as in the original MO project, becoming an observer is to become an active participant in a community: 'Many of the observers have noted that they are stimulated to take an interest in things and ideas that they had previously taken for granted. It creates a band of socially-minded and scientifically-minded people within the community at large' (Huxley 1937: 6).

But how does this engagement extend to the community of Bolton? As I have previously observed, photographs produced by participatory photography projects can easily give the appearance of community engagement, whether as mediated outcomes or the photographs of participants holding cameras and photographs which illustrate research studies (see for example Winton 2016; Lykes 2010; Prins 2010; Woodley-Baker 2009). These images of landmarks and statues in Bolton's town centre (Figs. 3.36-3.38), which I have selected, demonstrate that participants experienced an increased appreciation of positive aspects



3.36-3.38 Photographs demonstrating civic pride



3.39-3.42 Final personal selection of photographs by one project participant

of their community through awareness of the town's heritage, a finding supported by feedback from participants (evaluative discussion with project participants 13/6/2013): 'Most people I've spoken about they don't really get it like, they probably think well why Bolton, Bolton's rubbish... [But] I've learned quite a lot like who the statue is for instance Edwin Chadwick we don't know that, I've learned something there'. This evidence supports that of other collaborative and participatory photography projects with young people which similarly demonstrate increased positive responses to neighbourhoods (see for example Winton 2016; Lozowy et al. 2013; Wang and Burris 1997). But do these photographs really demonstrate this? After all they have been chosen by me, from over 1000 photographs taken by participants, as proof of a desired outcome. The evidence rests solely on the visual content of the photographs and an assumption that this content is a culturally defined visual representation of civic pride.

In participatory methodologies asking participants to select and talk or write about the photographs which are most important to them, is intended to enable self-representation in response to the agreed focus of the project. Viewing a selection of photographs chosen by one participant in *Observe Bolton* reveals personal desires and intentions (Figs. 3.39-3.42). The participant wanted to join the army, and so chose photographs which were mostly taken on the same day, during an Armed Forces Day event in Victoria Square. But these pictures are, like Spender's, simultaneously subjective and objective, encompassing 'an entire complex of social relations' (Frizzell 1997: 9). Army and religious recruiters in the town centre were a frequent sight during the process of research revealing some of the social and economic forces at work in the town.

Similarly another photograph taken by a participant showed a march against the spread of Islam by the far-right protest group, English Defence League (Fig. 3.43). We did not plan to photograph this event, indeed I would have not taken participants to the square if I had known it was taking place, but as the photograph shows this scattered grouping of ten or so people with flags, were not dominant in the space but rather passing in the background of other social processes, shopping, eating and walking— the other participants did not even notice the march was taking place. As a representation this photograph is interesting as it is very different from the types of photographs of similar events which are featured in the press, and which I have been sent on occasion to take myself—images which attempt to visually amplify confrontation and segregation. The content of the photograph differs from these mediated representations as it is a reaction; a response to being in this place at this time, photographing what was going on, when the event happened.



3.43 English Defence League march through Bolton town centre

In this way the act of photography occurs as an engagement with place or rather, drawing on Massey's (2005: 141) conception of place as event, as a negotiation of the processes which constitute place at the instant of pressing the shutter release button. The act of photography is within these social processes, not external to them. Our experience of photographing like Spender was therefore of being emplaced in, rather than surveying, these social processes (despite our best efforts with DIY drones). In a literal sense we were encountering the archive, 'from below' (Sekula 2003: 451) by tracing it through the streets and public spaces of Bolton. De Certeau (1988:93) has influentially suggested that the practice of everyday life in urban places, is of constituting place by walking the city, 'below the thresholds at which visibility begins'. In this way 'walking a path through the city forces a reaction to the space encountered, and in the course of that process the city is rewritten by happenstance, expedience and habit' (Tormey 2013: 104). Pink (2012: 37-38) suggests that in this way photographic practices may be interpreted as events of place, an understanding which brings to the fore the role of serendipity in such practices, and the contingencies inherent to both place and photograph. What I am arguing then, is that to photograph like Spender is not to create a representation of community, but rather to temporarily constitute community through the act of photography in relation to the embodied experience of place.

CONCLUSIONS

The *Observe Bolton* project began as a state sponsored attempt to demonstrate that collaborative photography could promote community cohesion and ended as a collective, and temporary, constitution of community in response to place. This shift, both during the *Observe Bolton* project and in the wider context of this thesis, is a reaction to the tensions which arise when creative and artistic forms of expression are co-opted as political forms of social and cultural capital. The economic necessity of demonstrating ethical and social value in collaborative photographic practices may result in the distortion of well-meaning intention. As I have argued here the treatment and interpretation of photographs as forms of visual representation results in the seeming appearance of community engagement, but obscures the now politicised contexts of such practices. Here then my response, as a creative practitioner, has been to avoid these terms of engagement by approaching and interpreting collaborative photography as a relational process. In this way the project has constituted a 'community of practice' in which meaning was collectively created (Wenger 1998) rather than using photography to visually represent a politically defined notion of what a socially integrated community should look like.

Our engagements with Spender's photographs—as repeat photography (which a participant described as 'when you photograph the past and the present'), by photographing at the sites where he photographed, or through experimenting with technique—connected archive with place by overlaying his paths through the town with our own. In this way the meaning of the archive becomes a relational process, rather than a fixed 'history'. Edwards (2014: 203-204) has argued that: 'it was the embodied experience of photographers in the historical landscape, rather than simply disembodied gaze, that produced and performed a sense of the past, anchored also in concepts of place and locality'. By approaching the archive through place, we could experience and collectively reimagine the 'past' of the Worktown photographs. The most interesting outcomes of this process seemed to occur when our practical investigations were at their most experimental and playful – the DIY drone, the discovery that one participant made of plans for a secret city in the microfilms of the MO archive, the creative juxtapositions of past and present place events through photography. This is a reflection I believe, of the age group of the participants, and also of the intrinsic qualities of the Worktown and MO archives. Our experience of the archive and community in relation to place therefore makes sense in relation to experimental and experiential practices of ethnography (Pink 2012; Pink 2011b; Ball and Smith 2011) and ideas around walking as a type of place-making (Vergunst 2017; Irving 2010; Ingold and Vergunst 2008), rather than in relation to theories of visual representation, and so these theoretically informed ethnographic methodologies have inspired the creative development of *Observe Bolton* into the larger scale collaborative photography project appraised in the following chapter.



- 4.1 Exterior view of the Worktown Observation Centre
- 4.2 Daily themes for observation were issued in the shop window
- 4.3 And through the WOC's online archive www.worktownobservation.co.uk

4. THE WORKTOWN OBSERVATION CENTRE

Visitors, born in faraway climes or at our own door, are helping us design an extraordinary machine which is for killing what exists so that what does not exist may be complete. At 15, rue de Grenelle we've opened romantic lodgings for unclassifiable ideas and revolutions in progress. Whatever hope remains in this universe of hopelessness will cast its last delirious glances at our ridiculous street stall: *"It's all about coming up with a new declaration of human rights."*

(Aragon 2003 [1924]: 10)

Fact is urgent- we are cogs in a vast and complicated machine which may turn out to be an infernal machine that is going to blow us all to smithereens

(Madge and Harrison 1937: 8)

This chapter examines the *Worktown Observation Centre* (hereafter *WOC*), a creative and experimental re-enactment of the Worktown study as a form of 'collective surrealism' (Walker: 97) which explored MO's potential as a creative ethnomethodology of the everyday, 'experienced by actors, not abstracted by professionals' (Stanley 1981: 273). The WOC may be understood as a practical conclusion to the research detailed in this thesis, drawing together tactics which have emerged through the preceding theoretical and practical investigations by activating the Worktown archive as a medium between past and present place through the use of recursive, surreal and sensory tactics and the creation of a collaborative photographic archive.

Through the development of this project I connect the interpretation of MO as a type of surreal ethnography to contemporary practices of sensory ethnography, understanding both as experimental methodologies which seek to develop new forms and ways of knowing. MO's introductory pamphlet suggested that the function of the organisation was 'to get written down the unwritten laws and to make the invisible visible' (Madge and Harrison 1938:8) while Pink (2015: 5) similarly describes sensory ethnography as a practice which 'does not privilege any one type of data or research method. Rather, it is open to multiple ways of knowing and to the exploration of and reflection on new routes of knowledge'. This account of the project therefore describes, to return once again to Schneider and

WE ARE OPEN 12-5PM EVERYDAY

SATURDAY 26 JULY

THE WORKTOWN ARCHIVE

An exhibition about the original Mass Observers in Bolton, featuring photographs by Humphrey Spender. Find out about the remarkable Worktown project and everyday life in 1930s Bolton.

SUNDAY 27 JULY

THE MUSEUM OF TAKEAWAY MENU ART

Artist Mark Page presents the world's only Museum of Takeaway Menu Art. The museum will be accepting submissions of takeaway menus from Bolton. Get involved with takeaway menu origami.

MONDAY 28 JULY

OBSERVE BOLTON

Young participants from the Observe Bolton project showcase their urban surveillance photographs and films documenting life in the town's public spaces.

TUESDAY 29 JULY

MASS OBSERVATION

Photographer David Dunnico's exhibition explores surveillance culture in Bolton and the UK.

CAMERA OBSCURA

Artist Liam Curtin's secret camera obscura will be out observing on the streets of Bolton. Can you find it?

WEDNESDAY 30 JULY

IN AND AROUND BOLTON PHOTOS

Local photographer and collector Gene Watts presents some of his remarkable collection of historical photographs and albums from Bolton.

THURSDAY 31 JULY

GANDER

Robert Parkinson of Preston is my Paris presents an exhibition and workshop about exploring, documenting and representing place. **THE WORKSHOP IS FULLY BOOKED.**

WORKTOWN PUB TOUR

A guided tour round some of the Bolton pubs featured in Mass Observation's Worktown study and the book 'The Pub and the People'. **THE TOUR IS FULLY BOOKED.**

FRIDAY 1 AUGUST

EXPERIMENTAL OBSERVATIONS

South Manchester Arts Collective experiment with sensory methods of documenting everyday life in Bolton's public spaces.

SATURDAY 2 AUGUST

THE NEW WORKTOWN ARCHIVE

An exhibition of photographs submitted by the public in response to daily themes set by the Worktown Observation Centre.

4.4. The shop space hosted a changing daily schedule of exhibitions and events

Wright's (2013: 1) suggestion, the development of knowledge which is 'emergent, rather than prefigured or planned' and which, taking the form of a collaborative, temporally and geographically bound re-performance of the Worktown study, is impossible to articulate in words. As Pink comments, to write up performances of sensory ethnographic representation is to inevitably 'flatten' them (Pink 2012:185).

In exploring how the WOC manifested the parallels between surreal and sensory ethnographies, it is also necessary to echo Charles Madge's observation (1937b: 36) that MO should be defined according to the individual beliefs of each observer: 'My statement is a personal one, with which some members of the group may agree, but is not binding for all.' While I consciously ingrained aspects of MO's surreal strategies and new ethnographic practices in the design of the WOC, in practice the meaning of the project was developed experimentally, collaboratively and subjectively for each individual involved. There is of course a danger that the adoption of ethnographic strategies in artistic projects which deploy social processes as the medium of the artist, such as the WOC, enact participation as a merely aesthetic gesture. This concern has been famously raised directly in response to anthropologist James Clifford's proposal of an 'ethnographic surrealism' (1991) by Hal Foster's influential essay, *The Artist as Ethnographer* (1995), which accused Clifford of a type of 'artist-envy' (1995: 304) and savaged the 'quasi-anthropological' practices of Surrealism which connected: 'the transgressive potentiality of the unconscious with the radical alterity of the cultural other' (Foster 1995: 303). Foster's essay responded to exchanges between artistic and anthropological methods, prompted by an increasingly globalized art market, and still effectively summarises the primary critical concerns around practices of 'relational aesthetics' (Bourriaud 2002 [1998]). The political use of participatory community arts within policies of social integration, which I examined in Chapter 3, is the present day realisation of his concerns that 'values like authenticity, originality and singularity' could become 'sited values' to be developed into cultural capital (Foster 1995: 306).

