



This article was first published by the English magazine TEN/8: No. 17 (Special issue: Men in Camera) on 24 October 1985, and is reprinted here by the kind permission of Dick Hebdige. It was written during the miner's strike in Britain and during the Greenham Common demonstrations against nuclear war and American military occupation, both of which are referred to in the text. It is part of Hebdige's ongoing work on the relationship between images and everyday life, explored in more detail in his forthcoming book,

Hiding in the Light (London: Comedia/Methuen, 1988). "Some Sons and their Fathers" will be part of the exhibition, "The Impossible Self," to be held in Winnipeg in April of this year (see Scanner for details). Dick Hebdige teaches at Goldsmith's College, London and is the author of Subculture: The Meaning of Style (London: Methuen, 1978).

Dick Hebdige explores the relationship between fathers and sons weaving words and photographs around the memory of his own experience last year of an identity crisis.

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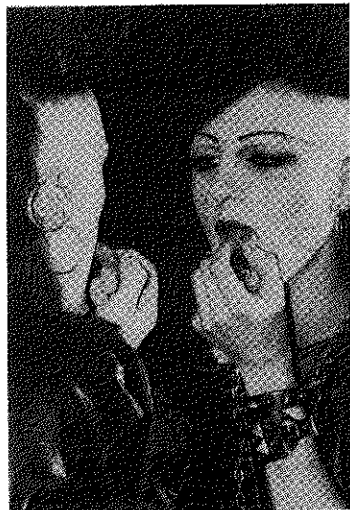
An Essay with Photographs

Dick Hebdige

To my Mother and Jessica

Although I write and don't take photographs, I do write in images. In this essay, I want to try something new: not an analysis of images or a history of images but rather a weaving together of history, image and text - a weaving that combines personal, private and public voices and which uses different forms of story telling in an attempt at rendering my relationship to actual and symbolic filial and paternal bonds and to examine from the inside the relationship between fathers and sons, men and boys. By trying to speak in more than one dimension - by using different voices and images - I am trying to explore certain possibilities which a more straight-forward approach would, I think, obscure.

We hardly need reminding at the moment that the traditional class specific forms of masculinity are in crisis. The bloody confrontations at the miners' picket lines provide perhaps the most tragic evidence of such a crisis. As has often been pointed out, what motivates the bitterness of the antagonisms between working and non-working miners is more than just the



security of the present generation's jobs in the industry. What is at issue in the current dispute is the whole future of coal and the culture: the forms of communal and family life and the strong sense of personal identity which have grown up around coal. What is being partly defended on the picket lines is the coherence of a cluster of equations between the value and

meaning of manual work, manhood and class solidarity which until fairly recently has provided the nucleus for what we now call 'traditional working class culture.' The disintegration of that culture has been preoccupying sociologists for years but the process of collapse has been vastly accelerated under the present Tory regime. The initiatives taken by the Government in anti-Trade Union legislation and under the auspices of the Manpower Services Commission in Youth Training Schemes with an emphasis on vaguely defined 'social and life skills' form part of a long term strategy for reorganising the relations between employer and the employed, and for dismantling hard won notions of workers' rights and the institutional framework through which those rights were originally secured. These initiatives have found ideological support in the right wing commonsense of the 'New Realism' with its double insistence on the individual (competitive) 'career' and the primacy of the national interest (defined for us not by us) both of which serve to further undermine older oppositional forms of collective identity and collective struggle and to erode alternative definitions of shared class interest and communal rather than individual consciousness. The Tories' Y.T.S. schemes are together transforming the experience of working class adolescence by blocking the normative transitions from youth to maturity, from school to work, from dependence on the family to independence and a break

from the parental home. This is particularly clear where I teach in the Midlands where the work ethic and the wage form are very deeply embedded in the local working class culture forming the core around which the patriarchal family and the strongly marked sex roles it supports and reproduces are organised.

