

Southern Exposure



The Southern Ethic

Introduction by A.D. Coleman

NOTATIONS. What you are holding in your hands (is it a catalogue? Is it a book?) is the final stage of over one and one-half years of thought, planning and work on the part of those of us associated with the Southern Ethic Show. It began as an idea for a small juried show which, with the help of the Georgia Council for the Arts, would open in Atlanta and then travel throughout Georgia and the rest of the South. But in this lush climate things seem to flourish and overgrow their intended boundaries, and somehow a small show of 35 prints juried by three photographers evolved (with the help of the Institute for Southern Studies and the National Endowment for the Arts) into a book of eighty-one photographs juried by 3 photographers, an anthropologist, a writer, and an archaeologist for the state of Georgia. This catalogue/book in its own way has somehow become more representative of the Southern Ethic Show than the show itself.

The jurors and editors all shared a strong interest in the South and in photography, but there was no attempt to select jurors who had the same ideas about either; nor were criteria for selection of photographs discussed in advance. As a measure of the variety of viewpoints and backgrounds of the panel, only two of the photographs (out of 350 submitted) in this book and in the show were selected by unanimous agreement. As the winnowing continued—from 350 photographs to 175 and then to 81—the show began to assume a strength and coherence and direction that transcended the six individuals who had started out directing the process. In the end, the photographs seemed to be dictating their own criteria for selection and sequencing; the editors merely the tools of their persuasion. For a show about the South, it seems fitting.

The Editors of *The Southern Ethic*

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NEXUS is a relatively young non-profit organization designed to promote the photographic arts. The organization emerged in 1973 out of a growing need among local area photographers to have an outlet for showing their work. The photo-gallery that resulted has been in operation now for two years, and photography exhibitions in Atlanta are no longer the rare occurrence they once were. A new exhibition is shown every month and is not limited to members only. Nexus has no salaried staff; and only in the past year has the organization received any financial aid. This year it received two grants from the Georgia Endowment for the Arts for the publishing of a film-video newsletter and for the Southern Ethic traveling show. Anyone desiring information on Nexus should write:

Nexus
1185 Virginia Ave., NE
Atlanta, Georgia

THE SOUTHERN ETHIC SHOW was organized by Nexus Inc., with the joint support of the Georgia Council for the Arts and the National Endowments for the Arts. The show presents a photographic view of the South by southern photographers. The show consists of thirty-five framed prints with the size ranging from 4 x 6 to 15 x 19 and covering 90 running feet of exhibition space. The length of the show at each new booking is one month.

The Southern Ethic Show and the Book, *The Southern Ethic*, would like to extend a special thanks to the following people for their individual and special assistance in helping in the production of this book.

Thank you: Michael Reagan
Bill Bradley
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Gail Lineback
Robin Johnstone
Vickie Staggs

THE SOUTHERN ETHIC

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Printing Co-ordinator Deirdre Murphy
Editors: Michael Blumensaadt
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Deirdre Murphy
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Book and cover design by Fredd Chrestman

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of Nexus, Inc.*

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE is a quarterly journal that lets the South speak for itself. Sometimes it's through the voice of a new poet or the testimonial of a tobacco farmer, or maybe it's through the words of older Southerners, whether miner or minister, who made their contribution long ago for a better South today.

This quarter it's an impressive collection of photographs produced in conjunction with, and arranged by, Nexus, Inc. Nexus is an organization of photographers in Atlanta who in this publication have set out to "clarify the ideals and values of the lower right-hand corner of the nation"—i.e., the Southern Ethic. Those who know much about reproducing photographs or producing a book will appreciate the herculean effort of the four editors of this publication working with Shield Printing and the engravers at Graphics Atlanta to preserve the quality of these prints at a price you can afford. Just how these particular prints were chosen and what they reveal to the professional eye is explained in the introduction by A.D. Coleman.

To the viewer untrained in the mysteries of shutter speeds or, like ourselves, slightly prejudiced toward the linear word, we urge you to have the patience to let your eye wander slowly across these pages. The camera captures an instant, but if you look deep enough, you'll see the layer upon layer of human experience that forms the traditions which finally emerge into a scene of young boys tinkering with a hot-rod, or a black construction worker pouring cement for the "New South." Getting at that depth, at the power of people being together or being apart, is what *Southern Exposure* and, we suspect, the "Southern Ethic" are all about.