However the combination of surreal and ethnographic tactics incorporated in the WOC, were developed through preceding practical, historical and theoretical explorations of the material relationships between the Worktown Archive and Bolton, and so these methods are derived from a very particular and local context: the connection between *this* archive and *this* place. As Foresta (2012:7) has suggested 'the real meaning of photography in the world, and the profound difference photographs have made to our knowledge of it, comes not from placing photographs in to the realm of art but from examining them in their original locations and understanding their original purposes.' Approaching the Worktown photographs through

their intrinsic connection to place and in response to the experimental impulses of their creation is a means of understanding the qualities of 'ubiquity and multiplicity' (Foresta 2012: 7) through which these photographs subsequently have gathered historical and cultural meaning. I begin by outlining the structure of the project, then considering how it relates to the contemporary practices of re-enactment in art and anthropology, and exploring how in practice the project related to the ideas of surreal and sensory ethnographies, before finally summarising how the activities of the *WOC* accessed the emplaced Worktown archive in Bolton, producing an embodied account of the past in relation to present place.

PROJECT STRUCTURE

The *WOC* was open for eight days in the summer of 2014 (26 July to 2 August 2014) in a disused exterior shop unit at Bolton's Market Place Shopping Centre (Fig. 4.1). For seven days the community was invited to become observers by contributing photographs to an archive of everyday life in the town. Daily themes for observation were issued through a sign in the shop's window (Fig. 4.2) and on the *WOC*'s online archive, www.worktownobservation.co.uk (Fig. 4.3): Leisure, Takeaways, Surveillance, Religion, Past and Present, Public Spaces and Public Houses, Play. Observers were able to submit contributions to the archive digitally or in person at the physical centre. Over the week the centre collected over 3000 photographs and other artefacts including written observations, poems, maps, videos, audio recordings from 39 participant observers.

On opening day the centre presented an introductory exhibition to the Worktown study and Spender's photographs, using display boards produced for a previous museum exhibition. On the following six days the shop space hosted a changing daily schedule of exhibitions and events presented by local photographers and artists, who I invited because of the thematic connection between their practice and the Worktown study (Fig. 4.4). Exhibitions included artist Mark Page's archive of takeaway menus (Fig. 4.5-4.6), David Dunnico's investigation of surveillance in Bolton and other local towns (Fig. 4.7-4.14), local collector Gene Watts' archive of found photographs (Figs. 4.15-4.17), participants in the *Observe Bolton* project (Fig. 4.18) (see Chapter 3), and the South Manchester Arts Collective's experimental and interdisciplinary methods (Fig. 4.19-4.25). On the final day an exhibition was held of material collected by observers over the course of the week.

Other creative responses to the Worktown Archive extended the centre's activities as performances and walks through Bolton's public spaces. Artist Liam Curtin's analogue

surveillance camera—a camera obscura disguised as a telephone engineer’s stripy tent—was situated on Newport Street, the town’s main thoroughfare, and photographer Robert Parkinson (Preston is my Paris) led a sensory photography walk, Gander, from Davenport Street, the original base of the 1930s Worktown observers and around the town centre. We also held an evening tour of pubs featured in MO’s study of drinking in Bolton, the Pub and the People.

An open call was issued for observers, through promotional flyers, email lists, social media, online local and arts listings, local media, and direct contact with Bolton based groups with corresponding interests, for example local camera clubs and arts societies. Like the original Worktown study we also offered a cash prize (£50) for the best photograph submitted during the week in order to encourage people to submit observations (Fig. 4.26). Observers were also recruited through informal, personal networks— the communities of interest built around the Worktown photographs through the documentation (Chapter 2) and *Observe Bolton* projects (Chapter 3) or from my personal creative networks, or those of other participants involved in the project. The centre also drew observers and visitors through word of mouth and foot fall; some people visited daily during the project but did not necessarily submit observations. Members of the public were also engaged by chance encounters in public spaces with the performances of observers, for example by viewing the camera obscura and of course through the act of photography.

1. RE-ENACTMENTS AND ARCHIVES

In 2009 when I was awarded a scholarship to photograph in response to Spender’s photographs I was asked to have my photograph taken for an article in the local paper. The photographer who came to take this picture told me: ‘whenever it’s a slow news day in Bolton, the editor sends us out to “do a Spender”. I’ve “done a Spender” loads of times.’ Following in Spender’s footsteps by photographing in Bolton is not an original, but rather, an inevitable response; as I have previously observed (in Chapter 2) in MO photography was intended to be an iterative research process and both Spender and Wickham returned to photograph Bolton. Recursive photography has become a strategic thread running through this thesis, a way of accessing and exploring the relationships between past and present place by returning photographs, repeating photographs, walking routes of negatives. Evidently such repetition can enable social and historical comparisons—as Tinkler (2013: 141) has suggested photographs of Bolton Market may provide a focus for studying historical



Clockwise from top left:

- 4.5 Artist Mark Page's *Museum of Takeaway Menu Art*
- 4.6 A Bolton related acquisition for the *Museum of Takeaway Menu Art*
- 4.7 Bolton Council's CCTV control room, photo by David Dunnico
- 4.8 Installation view of David Dunnico's surveillance exhibition
- 4.9-4.14 Surveillance photographs taken outside the WOC, the week before it opened and featured in David Dunnico's exhibition







Clockwise from above:
4.15-4.17 Installation views of Gene Watts exhibition of local 'found' photographs

Below:
4.18 Installation view of exhibition by Observe Bolton participants







BECOME AN OBSERVER!

WIN £50

SUBMIT YOUR PHOTOS IN RESPONSE TO OUR DAILY THEME

BEST PHOTO OF THE WEEK WINS £50 PRIZE

Find out the day's theme by visiting www.worktownobservation.co.uk or looking in the window of the Worktown Observation Centre, Knowsley St.

SUBMIT YOUR PHOTO:

EMAIL: worktownobservation@gmail.com

SUBMIT ONLINE: www.worktownobservation.co.uk

OR BRING YOUR PHOTO INTO THE CENTRE AND SAY HELLO!

We are recreating Mass Observation's 1937 study of everyday life in Bolton and inviting the public of Bolton to become observers. Visit our changing daily exhibition at the Worktown Observation Centre and get involved. Winner of the photography competition announced Saturday 2 August.

Full terms and conditions online at www.worktownobservation.co.uk

Opposite page:

4.19 Installation view of South Manchester Arts Collective's set up for live projection of street view

4.20-4.25 Stills from the live video projection: enjoying the rain

This page:

4.26 Photo competition flyer

changes in consumption—or provoke an emotional response such as John McDonald’s repeat photography of Bolton in the 1990s prompted by a memory ‘of working class community that may never have existed’ (McDonald and Morris 1993:5). But what has emerged through the documentation of the archive, and the development of the Observe Bolton project, was a more over-arching concern with the way in which active engagement with the archive and place facilitates these processes, enabling the archive as a medium between past and present community. Here I examine how the expansion of these recursive tactics, through the creative re-enactment of the Worktown study, relates to current practices at the intersection of art and anthropology.

In popular culture the idea of re-enactments connects most obviously to historical war re-enactments and crime reconstructions, but as Pink and Mackley (2014:147) have observed re-enactments are increasingly adopted as a method in visual research, in response to the influence of arts practice. In their study of everyday energy consumption re-enactment becomes an applied research method which gives ‘routes through which to research and collaboratively apprehend, with research participants, areas of everyday life that are ‘hidden’, never usually spoken about and therefore under acknowledged and under-researched’ (2014:147). In this way, as Pauwels (2011: 9) has suggested, re-enacting events in visual research can move beyond educational aims—to show how something did or could have happened in the past—and ‘generate new data in much the same way as a ‘reconstruction’ of a crime may generate new insights into what really happened’. Indeed, as Blackson (2007: 30) has argued re-enactments need not ‘follow the path of historical evidence’, but may become improvisational and interpretative, as the past is not the same as history.

The *WOC* was a selective re-enactment of the Worktown study, an approach determined by the limitations of scale and budget, and the predominant concern of my research with photographic practices. It drew out certain aspects of MO’s methodology during the Worktown study, for example: the use of visual research methods, the ethnography of a geographically defined space, the creation of an archive, the involvement of many participant observers, the physical headquarters, the use of thematic observation topics, the competition prize to encourage participation, the recording of the weather (Figs. 4.27-4.33). Other elements were inverted, most particularly the idea of covert observation (although each individual observer decided on their own methodology of observation). Our headquarters were intended to make the act of observation a visible and participatory engagement with place, and to this end I used signage to make the project visible, and to give ‘official’ status to the project (Fig. 4.34). The design of this signage referenced

the 1930s history of the project by using Modernist typefaces. The promotional poster for the project referenced the historical connection to place (Fig. 4.35), using one of Spender's 80s photographs of the interior of the Market Place Shopping Centre (where the WOC was based) before it was converted. Visitors to the WOC commented on how they wished the market had not been changed; our presence in the space, and other public engagement activities held during the period of our observations, also signalled the current management's desire to reconnect the community to place.

In artistic contexts re-enactment has become a tactic to address the mediation of history through images. Bishop for example describes Jeremy Deller's restaging of *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001), a violent confrontation between police and miners during the 1980s strike, as a participatory artwork which 'collapses representation and reality' (Bishop 2006). Arnes (2013: 2-3) similarly suggests that:

artistic re-enactments do not ask the naïve question about what really happened outside of the history represented in the media — the "authenticity" beyond the images — instead, they ask what the images we see might mean concretely to us, if we were to experience these situations personally. In this way the artistic re-enactment confronts the general feeling of insecurity about the meaning of images by using a paradoxical approach: through erasing distance to the images and at the same time distancing itself from the images.

Re-enactment has similarly emerged in contemporary practices of documentary photography as a method which challenges the construction of history through photographs, and addresses the binary assumptions of realism versus imagination (Schneider and Wright 2013:19). For example photographer Cristina de Middel's project *Jan Mayen* (2015) responds to staged photographs taken during a failed quasi-scientific expedition to 'rediscover' an island situated between Iceland and Greenland. Having failed to land on the island of Jan Mayen, the expedition decided to stage their conquest, by taking photographs on a beach in Iceland. Middel added to the Jan Mayen archive by recreating a missing film of the staged landing through a re-enactment on a beach in Scotland. In this and in other projects, like *The Afromauts* (2012), Middel develops a type of documentary fiction, a photographic practice which questions the nature of historical truth. In response to Jeremy Millar's project *As Witkiewicz* (2009) Schneider and Wright (2013:12) suggest that re-enactment may be understood as a type of performance. In this project Millar created, like Middel, photographic materials which almost, but never actually existed. Polish artist Stanislaw Witkiewicz was to be Bronislaw Malinowski's photographer for his seminal anthropological



This page:
4.27-4.33 Weather observations, Bolton town centre, 26 July-
1 August 2014
Opposite page:
4.34 signage
4.35 Promotional poster

worktown observation centre

www.worktownobservation.co.uk



WORKTOWN OBSERVATION CENTRE

26 JULY - 2 AUGUST 2014

www.worktownobservation.co.uk
BECOME AN OBSERVER
UNIT X7, KNOWSLEY STREET, BOLTON

PHOTOGRAPH BY HUMPHREY SPENDER, COPYRIGHT BOLTON COUNCIL

study of Kiriwina (formerly known as the Trobriand Islands) near Papua New Guinea in 1914. But when the expedition arrived in Australia, Witkiewicz decided to return to Europe to fight in World War 1. In 2009 Millar travelled to Kiriwina to take the photographs which Witkiewicz never produced, reimagining the future of the past.

This type of practice has precedents in the enduring relationship between ethnography and Surrealism. Most notably filmmaker Jean Rouch drew on Surrealist influences in the development of ethnofiction as a methodology which embraced the creative insights of chance encounters and spontaneity (Henley 2009: 29). In response, new practices of re-enactment acknowledge the value of creative experimentation and serendipity in research, but also act to address historical imbalances of power within this shared history. In *Postcards from a Life* (2013/15) photographer Martina Cleary re-enacts the archetypal Surreal *rencontre*, the chance encounter between André Breton and Nadja on the street of Paris, by retracing Breton's paths through the city and constructing a new archive for Nadja as the 'materialization of evidential traces from a life that has been otherwise erased' (Cleary 2015). By outlining the collision of subjectivity and objectivity, surreal and documentary strategies in these contemporary practices of re-enactment, evidently I am drawing attention to the ways in which they echo MO's use of experimental methodologies during the Worktown study, but also hold the capacity to address the role of the Worktown photographs in the mediation of history.