On the other hand, these broken transitions need not have entirely



negative implications. The newer forms of cultural and sexual politics have positively challenged or reworked the established modes of identity, for young or old, male or female. To take a topical example, gender-bending is one of the more obvious attempts within the milieu of fashion, subculture and popular music at articulating a transfigured masculinity. It is the science fiction solution to the crisis facing men: a revolution in the use of personal pronouns. Gender-bending substitutes the wholly 'it' for 'he's' and 'she's' that most of 'us' still inhabit. A less bizarre proposal has been made by the marketing people who have set out to sell us the 'new man' - a creature addicted to toiletries, terrorised by the fear of incipient baldness.

Whether or not the reader finds these solutions attractive or convincing, they hardly represent meaningful alternatives for most men. We still require positive images of a new, more responsive and more responsible masculinity. Clearly, we are living on the cusp of multiple transitions however those transitions are defined. The transition, for example, from the industrial pattern of work and the cultural forms and subjectivities it supports into something vaguely 'post-industrial' - from the known to the unknown - is the result of a shift in patterns of investment away

from the labour intensive industries, but the social consequences of that shift and the brutal and sudden implementation of the new productive methods are themselves by no means inevitable. Ultimately the New Technology may lead to the releasing and rechanneling of energies and possibilities which are repressed within the current structures: freedom from dull, repetitive and demeaning jobs and the dismantling of the work ethic. It may bring a new sense of space and scale into people's lives, providing the basis for the emergence of new, more diverse and less oppressive forms of social and sexual identity. It may lead to a softening of the contours of masculinity. It should lead to a fairer sexual division of domestic labour. It may make men and women flexible, more fluid, less driven to acquire and possess, less fearful and more playful,

bound less tightly into their bodies and their skins. It may help to install — alongside the right to meaningful, socially useful labour — the rights to pleasure, joy and laughter. But at the moment (for most people), the words 'New Technology' still mean worklessness and worklessness means powerlessness: exclusion from the right to earn and spend money and to perform the consumer role. They still mean that for most people a long, perplexing and painful interregnum has somehow to be got through. That is the context in which I'd like the following essay to be read. This is how I confronted my personal identity crisis. I don't claim that my crisis is typical or representative or that my personal 'resolutions' have any general significance. I merely offer it as one man's route through the present 'evil time.'

Death of a Father

'The righteous man is the advocate for created things...In Leskov he has a maternal touch which is occasionally intensified into the mythical...Typical of this is the protagonist of his story 'Kotim the Provider and Platonida.' This figure, a peasant named Platonida, is a hermaphrodite. For 12 years his mother raised him as a girl. His male and female organs mature simultaneously, and his bisexuality 'becomes the

symbol of God incarnate.'

In Leskov's view, the pinnacle of creation has been attained with this, and at the same time he presumably sees it as a bridge between this world and the other...'

Walter Benjamin, *The Storyteller*

'Certainly there's scarce one found that now Knows what t'approve and what to disallow. All arsey-varsey, nothing is its own But to our proverb all turned upside down Where hell is heaven and heaven is turned hell.'

Michael Drayton, *To my noble friend Master William Browne of the Evil Time.*

Eighteen months ago, a very close friend of mine died. I had known him for half my life, ever since my first tentative forays with another adolescent friend into the 'man's world' of the West London pubs and clubs - a milieu which seemed to our young eyes marvellous and dangerous and thus intensely real: a place reserved precisely for the boys. It was warm and comfortable in its own way - each bar a giant living room - but it was marked off from the home - at least from our respectable working class homes - by the nimbus of smoke and raucous laughter that hung in the air and by the ever-present possibility of violence. Here we learned how to dream ourselves into manhood.

The older man, the friend who died, stood at the centre of this world like a magician or a sorcerer and it was he who gave us our apprenticeships. He took us under his wing leading us down into the underworld past all the Carnavalesque characters: the 'hard nuts', 'brasses', villains, conmen, the musicians, the boozers, the actors and the fools. He led us down in language through the 'wind ups': showing us how to weave stories, how to play chess with words, how to laugh away the fear that came spiralling up into the throat from time to time. He taught us how to enjoy the pulse of death and renewal (of individual reputations and individual fortunes), of crowning and uncrowning which made up a kind of topsy turvy order in the world of the pub.