Our regular readers have come to expect almost anything from this journal. It may be a music book one time or a research report on energy conglomerates the next. What ties it together is our passion for this place and its people, our belief in being rooted *in* a culture in order to transform it into a new future. We use everything from investigative journalism to oral history to understand our culture, and like the populists of old, we're not afraid to name the culprits who chronically destroy it, nor too meek to recommend a few alternatives for its improvement. If you'd like to know more about *Southern Exposure*, write for a free catalog of our publications at Box 230, Chapel Hill, NC 27514; include \$8 for a year's subscription.

Bob Hall
Southern Exposure
Managing Editor

THE SOUTHERN ETHIC. Why the Southern Ethic? Having worked in photography in the Southeastern United States for the last 15 years I had come to the conclusion that regional interest in photography was nonexistent. Few photographers of national or international reputation were practicing in the Southeast; few museums displayed national photographers, let alone local ones; and even fewer schools were known to offer photography. Conditions have changed dramatically in the last five years. With the boom in photography across the nation, photographic activity in the Southeastern states also increased. But disappointingly, most of the photographic activity was originated by people from outside the region.

What I wanted to see was indigenous action coming from within the long established southern experience. The South has always had a rich and prestigious literary tradition. Why then couldn't there be a visual tradition built on the photographic vision of the region's photographers? Hence the birth of the Southern Ethic idea and eventually of the show and catalogue. This was perhaps the first time photographers who lived and worked throughout the South had been called on to present their images to be selected and arranged by individuals who were also products of the South.

The Southern Ethic Show is an attempt to bring out known and unknown Southern photographers, present an indigenous point of view and accomplish all of this within the region. The total concert, workings and completion of the project were strictly regional.

How successful we were, I am sure, will be debated, but the important thing to me is that we did start and complete the Southern Ethic Show. What is the Southern Ethic? This is a question that can not and should not be answered by one photographic show. Only time can reveal the true nature and scope of the visual Southern Ethic. I do hope that this show is at least a start in the formation of a Southern visual ethic.

Richard M. Blumensaadt
Co-director of the Southern Ethic Show

INTRODUCTION BY A.D. COLEMAN. As recently as a decade ago, a form of regionalism was still noticeable in creative photography. Its hallmarks were primarily stylistic: one or another master photographer would emerge from or settle somewhere in the country and, like a stone cast in a pond, would gradually send out rippling waves of disciples. Work from the west coast looked quite different from east coast imagery, largely because certain photographers' approaches and formats had become linked with specific geographic areas.

This was at the tail end of the first stage of photographic education, which was essentially an apprenticeship system based on imitation. Gradually evolving alongside this was a more elaborate structure for photographic education, rising out of the rapidly increasing acceptance of photography as a full-fledged medium and a legitimate field of study in colleges, universities, and art institutes across the nation.

The results of this evolution have been many and diverse; two of them are particularly pertinent to the work in this catalogue. First, the growth of a formal educational network in photography has encouraged the rapid dissemination of styles, techniques, and ideas. Apprenticing oneself to a particular master usually involves closing oneself off from the theories and practices of others, whereas studying a medium in a university context tends to confront one with the full range of that medium's possibilities. Consequently, photography's few purely regional styles are slowly but surely dissipating.

Secondly, the development of this network has contributed to the disappearance of the regional photographer as such. Less and less frequently do photographers remain to do their work where they were born and raised, or even where they learned their craft. They are more likely to attend one (or several) of the hundreds of schools offering photography programs in this country, and then to go on to teach at other such institutions elsewhere. Any labelling of them based on geographical location, therefore, must be recognized as temporary at best.

The forty-one image-makers represented in this volume are not all Southerners. Many of them haven't even studied here, and most of them don't know each other. In no sense do they represent a formal "Southern school" of photography, stylistically or conceptually. What they have in common is that they are all currently living and working throughout the Southern states—and, beyond that, they all felt enough of a connection with the South to contribute one or more images symbolizing their responses to this part of the country as a physical place and as a state of mind.