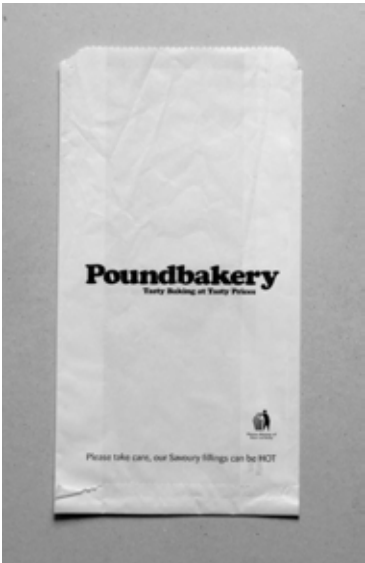
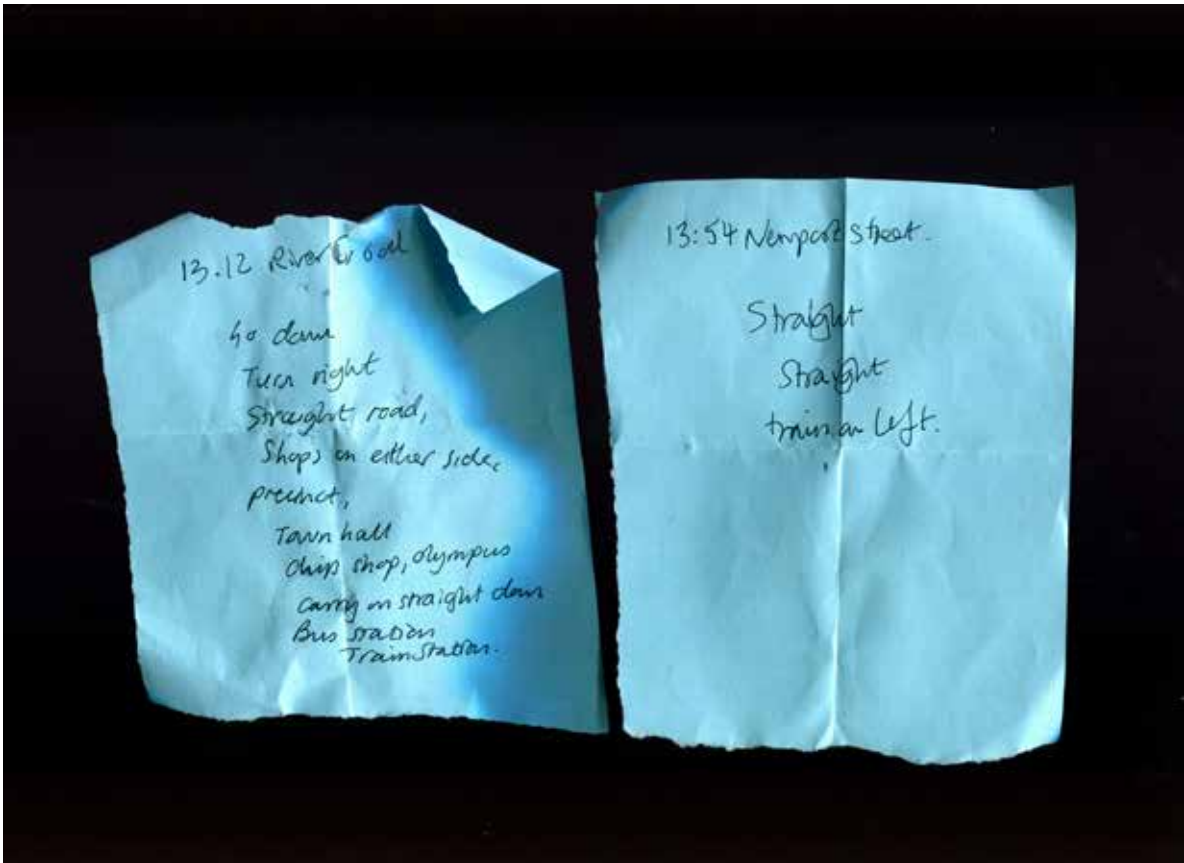
2. TRACES OF SENSORY SURREALISM

The activities of the WOC drew together the ideas of surreal and sensory ethnographies in practice. In Chapter 1 I considered Clifford's (1991: 563-4) description of a surreal ethnography and MacClancy's (1993: 510) connection of this proposal to MO. In accordance with these ideas MO may be understood as a surreal ethnography as a practice which incorporates multiple subjective observations, the inclusion of found materials, practices of assemblage and montage, and a resistance to the Westernized dominance of textual forms of knowledge. In Chapter 1 I suggested that the Worktown archive could be understood as a surreal ethnography through the active processes of accessing and interpreting its materials, and through the process of research have drawn on sensory interpretations of photographs as a way to understand how they continue to exceed their critique as visual representations. This has demonstrated that the community memory of the Worktown photographs in Bolton is constituted through sensory processes of talking and sharing memories (Chapter 2), and the experience of the photographs as embodied in geographically located place (Chapters

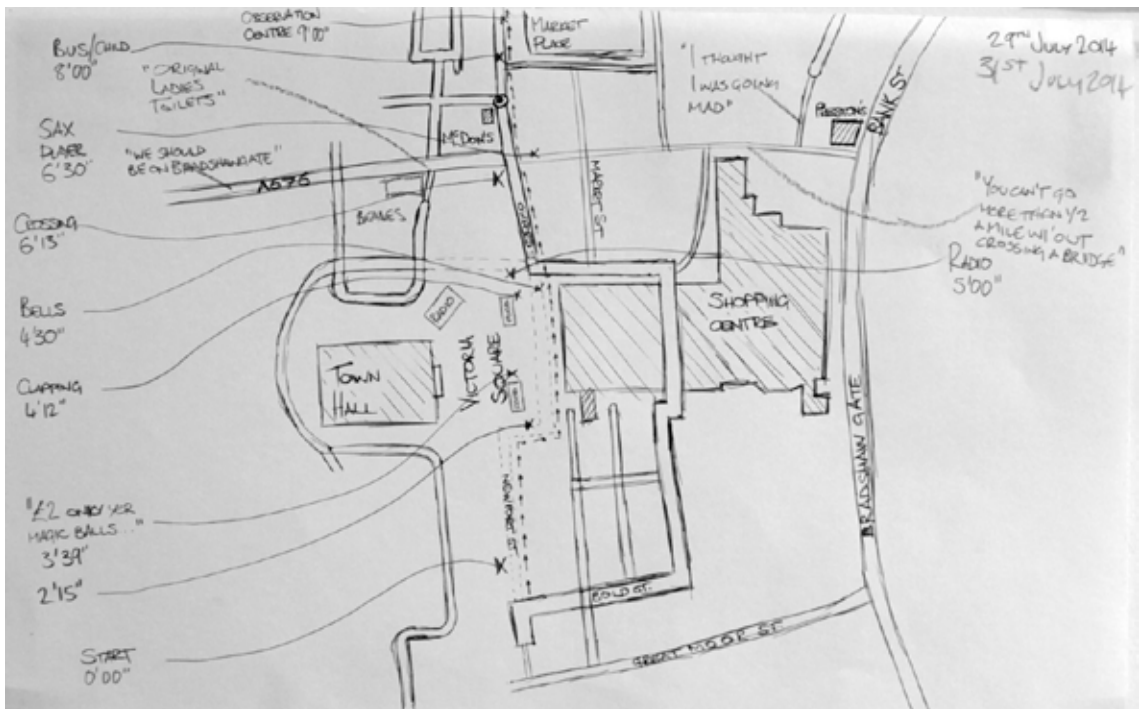
2 and 3). Here I examine the elements of ethnographic surrealism which I consciously embedded in the underlying structure of the WOC, and relate them to contemporary sensory ethnographic methods, but also consider what emerges in practice when you invite 'the god of Chance to lend a hand' (Trevelyan 1957: 85).

The WOC developed a plural account of place through the contributions of 39 observers, of differing ages and social and cultural backgrounds, which encompassed different forms of representation. Although the majority of submissions were photographs the WOC also received written observations, videos, time lapse videos, audio clips, sound maps, drawings, poems, newspapers, lists of instructions, posters and found objects (Figs. 4.36-4.41). Through the collection and presentation of these observations the WOC developed the idea of a mutable archive of fragments as enacted through the creation of parallel physical and digital archives. Although I use the term 'parallel' these archives are evidently not the same, and do not in fact even contain the same number of photographs—the first sits across the room from where I am writing in a couple of gloriously disordered archival boxes, while the latter has no physical form—but the simultaneous process of creating both and their subsequent form as conjoined, collaborative archives entailed practices of collage and montage.

The online archive (www.worktownobservation.co.uk) was built using the micro-blogging application Tumblr with a plug-in template design (Figs. 4.42-4.45). I chose this application with a minimalist design as the basis for the online archive as Tumblr facilitates ways of organising, sorting and accessing archival information, which enable the information to be accessed as a form of montage: the home page of the site presents an infinitely scrolling page of submissions, which can be also viewed according to thematic tagging, date of submission, and as a randomised selection. The site also enabled online submissions, and therefore as Hjorth and Sharp (2014: 132) have suggested this online archive acts as a co-present place. Although most observers who participated in the WOC came to the physical space, some did not, making submissions to the archive solely through the website. In this way the online archive enabled participation, and the constitution of community beyond 'physically locative practices' (Hjorth and Sharp 2014: 132). Most of the physical archive was displayed in the form of a collage which began with digital prints of the Worktown photographs and developed over the course of the project. As photographs and other artefacts were submitted we printed them at a local photo shop and added them to the growing display (Figs. 4.46-4.49). The current disorganisation of the physical archive, and the very likely possibility that I will forget, or not want to pay for the renewal of the domain registration and the online archive will vanish into the digital ether are not a particular



4.36-4.41 Artefacts collected by the WOC



CIRCUS MONDAO
 ★ MONDAO ★
 ALL NEW SHOW
 SPECTACULAR

BOLTON
 HUNGER HILL, WIGAN ROAD OPPOSITE 3 PIGEONS PUB, BL3 4RQ

TUE 22 JULY	SUN 3 AUG	SHOWTIMES
TUE 22ND - 8PM & 7:30PM (E.O.)	TUE 29TH - 8PM & 7:30PM (E.O.)	TUE 29TH - 8PM & 7:30PM (E.O.)
WED 23RD - 8PM & 7:30PM	WED 30TH - 8PM & 7:30PM	WED 30TH - 8PM & 7:30PM
THURS 24TH - 8PM & 7:30PM	THURS 31ST - 8PM & 7:30PM	THURS 31ST - 8PM & 7:30PM
FRI 25TH - 8PM & 7:30PM	FRI 1ST - 8PM & 7:30PM	FRI 1ST - 8PM & 7:30PM
SAT 26TH - 8PM & 8PM	SAT 2ND - 8PM & 8PM	SAT 2ND - 8PM & 8PM
SUN 27TH - 8PM ONLY	SUN 3RD - 8PM ONLY	SUN 3RD - 8PM ONLY
MON 28TH - NO PERFORMANCES		

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4.42-4.45 Screenshots of different ways of accessing the online *Worktown Observation Centre*, from top:

- Collaged home page
- Tagged as 'Religion'
- Ordered by date
- Random selection



4.46-4.49 Detail shots of juxtaposed photographs on display in the WOC

concern as the creation of these archives was intended as an principle of organisation and inspiration rather than being the purpose of the WOC. As Pollen (2016: 211) has commented, in mass-participation photography projects ‘the *act* of event creation and build-up, the gathering of participatory energy and the establishment of a brief but intense sense of community matters more than the resulting images or their longevity.’