No image could contain this man. No words could trap him: story teller, rebel, warrior, trickster, jazz musician, bandit, natural gent, ladies' man, man's man, guardian of the manor, a man born

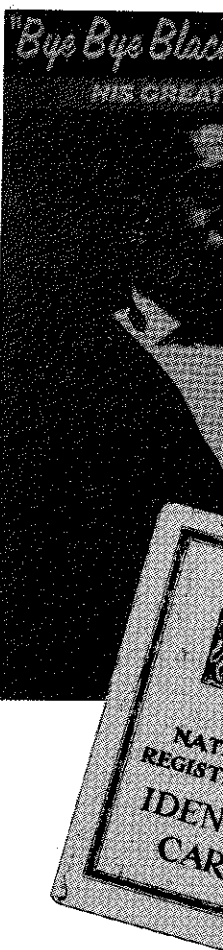
with his boots on; roses in his mouth.

When he died, the flowers. Big men were helped to wipe away tears from their faces. Friends gathered round, never once faltering. She had lost her dignity, which was tragic, pale bright in the funeral.

During the service, name but that didn't believe any of that.

This man had also used to spin out about shapes: the visual of full notes he blew and of the living struck wound up from his of his lips. His speech music were all part less web he wove and

About a year before began his final pain took up one wall of with his wife and in retrospect, his last The mural consisted done in clear, strong warm, tan background find salvation in. A bird, a dove of peace ganja weed in its be



with his boots on; a man born with roses in his mouth.

When he died, the florists ran out of flowers. Big men wept and women helped to wipe away the tears. At the crematorium, a massive crowd of friends gathered round his wife who never once faltered, who never once lost her dignity, who shone with a tragic, pale brightness throughout the funeral.

During the service, the vicar forgot his name but that didn't matter. He didn't believe any of that stuff anyway.

This man had also been a painter. He used to spin out abstract forms and shapes: the visual equivalents of the fat, full notes he blew down his saxophone and of the living strings of words he wound up from his belly and spat out of his lips. His speech, his painting, his music were all part of the same seamless web he wove around himself.

About a year before he died, this man began his final painting, a mural which took up one wall of the flat he shared with his wife and two kids. It was, in retrospect, his last will and testament. The mural consisted of a Noah's Ark in clear, strong lines against a warm, tan background. A solid boat to find salvation in. Above the Ark flew a bird, a dove of peace with a sprig of ganja weed in its beak. In the housing

erected on the body of the Ark, he had stuck a line of mugshots he had grown up with, fought against and fought alongside of all his life. These passport photos, taken by the men themselves in station booths and freely given for the painting formed a real rogues' gallery. They stared, grinned and grimaced out from the wall like gargoyles. By 1983 this was the last surviving local fragment of that generation of 'tough' working class men who had lived through the London Blitz, made its bones on the bomb sites of England, in the cages of the National Service, through Borstal, Soho jazz clubs, and Her Majesty's Prisons before settling down uneasily into the no less constrained, no less passionately contested regime of marriage, wife and kids or going off to seek out wild destinies as loners. The 'animals' preserved in the Ark were the magician's own dying tribe.

And when he died, his wife began, slowly at first, one at a time, to peel the photo's off the wall, to put the animals away.

When I was a boy I had thought in fear and admiration that these were the 'real men.' This zoo of 'difficult' and 'unruly' characters formed just one potent set of images in which and against which I sought to dream myself together as a man. The dream was woven out of many different coloured threads:

gangster films, crime novels, the ghost written biographies of convicts, adventurers, romancers, the history of the London Underworld, Gustave Doré prints, the legendary lives of the be-bop kings, ration coupons, photographs of spivs and teds and early modernists, old television shows, r&b album covers, accounts of the Great Train Robbery, the sensuous logic of Rasta, the saucy patter of Max Miller, the bruised grain in the voice of Billie Holiday and Julie London - images and sounds and memories. When the magician disappeared, the spell broke, the mirror cracked. I began to fall to pieces.