The idea of having a physical space in the town as a centre for observation, responded to the importance of Davenport Street in the Worktown study as a locus for observations, a place to gather and exchange ideas, but was also deliberately intended to reference the Bureau of Surrealist Research, established in Paris between 1924-1925. The headquarters of the WOC enabled the serendipity of ‘being there’ to give new insights into the everyday life of Bolton: as Pink (2015:98) has argued this is a valuable way in which ethnographers can develop ‘new routes to understanding’: ‘This might mean the ability to make connections with others and their experiences, and it might raise questions about the meaning of actions of others and how these are embedded in visible or otherwise not immediately obvious realms of meaning’ (Pink 2015:103). The space invited chance encounters: observations of Bolton’s hidden economies (Figs. 4.50-4.51); or regular visitors to the space like the shopping centre cleaners who came to see what was going on every day and tell us about local history and celebrities; or the woman who came to eat her sandwiches in the shop (Figs. 4.52-4.53). One man came in to the shop, was enraged by Spender’s photographs, and then apologised and told us that he had just received a diagnosis for terminal cancer. Other visitors to the shop were clearly baffled. As any encounter with the project was temporal they could encounter an empty room, or a formal exhibition of pizza menus, or twenty people waiting to go to the pub.

Street photography in an urban environment is of course also a chance encounter, with both place and people, and a practice of ‘being there’ (Figs. 4.54-4.59). As Frosh has observed photography may be understood as a constitutive type of (visible) action within the social world. In other words, photography is a ‘performance of representation’, in which both the act and the material product of the act, the photographic image, generate multiple and inter-related meanings (Frosh 2001: 43).’ As in the process of documenting the locations of the Worktown archive (Chapter 2), and in the *Observe Bolton* project (Chapter 3), the WOC’s use of photography to record everyday life in Bolton enabled an embodied experience of place. As I have previously argued this understanding has more in common with the theories and practices of experimental and sensory ethnographies, than with those of visual representation. In particular the WOC employed collective walks as a

Sat 20th
 1600-1700
 Woman (30's) + Man (30's) STAND IN THE
 LOCKED DOORWAY OF THE SHOP. THE MAN LOOKED
 AT ME AND IMMEDIATELY LOOKED AWAY.
 A FEW SECONDS LATER, ANOTHER MAN ARRIVED
 PUSHING A PRAM. THEY ALL DISCUSSED THE
 INCONVENIENCE OF HAVING TO WAIT AROUND
 FOR SOMETHING.
 THE 1ST MAN ASKED THE 2ND MAN FOR
 HIS PHONE NUMBER. THE WOMAN SAID
 "I'VE BEEN WAITING SINCE 1030 THIS MORNING"
 AND PRODUCED SOME MONEY. THE SECOND
 MAN TOOK SOMETHING FROM THE TOP OF
 THE PRAM AND HANDED IT TO HER, CONCERNING
 WHAT IT WAS.
 THEY ALL SAID GOODBYE/NICE ONE &
 LEFT.
 PRAM CONTAINED CHILD OF A NZ



4.50 Written observation of an exchange outside the WOC

4.51 Sequence of photographs submitted by Stephen Marland



Clockwise from top left:
4.52-4.53 Scans of the hands and the contents of the pockets of a visitor to the shop
4.54-4.59 Photography as a practice of 'being there'







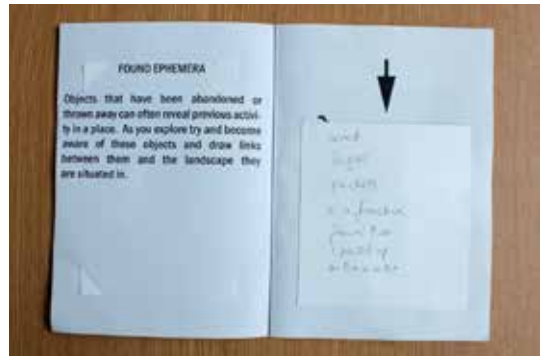
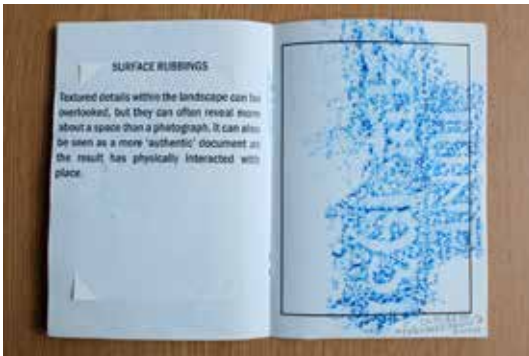
This page:

4.60-4.65 Tour of pubs featured in MO's book *The Pub and the People*

Opposite page:

4.66 Recording observations on Davenport Street during the *Gander* walking tour of Bolton led by Robert Parkinson

4.67-4.70 Page spreads from the *Gander* workbook designed by Robert Parkinson



method of observation— a tour of pubs featured in MO's *The Pub and the People* (4.60-4.65) and *Gander*, a type of photographic *dérive* of Bolton initiated and led by photographer Robert Parkinson (Fig. 4.66). *Gander* explicitly invoked chance and sensuous responses to place through a 'work book' (Figs. 4.67-4.70) which walkers completed as they explored the town which gave directives on, for example, flipping coins to decide which direction to photograph in, collecting found ephemera, and taking rubbings from surfaces. As Careri (2002) has demonstrated the development of walking as an artistic method of discovery and engagement with urban places can be traced from Dadaism through Surrealism to Situationism to the development of *dérive* as a methodology of psychogeographical observation which was referenced in Parkinson's guided walk. Here collective walking maybe understood as a way of knowing (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 5), but also as a form of resistance (Vergunst 2017: 17): for de Certeau (1988: xiv-xv) walking is one of 'the innumerable practices by means of which users reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production', part of the 'network of an antidiscipline' developed through 'tactical and makeshift creativity'.

The use of photography and creativity as a tactic of resistance in Bolton was also made evident through the operations of the *WOC*, particularly in response to the day directive on surveillance (Fig. 4.71), but also because the project brought photographers in the town together and created dialogue between them. One man revealed that he would come in to the town centre very early in the morning and fly a drone illegally round the town to create his own unique document of place. Other contributing photographers and artists interpreted the act of observation as a performance of resistance to contemporary surveillance culture. Artist Johny Byrne made a study of the anthropometrics of gait of passersby outside the *WOC* (Fig. 4.72), in response to the work of the Behavioural Insights Team (also known as the Nudge unit) a social purpose company partially owned by the Cabinet Office who use 'insights from behavioural science to encourage people to make better choices for themselves and society' (Behavioural Insights Team 2017). Liam Curtin's camera obscura was a type of analogue surveillance camera, street camouflaged as a telephone engineer's stripy hut. Dressed in the high visibility clothing of the official public space worker he invited over a hundred people to view the obscura and encounter a new perspective on a familiar place (Figs. 4.73-4.74).

The project revealed, as Pink and Mackley (2014:147) have suggested, 'hidden' areas of everyday life, as photography provides a means of articulating local knowledge of place. For example local photographer and photography collector Gene Watts submitted a photograph



Clockwise from top left:

4.71 Photography as an act of resistance to surveillance culture

4.72 Artist Johny Byrne studies the anthropometrics of gait outside the WOC

4.73-4.74 Artist Liam Curtin's camera obscura



4.75 The best place to 'hook up' with girls in Bolton in the 1970s, Gene Watts

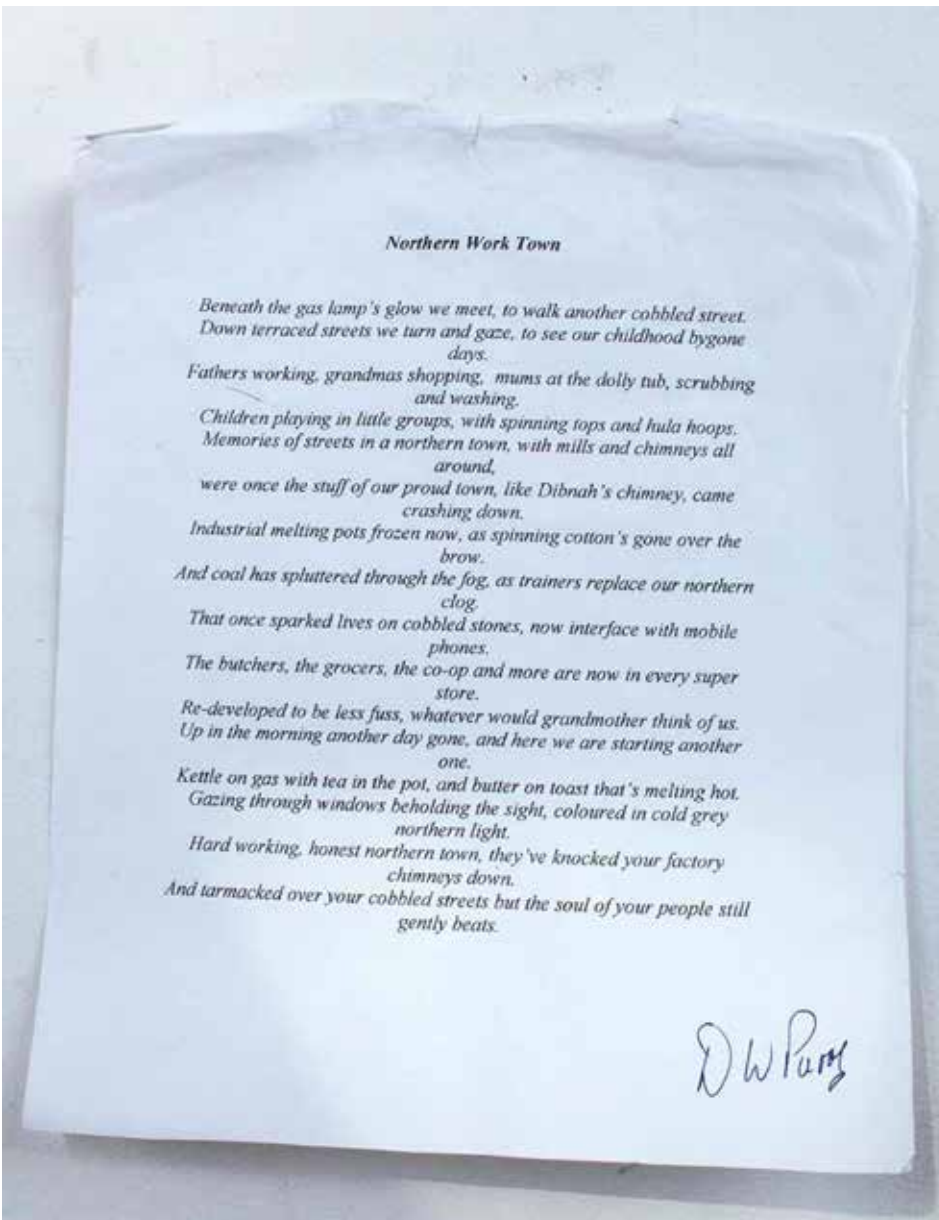
of red telephone boxes by the Market Place Shopping Place Centre (Fig. 4.75) which showed, he told me, the best place to 'hook up' with girls in Bolton in the 1970s. More expansively the project revealed some of the ways in which local people use photographic practices to constitute community, particularly in relation to memory. Gene presented the best attended exhibition at the *WOC*, where people sifted through piles of his old local photographs and family albums, a tiny part of his vast collection of Bolton related photography (Figs. 4.15-4.17). I met Gene by chance when I visited a charity shop in the centre of the town while researching the locations of the Worktown photographs. At the back of the vast space he had set up his own area overflowing with curios, local memorabilia, old cameras and boxes and boxes of old photographs and albums. Gene told me that he started collecting photographs when his mother died: 'I found all her photographs- it just intrigued me because I had no evidence of my father' (Watts 2014). From the single photograph he found of his father, he had been able to trace him, and found a family of thirteen aunts and uncles in Gloucestershire. Acquiring old photographs from local auctions and house clearances, scanning and sharing them on the internet had now become a consuming passion for Gene who delighted in using photographs to connect other people's families, but confessed that his house was filled with photographs. He also took his own photographs of notable events and locations in Bolton, which he thought should be recorded for posterity. Gene was building Bolton's community through a digital archive on a global scale, with a Facebook page receiving over 70,000 views a week: 'They're from all over the world. All races- Indians, Pakistanis, Australians- but they're all related somewhere to Bolton' (Watts 2014). In this way the serendipitous practices of the *WOC* gave greater insight into how digital technologies have enabled local communities to consciously preserve and develop community memories.

3. THE EMPLACED ARCHIVE

The *WOC* demonstrated the ways in which the Worktown archive continues to constitute community memory in relation to place. Edwards (2014: 203-4) has argued that it was the embodied experience of photographers in historical landscapes, 'anchored in concepts of place and locality', that has produced the sense of past. Accessing the Worktown photographs in the place where they were taken therefore creates a sense of community memory, an affective engagement with the past, and the people, or photographers, who once stood where you photograph now. This is an understanding which has developed through this research, from the mapping of Spender's negatives on to the current landscape of the town, to the repetition of his act of photography. The location of the *WOC* enacted this



- Clockwise from top left:
- 4.76 Shoppers outside the market hall, 1937, Humphrey Spender
 - 4.77 Queen's Park, 1937, Humphrey Spender
 - 4.78 Queen's Park, 2014, Don Tonge
 - 4.79 All-in-Wrestling, 1937, Humphrey Spender
 - 4.80 Wrestling, 2014, Cathy Todd
 - 4.81 Northern Worktown, a poem by D.W.Parry





embodied past, as it was physically situated on a road which was the direct route between the observers' Davenport Street headquarters and the centre of Bolton in the 1930s, when Spender photographed the shop fronts where we were based (Fig. 4.76) and observers followed shoppers through the now Market Place Shopping Centre.

Our collaborative use of photography during the *WOC* revealed how our physical movements through the town overlaid Spender's and each other's traces: as Hjorth and Sharp (2014: 129) have commented 'it is at the site of interrogating multiple modes of presence and the overlays of place that art ethnographies are most successful: moving beyond a mere aestheticisation and becoming an embodied part of creative, social practice'. In this way our collaborative photography may be understood as a form of *methexis*: 'a non representational principle' which involves 'an act of concurrent production, a pattern danced on the ground' (Carter 1996: 84) and the photographs we produced may be understood to visible this concurrent movement through place through the practice of juxtaposition. This understanding returns us to the idea of the 'image' as conceived by Madge and Jennings in the early application of MO as 'the knots in a great net of tangled time and space' (Jennings 2012: xiii). As such 'images' photographs make the entanglements, the meshwork of past and present movements through place, clear (Ingold 2016; Pink 2015). That this understanding of how the relationship between past and present place is manifested in the Worktown photographs is not solely an academic perspective was demonstrated through submissions to the *WOC*. Participants deliberately photographed where and what Spender had photographed in order to highlight social and cultural changes, but also continuities in the town's life (Figs. 4.77-4.80). The eventual winner of the photography competition was in the process of fundraising to make a film about the Worktown project. Another man brought his poem, *Northern Work Town*, to the *WOC* (Fig. 4.81):

Hard working, honest northern town, they've knocked your factory
chimneys down
And tarmacked over your cobbled streets, but the soul of your people
still
gently beats

In his poem the imagery of Worktown still conveys a memory of a lost industrial place, but the spirit of community remains constant.

In concluding then, of course I cannot present the experiential forms of knowledge produced through the *WOC*, but I can recount my personal sensory experience of place during the

project, in the form of photographs (Figs. 4.82-4.87), and by telling of the curiously heady intensity and exhaustion of constantly observing Bolton for a week. By the end of the project I was seeing meaning and patterns in everything, the tilt of a lamppost, a discarded Pound Bakery bag, a splatter of paint on the ground. As Huxley noted in the preface to MO's introductory pamphlet in 1937, that for observers: 'an actual day's work on Mass-Observation seems to exhaust to an unexpected extent, and yet, I am told, they come up for more' (Huxley 1937: 6), and in this way, for me, the activities of the WOC enabled an embodied account of the archive in place. Through the sensory experience of observation Bolton becomes MO'S imagined collaborative museum of the senses (Madge and Harrison 1937: 35), and through each subjective encounter with the Worktown photographs in place there is a return to, and a reordering of 'their economy'(Macpherson 1997 [1978]: 148).



4.82-4.87 Davenport Street, July-August 2014, Caroline Edge



CONCLUSIONS

This concluding chapter draws together the theoretical and methodological perspectives on the Worktown archive developed through this research. It considers the findings of this thesis in relation to the stated aims of the study, examines its wider contributions to knowledge, and suggests areas for future research.

WHAT ARE THE HISTORICAL, CRITICAL, MATERIAL AND SOCIAL PROCESSES THROUGH WHICH THE WORKTOWN ARCHIVE CONSTITUTES COMMUNITY IN RELATION TO PLACE?

Culturally the Worktown archive has come to function as a collection of old photographs which signify an idealised past, a lost community destroyed through the decline of industrialisation. In academic contexts this function has been critiqued as evidence of the social control exerted by the privileged elite on to the working class through the interpretation of the photographs as a form of social documentary (Chapter 1). This interpretation is rightly concerned with the politicisation of photographs and their role in the construction of a false history of social consensus and class cohesion, but also reflects the intellectual currents which shaped the nascent photographic theory of the 1970s. Such critiques of the Worktown photographs explore the effects of external political and social forces acting on and through the photographs, but do not suggest that the ideological construction of community is an innate property of the photographs. Yet as Burgin has suggested, when photography is interpreted and used in interdisciplinary contexts there is a danger that misunderstandings pass between disciplines (Burgin 1982: 2). As the ideas of photographic theory passed into wider interdisciplinary academic contexts in the subtleties of photographic analysis were lost and replaced with a critique which inaccurately sited the evidence of social control in the visual content of the Worktown photographs through analysis based on the limited evidence of edited selections.

In Bolton, the meaning of the Worktown photographs cannot be theoretically abstracted as they continue to relate directly to the geography of the town. Considering the Worktown photographs in the context of the town has therefore demonstrated the inaccuracies of critical interpretations. Through photographic analysis of the intrinsic connection of place

and negative, using methods such as repeat photography and archival research, the depiction of Spender as a secret spy is revealed to be much over-stated in criticism. Examining the photographs in the context of Bolton reveals their continuing role in local and domestic histories in the town. But the role of the archive in Bolton has been superseded by external cultural and academic narratives in histories of the photographs, demonstrating how the ideal of local community has become an ideologically charged concept imposed on, rather than arising through, the particularities of place and time.

By returning to reconsider the original contexts of MO, the use of photography during the Worktown study is understood as a plural and recursive strategy, involving many photographers, and part of an interdisciplinary methodology developed through creative experimentation. The subsequent critical history of the Worktown photographs has revealed the ways in which the state of the archive is affected by critical and curatorial interventions, shaping future interpretation and making visible external forces. This history therefore suggests a mutable archive, which is contingent on the contexts in which it is accessed and interpreted. This concept of the archive relates directly to the original creative impulses of MO, which have been developed through the idea of a surreal ethnography by Clifford (1991) and MacClancy (1993) – a collection of sensory fragments, produced by multiple participants, creating temporary meaning through chance juxtapositions as the archive is accessed and reordered. In this way the archive may be seen to retain the capacity to produce new forms of knowledge in relation to community, developed by active engagement with the archive.

HOW CAN UNDERSTANDING HOW THIS PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE CONSTITUTES COMMUNITY INFORM NEW WAYS OF INTERPRETING, ACCESSING AND USING IT COLLABORATIVELY IN PRACTICE?

Examining how the Worktown archive has constituted community in different contexts has demonstrated how issues of access have distorted critical responses to the photographs, exacerbating their theoretical abstraction from the material relationships between the photographs and the local community. In response this research has expanded access through the development of an exhibition and online archive, which have facilitated the co-existence of multiple interpretations. In particular the *Bolton Worktown* website enables the continual renegotiation of meaning by, for example, allowing the local community to leave comments relating to the ways that the photographs are connected to their personal histories and knowledge of the community. The development of these outputs was informed by the process of documentation which demonstrated how material engagement reactivated

the archive, and gathered a community of interest around it.

This understanding suggests that the archive should be interpreted and accessed in ways which respond to this innate mutability: an approach which acknowledges the relationship between the original impulses of MO as a surreal ethnography and the resurgence of such practices as contemporary, sensory methodologies in the social sciences. By drawing on contemporary theoretical perspectives to photographs as material and relational objects (Batchen 2008; Edwards 2012; Edwards and Hart 2004; Pinney 2004) this research has interpreted and accessed the archive as a medium which facilitates exchanges— between academic and local forms of knowledge, external social and cultural forces and a geographically-defined community, and between past and present place. Active involvement with the archive therefore develops new knowledge, informing the development of methods of using the archive to collaboratively constitute community through engagement with place.

In response to these theoretical insights this research has collaboratively reimagined MO's use of photographic research methods through the development of two photography projects, *Observe Bolton* and the *WOC*, which accessed the archive through physical engagement with place. *Observe Bolton* reinterpreted MO's methods in relation to the use of photography in contemporary participatory methodologies finding that, as in the documentation project, photography acts to create a temporary community in response to the contingencies of place. But here the history of MO acts as a warning of the ways in which photography of and with local communities continues to be politically co-opted to present the appearance of cultural and social integration. As in the academic critique of the Worktown photographs evidence of meaning is frequently read from the visual content of photographs produced by participants and, as I have argued (in Chapter 3) these outputs may easily be presented to give the appearance of community engagement. The *WOC* responded to these concerns about the ethics of collaborative photography through the development of a re-enactment of the Worktown study. This project emphasised creativity and experimentation in response to the ideas of a surreal ethnography and contemporary practices of sensory ethnography. Here the understanding of how the photographs constitute community is developed as a collaborative exploration of the archive through engagement with place.

HOW CAN THE FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE GENERATED THROUGH RESPONDING TO THE ARCHIVE PHOTOGRAPHICALLY BE UNDERSTOOD AND INTERPRETED AS FORMS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

By responding to the Worktown archive photographically this research has drawn on the intrinsic connection of place and image, creating emplaced and experiential forms of knowledge. This knowledge may be understood as a form of community engagement as it was generated through physical and sensory involvement with a geographically-defined place, and acted to assemble 'communities of practice' (Wenger 1998) around the Worktown archive throughout the different stages of the research: the documentation project and resulting Bolton Worktown website, Observe Bolton, and the WOC. Here photography may be understood as a 'catalytic' agent (Lowozy et al. 2013: 202; Heiferman 2012: 17) constituting community in response to the contingencies of place.

This is a form of engagement which extends beyond the aim of transforming individual perceptions of local community, as it creates new collaborative forms and understandings of community. By understanding the process of photography to be a 'generative act' (Edwards 2014: 179) this research has approached the Worktown photographs as being 'actively "resourceful"' (Edwards 2011: 47). By invoking the serendipity of 'being there' (Pink 2012: 98) in place this research has revealed hidden practices of everyday life in Bolton, and the ways in which photography, photographs, and the Worktown archive, continue to inform the practices which develop community identity in the town. By reactivating the photographic archive as a medium, this research therefore enables an experiential account of community in relation to past and present place. Through active involvement with the archive participants in the research are then able to 'reorder' the 'economy' (Macpherson 1997: 147-8) of the photographs, challenging the externally imposed ideology of community attached to the Worktown archive, and reimagining the future of the past depicted in the photographs.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

This research has challenged enduring academic interpretations of the Worktown photographs (Roberts 1998; Samuel 1994; Taylor 1994) by interpreting the Worktown archive materially, holistically and in relation to place. This has revealed new information about where, when, how and why these photographs were taken. As I noted in Chapter 2, these little pieces of empirical knowledge may seem to be only of local interest, but as much of the critique of the Worktown photographs has been developed through reference to visual content they actually shatter the basis of these arguments. For example in Chapter 1 I detailed Samuel's (1994: 325) incorrect assumption that photographs taken in Ashington were of Bolton, an indication of the way in which critiques of the Worktown photographs

have argued that the observers conflated working class experience while simultaneously manging to do exactly the same (Highmore 2002: 81). Here interpretation of the images photographically – that is through technical and material analysis – has shown that, at least in terms of their transcription of place, photographs do retain some capacity to tell the ‘truth’.