It is so difficult to resist our own construction, to build constructively on what's already there. It is so difficult to peel back the shifting layers of images and words through which we have been made and within which we go on making and remaking ourselves so that we can stand up and say this is who I am and this is where I come from. But that struggle to put the breath right back into the voice, to speak from a motionless centre, is still right at the core of things despite all the theory and the doubts and the self-recrimination which push us back the other way against ourselves. We want to own ourselves at least. To own our own voices. We want to be authentic men and women. But when I try to speak about my masculinity I dissolve into more dreams: more images and words.





I conjure up another story, another funeral, another dead father.

Is it necessary to gather up all the strains and wounds and conflicts here and lay them on the table?

To understand what's happening in this newspaper account of Jason Lake's composure at his father's funeral, we have to bracket off the real boy and the tragedy he has suffered from the way these have been constructed in the text. Those words - 'constructed', 'text' - that surgery-prising the photograph away from its anchorage in the *Daily Mirror* piece - just seems wrong. My paternal instinct is to leave the boy in peace - to let him be. The death of Diana Dors from cancer in May and Alan Lake's suicide five months later have been scorched into the popular memory, as a dark and ominous configuration. These tragedies filled the front pages of the tabloid press for weeks. Lake's death pushed aside the war in Lebanon as the leading item in the *News At Ten* on October 10. He was pulled before the public time and time again as the archetype of the weak and fatally dependent husband, as the little man in the big woman's shadow, as obsessed lover and alcoholic fop, as an uncompleted man (made whole only through his absorption in his 'better half'). Press reports of his passionate bond with the 'tragic' comedian, Freddie Starr, who had already gone through a very public nervous breakdown, exposed levels of emotional intensity between men which are rarely given

any public airing.

Freddie said, 'Alan always came to me when he was depressed. We were like brothers. At Di's funeral he turned to me and said, 'What do I do now?' I told him to be strong and just walk away. But no one can describe the love he had for Di. She was a real part of him. When she went he was left just half a man. He tried to put a brave face on it but it never really worked. He just couldn't cope in that house. She was all around him. She was everywhere. But he was alone. When he came around to me he looked terrible. His face was drawn and he looked so thin. We sat down in the lounge drinking coffee. My wife Sandy made him something to eat but he couldn't face it and did not touch a thing. He said he just didn't know how to carry on. I tried to cheer him up. But he still seemed unable to look to the future. 'I want to end it', he said. So I tried to shock him out of it. I told him to stop thinking like that. I remember saying, 'How dare you think like that when Di fought every step of the way to stay alive.' I thought it worked. He stayed for about four hours and left at 10 o'clock. When he was going he took me in his arms and embraced me. 'I love you, Freddie. You have been like a brother to me', he said. I said, 'Don't say anything more. Save it until another time.' Then he drove away. That was the last I was ever to see of him.'¹

This stuff is raw. The last thing young Jason Lake needs is to be turned into an object of analysis. But what is clear from even a superficial reading of the report of Alan Lake's funeral is that the boy is placed here in an impossible position. He is stuck at the dead centre

of a set of double binds in which his 'angelic' (i.e. ungendered) essence is extracted from the tension between on the one hand his beautiful i.e. 'feminine' appearance and his heroic i.e. 'masculine' reserve and on the other, his assumed identification with a strong mother (a link reinforced by the physical resemblance between Jason and Diana Dors) and the disavowal of any link whatsoever with his weak father. There is a deeper mythological structure here too: the parents are polarised - he is dark, she is light and here the light has triumphed in the person of young Jason who is looking down the same line of vision as the blonde Starr. However, Paul Callan's prose monitoring every ripple on the surface of the boy's self-restraint threatens to turn this victory inside out. The journalist engulfs the boy. He eats him up. The world turns darkly in upon itself.

Where are the sources and resources of renewal? We have got to find a faith in being men without turning back to the old patriarchal structures, the old phallogocentric images, to the complacency, and the violence and the fear, to the 'cool' frozen poses of the past. It has got to be a faith that is spun out of the gut and felt in the belly. It has got to be borne out of the darkness of the present 'evil time.'