Other empirical knowledge produced during the research has similarly served to expand the interpretation of MO’s use of photography as creative, experimental research method, acting to restore the project to histories of visual anthropology. For example the rediscovery of Michael Wickham’s photographs of Bolton, has contributed to my interpretation of photography in MO as plural and recursive, an understanding which has led to the development of ‘a new and expanded methodological space’ (Edwards and Morton 2015: 10) for interpreting and responding to photographic archives in museums. The development of a new online archive massively expands access to the Worktown photographs, enabling academic, artistic and local meanings to coexist, and the development of new forms of knowledge around the photographs. The immediate impact of this has been reflected by much more varied loan requests from institutions and curators to Bolton Museum, showing how access shifts interpretation. My analysis of the Worktown photographs in relation to place has therefore developed ideas relating directly to the Worktown study and MO and, because of the cultural status of the photographs, may also be understood in a very small way to have contributed to the work of moving photographic history from a canon of singular, great achievements towards a plural understanding of photography’s role in the practices of everyday life.

Perhaps most importantly this thesis has developed collaborative photographic methods and outputs which continue to develop knowledge about the Worktown archive. Although I have designed and managed this research, the work and insights described here represent the contributions of many people: participants in *Observe Bolton* and the *WOC*; staff at Bolton Museum; academics and artists; members of the local community. As people continue to add comments to the Bolton Worktown website the knowledge around the Worktown archive continues to develop, and this provides a basis for future research by others into the photographs. Contributors to this research and, in particular the local community, have therefore permanently altered critical perceptions of the photographs by adding their voices and memories and expressing how the photographs relate to a local, rather than externally defined, community. In this way this thesis has contributed to the development of methods which mediate between academic and community knowledge.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Engaging with the sprawling interconnections and multiple meanings inherent to both photographs and MO was bound to result in the development of research which is a little messy and has spilled out a bit at the edges into other areas of theory and practice, and approaching the archive through creative and experimental tactics has intensified these multitudes of potential associations with other theories and methodologies. As a photographer I have of course emphasised forms of knowledge developed in practice, but this has perhaps limited my ability to develop and integrate some relevant theoretical perspectives on the work detailed in this thesis. These omissions particularly suggest ways in which the theoretical basis of this research may be developed by exploring how my findings relate to theories of performance and practice in relation to ethnographies of place, and how photography may be understood in these contexts as a tactic of everyday resistance.

In practical terms the combination of methods deployed here respond to the particularities of this place and archive, yet the over-arching principle of how photography gives insight into the ways community is constituted through past and present processes of place-making suggest that these methodologies, this combination of archival and experiential processes, could be developed and applied in other research contexts. Potential areas for future research therefore include exploring the potential of the WOC as a methodology which creates new understandings of place in other geographically-situated communities, for example in Blackpool, like the original Mass Observers. Similarly the idea of approaching archives through their intrinsic connection to place could inform investigations of other archives, such as Daniel Meadows' photographs taken in a temporary studio in Moss Side, Manchester during the 1970s. This archive of photographs is particularly interesting to me as I live in the local area and it has, like Bolton, a national image at odds with the local experience of community. The thesis has also generated new areas for research around the use of photography in the original MO project, particularly with regard to Michael Wickham's under researched contributions and wider career.

Other areas for future research may address the ways in which photography continues to play a role in the political construction of community, particularly by expanding and sharing the ideas developed in this thesis around the problems of visual construction of community engagement in academic forums and publications. As contemporary research continues to become increasingly interdisciplinary and concerned with community engagement, participatory photography has become a popular methodology. The insights

developed through this thesis may enable expanded analysis of, and critical debate around, participatory photography projects by drawing on theoretical perspectives which understand photography as an experiential and sensory process and so challenge such practices to produce positive change in communities, rather than being satisfied with the mere appearance of engagement.

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APPENDIX 1: LIST OF FIGURES AND CREDITS

CREDITS

Humphrey Spender Worktown photographs © Bolton Council

All Mass Observation Archive (MOA) material © Mass Observation Archive

Digital copies of Mass Observation Archive material ©Adam Matthew Digital

All photographs taken for Observe Bolton and the Worktown Observation Centre © the photographer

Julian Trevelyan artworks © Trevelyan estate

Michael Wickham photographs © Wickham estate

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APPENDIX 2: RELATED RESEARCH

Edge, C. (2015) Looking for Bolton in the Worktown Archive. In: Edwards, E. and Morton, C. (eds) *Photographs, Museums, Collections: Between Art and Information*. London: Bloomsbury. p 247-263.

14 LOOKING FOR BOLTON IN THE WORKTOWN ARCHIVE

Caroline Edge

In late September 1937 Humphrey Spender returned from photographing a church harvest festival service to Mass Observation's headquarters at 85 Davenport Street in Bolton, Lancashire. He stopped at the junction of Davenport Street and Snowden Street and took two photographs of children playing outside Union Mill. The first photograph showed best friends Bob Harwood and Billy Doeg, playing with two other boys (Figure 14.1).

The exposure was made in a split second, but 75 years later an indexical connection between place and image remains inscribed on the negative. This chapter traces the material performances of this image as it has travelled from, and returned to, the place where it was taken. It is informed by a project undertaken in collaboration with, and facilitated by, Bolton Museum, where the negative is now held in the Worktown Archive since its acquisition in 1994.¹ The research project used photographic methods to document Spender's photographs of Bolton by dating and locating them in the contemporary landscape of the town.

At one level this is the history of a photograph but, as Langford has observed, any 'close reading of a photograph is like a stone dropped in a pond, with its ever expanding inclusions, occlusions, and allusions' (2001: 4). The image of Bob and Billy has neither a singular meaning nor form: photographic meaning proliferates through reproductions and shifts with context. Writing shortly before Spender took the photograph, Walter Benjamin observed that the process of reproduction 'substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced' (1936: 215). The history of this photograph is constituted through the reactivation of multiple instances of the image: unique negative, book reproduction, photocopy, digital file, inkjet print, and archival silver gelatin print. Each material performance of the image has accrued meaning from the context of its reactivation, while still referring back to the unique negative and the corner of Davenport Street where it was taken. As Edwards and Hart have



FIGURE 14.1 Children play street games on Davenport Street, Bolton. Copyright Bolton Council.

observed 'photographs are both images *and* physical objects that exist in time and space and thus in social and cultural experience' (2004: 1). By extension the history of the photograph is a history and analysis of the social forces at work upon and within the Worktown Archive.

Photographing Worktown

The photograph of Bob and Billy is embedded in a complex discursive history. At the moment the negative was exposed the image began to accrue external meaning. I outline the prehistory of the archive in order to reveal how the cultural resonance of the photographs has both framed and enabled museum responses to them. Spender was invited to photograph Bolton as 'an exploring ethnographer in a foreign country' by self-styled anthropologist Tom Harrisson (Mellor 1997: 135). In January 1937, Harrisson founded the social research organization Mass Observation² (hereafter MO) with poet Charles Madge and surrealist filmmaker Humphrey Jennings. The three young men felt that British society had been forced into crisis by a schism between the elite and the masses. Their experimental response was to recruit trained and untrained participant observers to create an 'anthropology of ourselves'(Madge and Harrisson 1937: 10). MO wanted the observation of everyone by everyone, including themselves, to empower the

common man through self-knowledge: 'We shall collaborate in building museums of sound, smell, foods, clothes, domestic objects, advertisements, newspapers, etc.' (Madge and Harrison 1937: 35). The project combined art and science through multidisciplinary research methods and has subsequently confounded definition: 'It was an episode that can perhaps be understood as a complex of contemporary forces: populism, statistical social surveys, Surrealism, naïve Realism, anthropology, investigative reportage and Documentary impulses' (Mellor 1997: 134). Initially the organization focused on two research projects; a national panel of volunteer writers and the Worktown study of everyday life in Bolton run by Tom Harrison. Bolton was selected as a site for research primarily because it was 'a town that exists and persists on the basis of industrial work, an anonymous one in the long list of such British towns' (Mass Observation 1987: xiv). The Worktown study did not test a hypothesis: 'Our first concern is to collect data, not to interpret them' (Madge and Harrison 1937: 34). In essence MO produced 'a method not a theory' (Stanley 1981: 264), collecting a micro-level of information on even the most mundane detail of everyday life. This method combined science and art, and classified photography as the former, to be used as an anthropological tool with other 'scientific instruments of precision' (Madge and Harrison 1937: 35).

Harrison took 'an almost passive stance of pure observation' (Hinton 2013: 31), which privileged the veracity of the visual. He recruited Spender and directed the themes of his photographs, which were to provide a check on written observations. Spender recollected that: 'Tom loaded me up with objectives, too many objectives, and then it was simply up to me' (Spender 1982: 15). Although, as I have noted, MO did not seek to prove a hypothesis, the organization simultaneously admitted the subjective desires of its participants to pursue their own hypothesis: 'it is left to any member of the group to draw his own implications [about the purpose of MO]' (Madge 1937). Harrison, for instance, was interested in drawing parallels between his previous anthropological studies of Sarawak and Vanuatu and everyday life in Bolton. A purely visual analysis of the image of Bob and Billy reflects the intentions of MO, Harrison and Spender. The Worktown study collected information on the theme of children and the play fight may seem to represent Harrison's interest in 'primitive' self-expression. However Spender was consciously resistant to taking photographs 'merely as illustrations' to theories (Spender 1982: 15) although he agreed on the positivist function of his photographs: 'I suppose with a touch of hindsight I can say I was out to expose truths' (1982: 16).

Spender's approach to his task reflected his experience as a professional photographer,³ and his recollections of the project centre on the practical difficulties of fulfilling this task. Spender saw that people altered their behaviour for the camera and so tried to become an unobserved observer. On a series of short visits to Bolton he developed techniques for taking naturalistic photographs – pretending to photograph something else and then turning around at the last minute, or concealing his camera at waist height underneath a raincoat. He recalled



FIGURE 14.2 Humphrey Spender's Contax II rangefinder camera. Copyright Caroline Edge.

that 'I had to be an invisible spy – an impossibility which I didn't particularly enjoy trying to achieve' (Spender 1982: 16). His camera, a Contax II rangefinder camera with a Biogon wide-angle lens (Figure 14.2), was the latest technology of the time and fundamental to his process.⁴ The innovation of small manoeuvrable 35mm film cameras with fast shutter speeds changed the physical and temporal experience of photography in the 1930s, making the act of photography mirror the physical movement of the photographer and capturing a sequence of moments.

Spender's experience is embodied in the material form of the negative of Bob and Billy. It is fourth in a strip of five negatives (Plate 14.1), taken on a 36 exposure 35 mm Agfa Isopan ISS film. The first two negatives show a church service, the altar decorated with flowers for the harvest. The third shows three children playing with a pile of stones, in the background of the shot the gates of Union Mill are visible behind a small group of people. The next negative is the image of Bob and Billy; Spender has moved into the horizon of the preceding image. The final negative in the sequence is taken a moment later; the eye of the camera has angled to the left following the boys' movement. The little boy in the big shorts is now smilingly aware of the camera and two smaller children are now also in the frame.

Reading the negatives as a sequence reveals not just a transcription of place but of a journey through place. Spender's passage through the split seconds of time traces a visual chain of thought, through the material form of the film. We move with Spender from the surreptitious, shaky photographs of the church's dim

formality to the spontaneity of the children's games outside. You can almost feel him breathe a photographic sigh of relief as he comes into the light and can lift the camera up to his eye to compose. He sees the potential photograph of children playing and pursues it through the next three frames. It is the photograph of Bob and Billy that captures the 'decisive moment' of the sequence, captured in the split second after Billy has thrown something at the boys on the left. His hand is blurred by movement; they are fixed permanently in time dodging towards the edge of the frame.

The strip of negatives also reveals the traces of its own journey: yellowed tape mending the torn film rebate, the cuts at each end marking precisely its separation from the film. It is unclear precisely when the strip was processed and cut although this material intervention cut the photograph loose from its original context, a physical process arguably reflected in the subsequent theoretical abstraction of the image. When Bolton Museum acquired the Worktown negatives in 1994 they had already been cut into strips, which were thus no longer in their original film sequences. In a letter⁵ to the museum (dated 4 October 1994) Spender said that the negatives 'had been in uncut continuous rolls' until they were rediscovered and taken to Sussex in 1973. Memory however is not as precise as photographs and there is evidence to suggest his recollections are incorrect. Some of the films were certainly processed, cut and printed shortly after they were taken since Spender's Worktown photographs were published in *The Bolton Citizen* in March 1938 and *The Geographical Magazine* in April 1938. Although MO planned to publish Spender's photographs in four books on the Worktown study, the onset of World War II intervened. Only one book was published⁶ (*The Pub and the People*), and cost prohibited the inclusion of Spender's photos. Spender's photographs were never used as intended to support the data of MO's written observations. By the time they were critically rediscovered by David Alan Mellor in 1973, they had become 'homeless photos unmarried to the statistics' (Mellor 1997: 141).

Reproduction

The first known reproduction of the photograph of Bob and Billy was in the book *Worktown People* in 1982. The book selected about one hundred of Spender's photographs taken for MO, which were thematically arranged and presented with an introduction, interview with Spender and minimal captions.⁷ The book's editor Jeremy Mulford made specific reference to the photograph of Bob and Billy observing: 'Travelling around Bolton you continually come upon bits of Humphrey Spender's photographs; and occasionally, more than just bits. The corner where the boys are running on page 42 is still clearly recognisable (though the mill behind is not a mill now)' (Spender 1995: 10). The selection

and organization presented the photographs as social documentary, but 'this was a process which constructed Spender's oeuvre as much as it recorded it, and rendered other aspects invisible' (Walker 1998: 117). Although Mulford was cautious in his presentation of the images, noting that it would be a 'major research enterprise' to document the photographs and warning against an impression of comprehensiveness in a 'reconstruction of a piece of the past' (Spender 1982: 9) criticism emerged based wholly on the evidence of the book.⁸ The photographs, abstracted from their original contexts, began to function as historical documents, part of a wider trend of 'rehabilitating old photographs' in both academic and local histories (Sontag 2002: 71).

Historian Raphael Samuel found evidence in *Worktown People* to prove photographic 'entrapment', describing 'the worried faces of Humphrey Spender's Worktowners, gazing on life's meagre chances and going uncomprehendingly about their daily tasks' (1994: 325). His argument, that the photographs had become iconic visualizations of a false past, placed them within a historiographical context. His analysis privileged the visual content of the images, occluding the subtleties of photographic meaning. In stating a 'long shot of a woman whitening the doorstep has her face – and that of a watching child – a mere blur' (Samuel 1994: 331), he suggests the removal of identity but does not appreciate the technological limitations of Spender's photography. His analysis typifies the dispersal of interpretations as analysis abstracted from the archival object. It is apparent even in the reproduction on page 55 of *Worktown People* that the negative is 'thin': in response to low light conditions Spender has had to push the limits of the film emulsion and print on high contrast paper, resulting in an image where the faces are grainy rather than blurred. As Sekula has observed: 'when photographs are uncritically presented as historical documents, they are transformed into aesthetic objects. Accordingly the pretence to historical understanding remains although that understanding has been replaced by aesthetic experience.' (2003: 448) As the *Worktown* photographs were theoretically and materially incised from their original contexts they became illustrations of the past, of art not science. This reclassification began the process that returned them to Bolton, even as it transformed their intended function: 'The *Worktown* photographs were taken to provide information. The fact that they have become – particularly the original prints – "art objects" in frames makes me uneasy' (Spender 1982: 23).

The indexical specificity of the images meant that in Bolton they were not iconic illustrations of a past, but of *the* past, and they were incorporated into local histories. Book shops in the town sold *Worktown People* as a book of 'old' photographs – naturally local people were more interested in how the images connected to their own experience than the contextual framework of MO's activities. The presentation of the photographs in a book gave authority and status to community memories. In an interview in January 2013 a Bolton resident explained how she first saw *Worktown People* after a neighbour brought it to her

house.⁹ She immediately recognized herself and younger brother as the children sitting on the election cart in the photograph on page 99. She was pleased to see the photograph despite remembering nothing of the event and joked that the book brought her: 'Fame at last!' Her account reveals how the 'return' of the Worktown photographs to Bolton, even in the mediated form of reproductions in a book, enabled their function outside of institutional discourses. The photographs were absorbed into local domestic histories by social processes embodied in the material performance of sharing and viewing the book. As Edwards and Hart have observed the materiality of photographs informs their function as 'socially salient objects, as active and reciprocal rather than simply implications of authority, control and passive consumption on the one hand, or of aesthetic discourses and the supremacy of individual vision on the other' (2004: 15). The shifting role of the image, from historical document to family photograph, was physically embodied: as the local resident had few photographs from her childhood, she copied the image of her brother and herself from *Worktown People* and put it in a frame at her bedside. The subsequent assimilation of the photographs in to the Worktown archive enabled the museum to mediate between academic and local narratives.

Return

In 1994 the negative of Bob and Billy followed the shadow of its reproduction back to Bolton through the museum's acquisition of the Worktown negatives (and intellectual rights) from Spender. Bolton Council, the local authority, planned to open a museum dedicated to the town's industrial heritage in which Spender's photographs would be exhibited alongside early industrial artefacts. The rationale for the acquisition however reiterated the aesthetic performance of the photographs, defining them as art works of local interest. The institutional classification of the negatives was reinforced through a material intervention; the negative of Bob and Billy was catalogued, copied and placed in an archival sheet in a solander box in a temperature-controlled fine art store. Bolton Museum sought to preserve local history by incorporating the negative into the creation of the Worktown Archive. Yet this process may be also understood as evidence of 'the ways in which photographs are understood and institutionalized as 'history' and as 'documents' within discourses of information, documentation, authentication and representation, rather than as historical objects in their own right' (Edwards 2012: 253). Edwards has argued that institutions are in many ways complicit in restricting the potential meanings of photographs (2012: 254): in the creation of the Worktown Archive original contexts were restored, yet obscured. For example, the archive also contains art works produced during the Worktown study; a sketchbook by artist Graham Bell holds drawings of some of the same locations

photographed by Spender. The reclassification of Spender's photographs as art, alongside the sketchbook, privileged their visual and historical interpretation, concealing the original scientific intention of the photographs and the potential of their purpose within MO's collaborative museum.

The project of documentation nevertheless sought to re-establish the original contexts of the Worktown images by enabling their performance as photographic objects rather than aesthetic or historical documents. This process responded to the intrinsic materiality of the photographs and their unique indexicality by reconstructing the negatives back into film sequences and relocating the photographs in the landscape of Bolton. Sekula has observed that 'photographic archives by their very structure maintain a hidden connection between knowledge and power' (2003: 447): Could this process reactivate the ideological power of MO's collaborative museum within the institutional restraints of the museum?

As I have noted the shifting meanings ascribed to the Worktown photographs were reflected in the physical disorder of the negatives. The negatives were acquired by Bolton Museum in 25 archival sheets, accompanied by a handlist written by Spender, based on his memory of what the images depicted. The negative strip that held the image of Bob and Billy was in sheet 20 and was notated as 'Street Games', like the two other photographs of children playing in the sequence. The material details of the negative revealed clues of its original context – the exposure number and film type on the rebate, the unique cuts in the film. The negative of Bob and Billy was reconstituted into one of 33 separate films. Each negative was then given a new accession number. The photograph of Bob and Billy became number 1999.83.08.35, and part of film 8. The process revealed some negatives to be missing, while others, from unrelated projects, had become absorbed into the Worktown Archive. The physical reconstruction of the films restored temporal relationships within the archive. The negatives became part of sequences of time, making each productive of information about the others. Some sequences linked the end of one film to the start of another, so we could work out which order some films were taken in; for example the last photograph of film 3 and the first photograph of film 12 are almost identical, both were taken in St Peter and St Paul's Church.

Following the reconstitution of the films digital surrogates were created for each negative: jpeg files with the same accession numbers. The original negatives were fragile, and while enlarged copy negatives had been created shortly after the acquisition of the archive, digital scans were far easier to view, much more productive of information and did not have to stay in the archival store at the museum. Sassoon has cautioned that the digital translation of images is a 'profoundly transforming' act: 'This digital shadow obscures the carefully documented balance of power between materiality and context that is critical to the determination of photographic meaning' (2004: 199). Yet arguably digital photographs have 'their own sets of embodied relations with a material culture' (Edwards 2005:

35). The experience of zooming into or panning across a photograph is reflected in an intuitive movement of the hand, and the sense of being almost inside the photograph. The process revealed details such as street signs, imperceptible in the small scale of a negative, which helped us identify where the photographs had been taken. Although the photographs had been digitized their referent of place was in no way diminished, for they continued to foster close connections.

The negatives were not, of course, only referents of place, but also of the context of their production, linking to written texts in the MO Archive. Spender made written observations to accompany at least four of his sequences of photographs, which were dated.¹⁰ These observations enrich the photographs, revealing Spender's completely subjective and often humorous responses to situations and people, as for example in his comments on a performance of *Madame Butterfly*, which reveal his awareness of the visual construction of cultural representations.

Poor playing by orchestra. Singing quite good but no idea of acting. Scenery suitably Japanese, ex-aggerated. Slit-eyed make up and European idea of tiny steps taken by Japanese women. Coiffure as in Japanese prints. Emphasis on WHITE characters (see plot) obtained by men in white ducks (semi-naval & uniform) and Lews European wife in white cotton dress (pre-war slinky), parasol, white cotton stockings, broad brimmed red hat, white high heeled shoes, hideous horse-like face.¹¹

There were also texts written by other observers, for example, an observation of a funeral that Spender photographed, and artefacts, like Spender's ticket and programme for *Madame Butterfly*. Both Spender's 930 photographs and the MO Archive provided an abundance of detail reflecting MO's methods and formed a network of both direct and oblique connections between and within the archives. For example, we were able to date the photograph of Bob and Billy from the Bolton Girl Guide's annual report for 1937–38. The report described the formation of a human Union Jack for a Coronation rally on Saturday, 25 September 1937, an event recorded on negative 19 of film 8. Checking the local newspaper archives for that day enabled us to identify the preceding sequence as a football match between Bolton Wanderers and Wolverhampton Wanderers on the same day. As we had dated another film to 27 September, the moment that Spender photographed Bob and Billy could be placed within a short time period.

This photographic detective work was a compelling activity, which pulled people deep into the detail of the images. Many colleagues at Bolton Museum were drawn into the process, and it became obvious that local knowledge was the key to identifying where the photographs were taken. In 2012 a low-resolution copy of the digitally scanned negative of Bob and Billy was placed in an album on Bolton Museum's Facebook page. The museum initiated a campaign entitled *Lost Locations*, which asked the museum's followers to help identify the locations of Spender's

photographs through leaving comments on them, in a process of collaborative documentation. We visited suggested sites physically or virtually using Google Streetview depending on their proximity to the museum. As I have noted, digital photographs retain an emanation of place and may be seen to have their own materiality. Although we were travelling in a digital simulation to check a digital surrogate the process still gave an embodied account of Spender's experience: following sequences of images we retraced his paths through the virtual town and reconnected the photographs within the physical landscape of Bolton. I extended this re-embodiment by taking digital prints of around 50 of Spender's photographs back to the locations where they were taken and rephotographed them in their original context (Plate 14.2). Tinkler (2013: 138) has observed that rephotography is a process that explores social and cultural change over time. But while the resulting photographs were documents of 75 years of change in Bolton, the process of taking them was performative, reiterating the original act of photography. Holding up the photograph and aligning it within the physical landscape reconstructed Spender's viewpoint. This showed that he had predominantly held the camera up to his eye to compose, revealing the conception of him as a spy with a concealed camera to be somewhat of an imagined and theoretically derived trope.