I turn the page of the *Daily Mirror*. The world of the tabloid is the world of the fairy tale. The logic it employs draws on the ancient popular wisdoms - a tradition which antecedes the current construction of the 'popular' under Mrs. Thatcher by several thousand years. The old world turns on its axis as it has always done between night and day. There is an even distribution of light and darkness and the world is as it is conceived within this tradition turns, too, like a wheel of fortune. In the tabloids the mighty are uncrowned in scandal and the losers come up trumps: the body politic is resurrected every day in the same stories, the same balancing of the scales between the comic and the tragic, the serious and the lighthearted. Mikhail Bakhtin once described the principles upon which this alternative popular order was originally based. This order was enshrined in the medieval carnival and the tradition of the grotesque. It centred on the inversion of all the accustomed hierarchies and was based in laughter and a mythology of regeneration in which the old world is continually eaten up and replaced by the new: 'Here... the bodily element is deeply positive. It is presented not in private, egoistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people... To degrade is to bury, to sow and to kill

simultaneously in order to give something more and

Degradation digs a new birth; it has no negative aspect but one. To degrade an imply merely hurling non-existence, into but to hurl it down to a lower stratum, conception and a new place.'²

So by turning back hood is miraculous itself: the light and blonde and the brun female are reconciled happy, smiling group elements of the nucleus reconstituted. 'We' bound back together, laughing present new day, a new dad fatherhood become The transitions that now mended.

The tabloid solution patriarchal norms is deep fractures in the nation of the male role 'natural' law given will be slow to reverse moreover unlikely the enabling definitions the paternal role will sively or even predom the context of the traumatic marriage. But change - this much i

Death of a Son

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simultaneously in order to bring forth something more and better...

Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect but also a regenerating one. To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of non-existence, into absolute destruction but to hurl it down into the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place.²

So by turning back one page, fatherhood is miraculously restored unto itself: the light and the darkness, the blonde and the brunette, the male and female are reconciled once more in this happy, smiling group. The scattered elements of the nuclear family are reconstituted. 'We' the people are bound back together round the generous, laughing presence of the father. A new day, a new dad. Boyhood and fatherhood become possible once more. The transitions that were broken are now mended.

The tabloid solution to the crisis in patriarchal norms is a magical one. Any deep fractures in the petrified conception of the male role as breadwinner, 'natural' law giver and bringer of order will be slow to reveal themselves. It is moreover unlikely that the newer, more enabling definitions of masculinity and the paternal role will develop exclusively or even predominantly within the context of the traditional monogamous marriage. But that man must change - this much is clear.

Death of a Son

It is altogether more difficult to locate those points at which these pressures and forces intervene in our own individual biographies. It is hard to say exactly where and in what ways the word 'crisis' cuts into our bodies and our lives. My own personal crisis was no less real, no less imaginary than the melodrama of the tabloids. In April of this year I had a total nervous breakdown. For a few terrible months I descended into a netherworld where I believed that eternal Holy War was being waged between night and day,

between male and female, between blonde and dark haired people.

I believed myself to be at different times John the Baptist, Christ, the AntiChrist, the instrument of a vengeful Jehovah, a warbling hermaphrodite, the Once and Future King, a human sacrifice, Tiresias: a seer half man, half woman. I dragged myself and my family and friends backwards through the centre of my own heart of darkness. I shall never forget the loyalty, love and steadfastness they showed me when all the lights went out, how they stood by me and led me gently forward like a little child.

I went into crisis when I tried to write a version of this article last Easter in the West Midlands in the middle of the wilderness this country is threatening

Trade Union rights won at the cost of immense effort and suffering for the piffling sum of £1,000 as a necessary step on the road to 'freedom.' Forget India. Forget the 'glory' that was the British Raj. This is the real jewel in the crown and it will not be bought with money.

I wrote as I descended:

Something begins to burn out of the heart of the darkness of this present 'evil time' when a young woman like Sarah Tisdall is imprisoned for speaking out for what she knows is right. Forget the golden boys of Oxford and Cambridge. Forget the victories won on the sportsfields of England. She shall drive our Chariots of Fire. These are not empty words stolen from the ether. They are filled with a lust for justice which has sustained the generations of the righteous down the centuries and



to become under the present Government, in a locality where only 1 in 10 of last year's 16 year old school leavers have found jobs. I had taken as my opening texts Michael Drayton's poem *Of the Evil Time* written in the English Civil War and Mrs. Thatcher's famous statement from 1979: 'If you have got a message preach it. Remember those Old Testament prophets? They said: "This is what I believe." I sat and worked at my desk and eventually after several days without sleep I followed her down into my own desert.