Annette Kuhn has suggested 'memory work can create new understandings of both past and present, whilst refusing a nostalgia which embalms the past in a perfect irretrievable moment' (2002: 10). As an applied process and form of community engagement, the *Lost Locations* campaign was very effective – we have now identified the locations of around 90 per cent of Spender's photographs. But, as we have seen, each reactivation of the photographs produced new meaning from the context in which it occurred. The photograph of Bob and Billy, while still functioning as both an index and a historical document, was transformed by the process into a family photograph. The image was quickly located as the corner of Union Mill by two comments on Facebook. One commenter recalled that he 'used to use the gates as goals'. This identification was followed by a comment from Norman King who said his uncle Bob Harwood was the 'lad on the ledge'. Norman provided a photograph of Bob and his best friend Billy Doeg who were easily recognizable from Spender's image. Through this identification the photograph was activated in a process of remembering, destabilizing its theorized function as an iconic visualization of poverty.

This reactivation suggested a practical response to Macpherson's question: 'Can we return to those images and reorder their economy?' (1997: 148). We invited Norman and his brother Dennis to participate in an interview about the photograph at Bolton Museum (Figure 14.3).¹² Banks has suggested photographs used in interviews may 'exercise agency, causing people to do and think things they had forgotten' (2007: 70): looking at the photograph of their Uncle prompted both memories of him, and of their own experiences growing up on Davenport Street. Bob was redefined as an individual with a life outside



FIGURE 14.3 Norman King and Dennis Pilling look at copy negatives from the Worktown Archive during an interview at Bolton Museum. Copyright Caroline Edge.

the photographic moment. The brothers could not identify the other children in the photograph but Norman remarked: ‘if I knew who they were I probably would know them’. As they looked at the photograph the brothers’ response took on the form of a conversation, confirming each other’s memories: ‘everyone used to play on that one didn’t they? On that step.’ Langford has argued that such conversations are central to the meaning and form of family photo albums and that ‘the separation of the album from its community casts it into an unnatural silence’ (2006: 224). Even though Spender took the photograph of Bob and Billy with archival intent, it could be simultaneously articulated as family photograph and historical document through Norman and Dennis’s conversation. For example, Norman suggested that residents in Davenport Street had not been aware of MO’s project. The first time Bob’s widow had seen the photograph was after Norman had identified it on Facebook, and their grandparents had never mentioned it – ‘because who would, this man just walked about taking photographs.’ This reflects Edwards’ proposition that orality forms part of the wider practices of embodiment – ‘the active sensory, experiential reiterations of history-telling’ – enabling the understanding of the Worktown photographs as relational and social objects (2005: 38). Through this understanding the photographs may be moved ‘away from the form of visual analysis in which photographs are simply the result of abstract concepts vested in power relations or semiotic codes’ (Edwards 2005: 29).

Dissemination

How could the understandings engendered by the process of documentation inform the subsequent role of the Worktown Archive within Bolton Museum? Could the material understanding of the images inform a more subtly inflected use of the archive enabling them to function as relational objects? Since the photograph of Bob and Billy was identified it has been reactivated by the museum within two new contexts. In 2012 the photograph was produced as an archival silver gelatin print for the Worktown 75th Birthday exhibition and was made digitally available through the Bolton Worktown website. Both material performances sought to promote community engagement with the archive but were necessarily mediated through the institutional protocols of the museum. In both instances, the photographs were thematically organized, recalling the structure of *Worktown People* and similarly constructing meaning while seeking to enable accessibility.

This imposition of order was visually reiterated through the presentation of the photographs in the exhibition: photographic prints were displayed in standard black frames using grid formations in a white cube space. This curatorial approach was primarily informed by cost and institutional procedure. The photographs had to be protected by frames, and since many were already in standard 20×16 inch black frames, it made sense to frame the others in this way too. This uniformity was an asset in that it reflected the original function of the photographs as information, privileging no image over another. The exhibition aimed to suggest multiple meanings, using information discovered in the process of documentation to present local histories evoked by the photographs and recontextualizing them against other texts and artworks produced by MO. A print of the photograph of Bob and Billy was specially made for the show and presented in a set of six street photographs near a display case containing Spender's camera and lens. The caption explained how the photograph had been identified and invited visitors to help identify other photographs. At a listening post, visitors could hear Norman and Dennis talk about the photograph of their uncle or Spender talk about photographing Bolton. While this presentation sought to enable alternate modes of engagement with the photograph, through, for example, the sensory mode of the audio or by inviting viewers to interact with the archive by sharing their own memories and knowledge, it nevertheless reinforced the aesthetic function of the photograph.

In contrast the Bolton Worktown website (www.boltonworktown.co.uk) presents a more fluid encounter. The 'multi-linear' nature of websites means that the 'researcher's account no longer has privileged status' (Murdock and Pink 2005: 159). Hyperlinks facilitate multiple interconnections allowing the viewer to shape their own interpretations and enabling the performance of photographic archives outside the physical boundaries of the museum. However as Tinkler has observed

digital photographic archives are still mediated through institutional processes of selection, description, presentation, and navigation (2013: 117–19). The design of the Bolton Worktown website sought to respond to the issues raised by the process of documentation, enabling multiple and collaborative methods of viewing and contextualizing the photographs. As Pink has suggested, new media technologies may encode reflexivity in both the creation and use of hypermedia (2007: 191). The website presents all of the digitized photographs taken by Spender during the Worktown study. The photograph of Bob and Billy is titled ‘Children play street games on Davenport St’ and captioned with information about the location and the identification of Billy and Bob. The photograph is presented visually within the ‘Street’ theme but tagging connects it to photographs depicting ‘play’ and ‘children’ or taken in the same location. Viewers are able to comment on the photographs, and share alternate individual histories of the images. A hyperlinked blog post gives expanded information about the image. Other photographs are linked to scans of documents from the MO archive, and the ongoing development of the site intends to link in other images and texts. Yet the presentation of the photographs is still mediated through the museum’s policies and the necessity of policing comments to prevent spam, which could potentially crash the website. The logical extension of Harrison’s original methods suggests that he would have seen comments promoting porn websites to be just as valid in terms of factual data as personal memories.

The photograph of Bob and Billy is also geo-tagged so that it can be viewed on Google Maps or Streetview, connecting it to contemporary Bolton. This function reflects a growing awareness of the value of sensory experience in museum practices, which has been facilitated through the development of new media technologies. For example, The Museum of London’s free ‘Streetmuseum’ application overlays historical images when the phone camera is held up to the present-day location, embodying the photographs within the physical experience of the city. As Edwards (2005: 41) has noted the emotional desire to materially experience a photograph, remains, even in the digital age. The final material performance of the photograph of Bob and Billy in this present history of the image was shown to me by Dennis, who had printed all the photographs that connected to his family history, and all the photographs which he had identified from the website and used them to create his own Worktown album.

Conclusion

The photograph of the children playing on Davenport Street has acquired meaning on its journey through time and physical space, revealing a history of cultural and theoretical concerns that have shaped its existence as a museum

object. Although Spender's photographs have been theoretically mired in issues of representation, their status as a 'museum collection' has restored other narratives. The use of visual methods has enabled the documentation of the archive, revealing alternate domestic histories, which developed outside the institutional constraints of the archive. The practical project of documentation has been successful, confirming the validity of visual research grounded in material context. But while the use of collaborative methods sought to respond to theoretical concerns the outputs of research – the website and exhibition – are still mediated through the authority of the institution. The question remains whether these photographs can 'only ever be sources for nostalgia?' (Evans 1997: 146). How is it possible to go beyond representation and reactivate the archive?

Alternative readings of MO have suggested a possible solution lies within the project's interdisciplinary, surreal methods. In his influential but unpublished thesis, Nick Stanley found that the MO archive refused 'the fiction of a complete account' and observed the potential of an ethnomethodology of the everyday, 'experienced by actors, not abstracted by professionals' (Stanley 1981: 273). This notion of a plural text was given anthropological credence through James Clifford's suggestion of surrealist ethnography. His proposed collage of voices and found evidence would incorporate data and 'leave manifest the constructivist procedures of ethnographic knowledge' (1991: 563). As the museum's documentation project progressed the voices of the local community emerged through the material experience of the photographs. But while the Bolton Worktown website has enabled both access to the Worktown photographs and these local narratives, the potential of MO's collaborative museum remains, as yet, unfulfilled. Hubble has suggested that the internet may enable a surrealist ethnography through which 'everyone will be both "native" and "ethnographer" and in possession of a poetic kind of thinking powerful enough to change reality in order to meet their collective social needs' (2006: 229). In order to fulfil this potential, the community must be actively involved in the reconstruction of the archive.

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Notes

- 1 The Worktown Archive holds 930 negatives taken by Humphrey Spender for MO's Worktown project, including films taken in Blackpool and Ashington and two films taken during the production of the Granada Television film *Return Journey* in the early 1980s. The archive also incorporates vintage and modern prints of Spender's Worktown photographs and a small collection of photographs and artworks created by Humphrey Jennings, Julian Trevelyan and Graham Bell during the Worktown Study.
- 2 The MO project was still active into the 1950s. In 1949 it was registered as a company specializing in market research. The MO archive is now held at the University of Sussex following its donation in 1970. In 1981 the project was revived and continues today through a national panel of volunteer writers. It has attracted a significant body of literature; Hinton (2013) and Hubble (2006) in particular present useful overviews of the Worktown project.
- 3 Spender was working for the *Daily Mirror* under the name 'Lensman' when he joined the MO project, and became a staff photographer at *Picture Post* shortly afterwards, in October 1938 (Frizzell 1997; Spender 1982 and 1987).
- 4 Rangefinder cameras and 35mm film became commercially available in the 1930s. Spender's Contax camera was released in 1936 and was the first camera to combine a rangefinder and viewer in a single window. While the camera offered a shutter speed of up to 1/1250 of a second the potential to freeze movement was limited by the film technology. Agfa Isopan was considered a fast film in 1937 but is now classed as slow, equivalent to ISO 100. This means it is difficult to achieve fast enough shutter speeds to freeze movement except in very bright conditions. The difficulty can be seen in Spender's photographs of Bolton pubs where the movement of domino players' hands has registered as a white blur of movement on the film.
- 5 Humphrey Spender (letter to David Morris, Senior Keeper of Art, Bolton Museum. 4 October 1994).
- 6 In addition to *The Pub and the People*, MO planned to publish books on leisure, politics and the non-voter, and religion informed by the Worktown study (Madge and Harrison 1938: 24). These themes are well represented in Spender's negatives and inflect subsequent presentations of them for the example in the book *Worktown People and the Bolton Worktown website* (www.boltonworktown.co.uk).
- 7 These captions were based on the recollections of Spender and a local MO observer Harry Gordon and were placed at the back of the book, in order to restrict the seeming 'authority of a document' (Sontag 2002: 74).
- 8 Bolton Museum's documentation of the Worktown photographs has revealed numerous factual inaccuracies in *Worktown People*: for example, the caption to the photograph of Bob and Billy relates to the image on the opposite page, and another photograph is identified as having been taken from the roof of Bolton parish church, when it was actually taken in Chorley, 11 miles away.
- 9 Interview conducted by Caroline Edge and Ian Trumble with a local resident at her home in Bolton on 22 January 2013.

- 10 The MO anthology *Speak for Yourself* (Calder and Sheridan 1984) included two observations written by Spender, and the process of documentation revealed two more. He wrote accounts of photographing a performance of *Madame Butterfly*, a 'quack medicine stall', Conservative club rooms and an argument with a pub landlord who caught him taking surreptitious photos.
- 11 Spender's written observation of *Madame Butterfly* is in the MO archive, where it has been wrongly ascribed to Brian Barefoot (TC Live Entertainment, 16/A, 'Madame Butterfly' report, ticket & programme [Brian Barefoot] 22.9.37). Reproduced with permission of Curtis Brown Group Ltd, London on behalf of The Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive. Copyright © The Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive.
- 12 Interview conducted by Caroline Edge and Ian Trumble with Norman King and Dennis Pilling at Bolton Museum on 16 September 2012.

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