I wrote as I descended:

Thatcher and her thieves will be forced to give us back our language because it is ours' by right and she shall not take it from us. There is something that begins to stir in the gut of the nation when it is confronted by the demeaning spectacle of a Government attempting to purchase

they shall not be bribed and cheated into silence.

I wrote as I descended:

Where are the sources and resources of renewal? They are here in the fibre of our bodies, in the bright and burning core of righteousness which lies hidden in the heart of the living English language. But the English language is no longer the language of Shakespeare and Cobbett and the Tolpuddle Martyrs. It bears the scars of other Wars and the blood of other struggles. It contains other voices and they too are clamour-

ing to be heard.

I wrote as I descended:

It is not foolish or unseemly to see the dreams of the early Trade Unionists or the visionary socialists being lived out through other bodies in a different time just because those bodies now belong to women and have different coloured skins. It is not to render ignoble or forever obsolete the Trade Union tradition and the Labour Movement to say that new forms of idealism are being forged in the fires which broke out on the streets of Brixton and Toxteth in 1981 or around the fires which are burning out against the darkness at the Greenham Common base.

And when I finally fell through the glass that holds the world in place for each of us, I wrote:

The new movements are not, as some would have it, the worm in the socialist rose but rather the thorn in the crown of the future... The body of socialism will be resurrected as it has been in the past on the basis of both passion and compassion... It is there amongst the tribes which even now are gathering in the margins that the phoenix is rising from the flames.

When the police arrived to investigate the shouting, they found me crouched in a rotting fairground float in a yard in a small wood which is situated behind the College where I teach. Braying like an ass at the moon on that mild Easter night I felt convinced that at last I'd found my voice. I was speaking out. I was coming clean. Little did I know at

the time how easily the 'still small voice of reason' can be swept aside in that sudden violent seizure of the right to have one's say. How could I know? There was no 'I' to do the knowing. Little did I realise then that the jangling in my ears was the sound of the bells in the Fool's cap I was wearing. How could I realise? To my crazed ears the bells were pealing out in triumph at a glorious ascension: 'Rejoice! Rejoice!'

This was the beginning of the end of the time of Margaret Thatcher. And then the fear moved in. I spent the next three months in and out of different hospitals and slowly, slowly thanks to the love and patience of my family and friends I began the journey back.

It is taking me time to dream myself back together as a man again. The pieces refuse to fall back into the old patterns but I am trying - if I can - to dream in a different key, to dream myself into something better than before. A New Year requires New Year resolutions:

We shall have to learn to be less defensive, less demanding, stronger and less powerful, more open and more openly desiring.

We shall learn from the women at Greenham Common who are spinning out a new language of positive dissent in the wool and in the photographs of loved ones which they hang in the perimeter fence and in the mirrors they use to shine back the evil contained within the base. It is no good us saying that the intensity of that desire for change is irrational or 'typically feminine' or that such beliefs are held

only by a lunatic fringe. It is sufficient that they exist and that they carry within themselves a bright, prophetic power that will brook no compromise.

We shall have to recognize that the fragmentations and dispersals that we're living through today require a new kind of integration and synthesis. We shall have to go beyond our bodies, beyond the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake and learn to cultivate instead a responsible yearning: a yearning out towards something more and something better than this and this place now.

We shall use a logic which is no longer cramped and stifled and no longer held in service to the narrow egotism of dogma - a logic charged with power and with life.

We shall seek to maintain what has always been the source of all good thinking and feeling: the reverence for unity in difference, the reverence for unity in separate struggle.

New Year's resolutions are easily broken and, in the end these are just words and what matters is less what we say than what we do. In the end, we are just men and women doing what we can, trying to survive and to snatch some joy, however sweet and bitter as it passes, and trying, too, if we get the chance to build something better for the next generation. I am just beginning to learn all that.

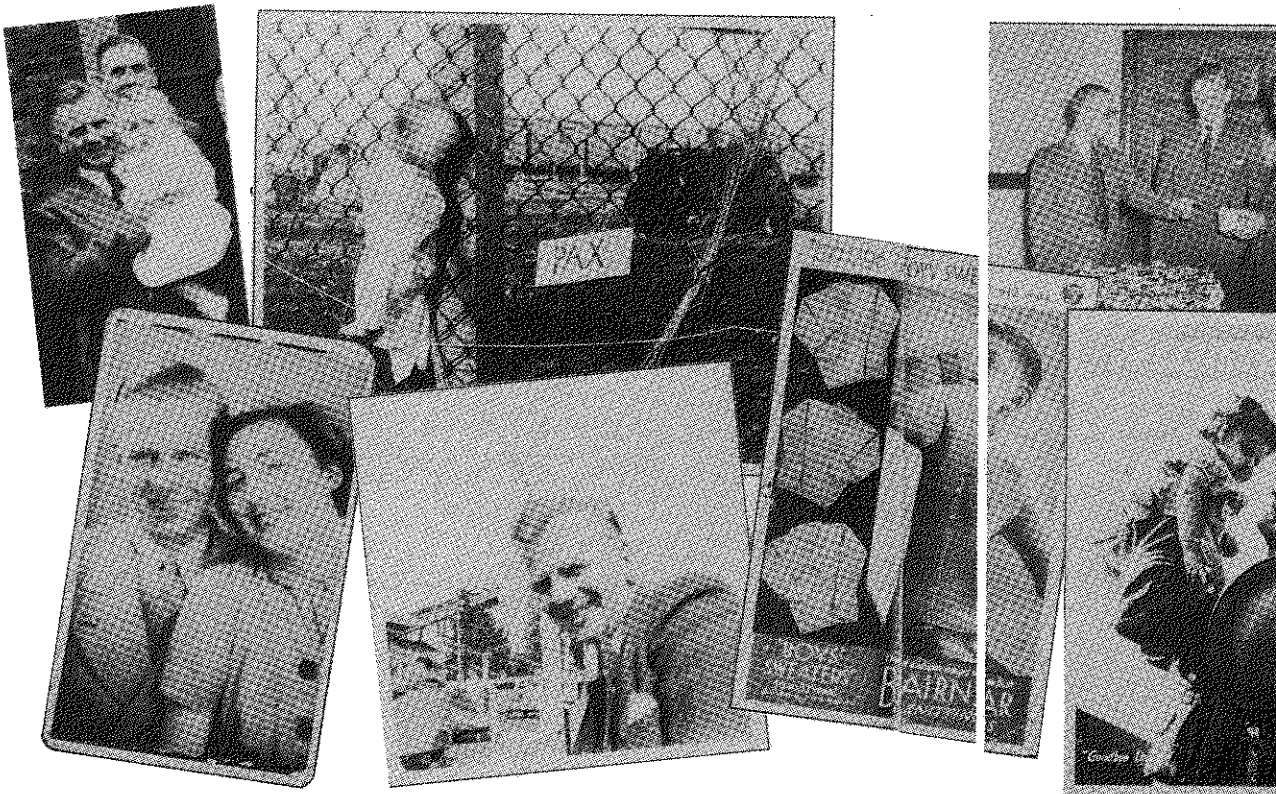
In terms of effecting change, what counts now as always is collective action, and such action in this context requires a long, gradual process of articulation: finding ways of linking

with and expressing residual forms of tracing out how related to and shaped by pressures and broad economic forces. The articulation is a far and more delicate rhetorical 'solution' course have to be cannot simply be v nonetheless we sti to know in what d have to go on maki to bear our witness we're living throug sharing to be done

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with and expressing emergent and residual forms of masculine identity, tracing out how these new forms are related to and shaped by institutional pressures and broader social and economic forces. This process of articulation is a far slower, more subtle and more delicate affair than imaginary rhetorical 'solutions.' The future will of course have to be struggled for. It cannot simply be willed into place. But nonetheless we still have to dream and to know in what direction to desire. We have to go on making new connections, to bear our witness and to feel the times we're living through. There is still some sharing to be done.

I used to dream in front of a mirror but the mirror cracked for me 18 months ago. Last April is shattered into fragments. Something old and tired died then but the seed that was sown in that dying may, I hope, engender something new, something more fruitful and less turned in upon itself. Meanwhile, I shall try to bury the past because there really is not a lot of time in a life: the future is already here sitting in its pram, playing in its playgrounds. When we walk down the streets it toddles alongside us at knee height. It doesn't fill me with despair — this future how on earth could it? — it's more inclined to make me laugh. The mirror lies in pieces.

'When we free the children we also drown Narcissus in his pool.'³

A final story for the next generation. Once upon a time there was a man. He was born in Yorkshire. At the age of 14 he left school and moved to London where he worked as a framemaker. He went to work on the first day wearing

short trousers. His future wife worked at the same furniture factory as an upholsteress. When they met he was 19, she was 16. During the War he poached a few salmon with some Geordies. He made the Normandy crossing a few days after D-Day. He sprained his knee running across a field but managed to run the rest of the way when German shells smashed into the soil beside him. One day he saw a black and bloated corpse. On the same day he and his mates found some roses in a bush and put them in the netting round their helmets. After the War, he married and his wife had two children. He was a gentle, loving father who played Robin Hood with his two sons on Wimbledon Common and went fishing with them most Saturdays in summer. He sang the youngest son old music hall songs that made him cry. His hands were hard and dry and smelled of sawdust. He helped his wife to cook and clean and shop. He used to meet his old comrades every Friday night to talk about old battles. At least once a week for a number of years he would go a visit a special friend who was crippled with arthritis and he would rub the man's ailing back and laugh away the older man's fear of dying.

That, of course, was, indeed still is, my real father.

Footnotes

1. *Daily Mirror*, Thursday, October 11, 1984.
2. Mikhail Bakhtin *Rabelais and His World* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology 1968)
3. William Kennedy *Billy Phelan's Greatest Game*, (Viking Press 1978)

Key to photographs

Page 28
John Topham Picture Library.
Women's Realm. This picture appeared with the following poem: Pretend that you are happy/ Though your spirits may be low/ Wear a cheerful face, and sing/ A little as you go./ Pretence like this is courage./ Spreading sunshine on your way/ And you'll often find the effort/ Clears your troubles right away.

Page 29
Top: Nick Hedges, *Born to Work* (Pluto Press 1982).

Bottom: Boy applying make-up in Gent's at the Powerhouse, Birmingham. Part of a project entitled: *The Alternative* at the Powerhouse, 1983, by Jet Palmer.

Page 30
Above: Photo Nigel Henderson, Bethnal Green series.

Page 31
Collage, clockwise: Bye Bye Blackbird: John Coltrane album cover, 1981.

Straight Life: The Story of Art Pepper. Book cover (Schirmer 1979) from photo by Bill Claxton, 1956. Billie Holiday book cover based on photograph of Billie Holiday, mid 50's. The Seven Curses of London. Book cover (first published 1869), this edition Blackwell, 1981, cover based on Gustave Doré print. Billy Hill with Georgie Walker in London after returning from the 'Flamingo.' From Billy Hill's autobiography, *Boss of Britain's Underworld* (Windmill Press 1955).

Page 32
Alan Lake consoled by Freddie Starr at Diana Dors' funeral. Photo: Syndication International. Below left and right: *Daily Mirror*, 18 October 1984.

Page 33
Christmas party organised by workers at the Slumberland Furniture factory, Wandsworth, 1956/57. The author is ringed.

Page 34\35
Clockwise: My father and me at my christening, 1951. The fence at Greenham Common, Photo: Belinda Whiting. Shop's chairman, shop steward (my father), shop's convenor of union at Cinnamon's furniture factory; Hackney with sweets and Coronation mugs to be presented to workers' children at Hackney Town Hall, Coronation Day, 1953. Cover of *Weekly Illustrated*, October 7, 1939: 'Goodbye Daddy.' Knitting pattern, 1950's. My father on a work's beano to Southend or Margate 1950's. My mother and father, booth photograph, 1936.