What is it that they have perceived and chosen to show us? On the whole, they have not concerned themselves with historic locales, public events, or (excepting Joe De Casseres' loving portrait of Flannery O'Connor) famous faces. Their raw material is common: common people, common places. The challenge they have set themselves is ferreting out the significance of the ordinary.

Look, just for example, at Mark Rosenberg's photograph of two boys and a dog. Is it only a picture of two poor children and their pet? Or is it an image of three beings who—at least for a fraction of a second—appear to know much more about the world than we would normally expect?

They are, at any rate, no more or less "typical" than the blank-faced construction worker in another of Rosenberg's photographs, or the very different women in Grier Thornberg's sympathetic portraits, or the

partying adolescents in Bill Yates' harsh, flash-lit images, or the two satisfied ladies Marcelina Martin shows us, as plump and contented as the bird they hold.

In fact, one thing which these otherwise dissimilar images share is a general avoidance of stereotypes and clichés about the South. These photographers have brought their individual sensibilities to bear on the environment they inhabit, and their responses vary enormously. Even the natural landscape undergoes considerable transformation in their hands. The variations range from the dense, encroaching vegetation in John McWilliams' imagery to the delicate trceries of a leaf's shadow in Carter Tomassi's, from Jim Frazer's explosive tree through Bill Brown's mysterious turf-covered hillock to the soft luminous darkness of Dierdre Murphy's forest.

Some of these photographers—Michael Reagan, Wilton David, Raiford Ragsdale, David Kaminsky, and Jim Frazer—manipulate the negative or alter the print with hand-applied color to violate the image's "facticity" and reflect their inner realities more accurately. Yet, even though most of the images in this collection are unmanipulated black & white prints, the kind we usually think of as "documentary," they too demand to be considered as interpretations rather than as records. What they seek to convey is not data but feeling, personalized perception.

Sometimes this manifests itself as a concern with the nuances of human gesture and interaction, as in the images of Gregory and Virginia Young Day, or in Michael Blumensaadt's gentle observation of a young boy. Elsewhere it occurs as a form of heightened attention to a particular object or space: Richard Sexton's New Orleans hotel room with its bare bulb, Peter Foe's marble table with its precisely positioned bouquet, Walter Beckham's dream-like "Conti St. Grill." In the work of others, it can be seen as an event specifically generated by the camera's intervention, an epiphany whereby our distinctions between the real and the imaginary are revealed in all their arbitrariness. Consider the fluid diver who leaps into Bill Fibben's static landscape; the dog plunging through Gail Lineback's billboard; John McWilliam's ghostly nude man on the dock, veiled in miraculous water; the almost indiscernible face behind the grimy windshield in Roy Money's image of a car; and the young woman on the verge of baring her breasts to Barry Anderson.

The South has already produced several photographers—Clarence John Laughlin and Ralph Eugene Meatyard among them—who have, over the span of a lifetime, produced major bodies of work which in one way or another visibly project something of what the editors of this book have termed "the Southern Ethic." Regionalism, in the traditional sense of the word, may be a thing of the past, but geography, culture and history are and will continue to be shaping forces, affecting the photographer as they affect all artists.

It may be more difficult to pinpoint the South's impact on the work of the photographers presented here, for numerous reasons. This is the first cross-section of contemporary Southern photography ever attempted, so we have no guidelines to go by; many of the contributors are young, and thus unfamiliar to us all; and they are represented by only a few prints each, hardly enough to define their individual ways of seeing. The editing and sequencing provide coherence and continuity, but intentionally do not emphasize any specific point of view. So what we have here is a series of glimpses through forty-one pairs of eyes.

Take them for what they are: images of the South by people who live there. Some of these photo-

graphers are in transition, but then so is the South itself. Some of them will leave, and their work will be molded by other places. But some of them will stay, to put down roots here, to nourish, and be nourished by, whatever the South becomes. Which ones those are I cannot say, but as this book indicates they all will bear watching. With luck and perseverance, a few of them may make definitive statements—or, even better, pose illuminating questions. At this stage of their visual investigation, it is premature to expect conclusions. But this book strikes me as a fine starting point.

A.D. Coleman
Atlanta, August 1975

Southern Exposure

The Southern Ethic











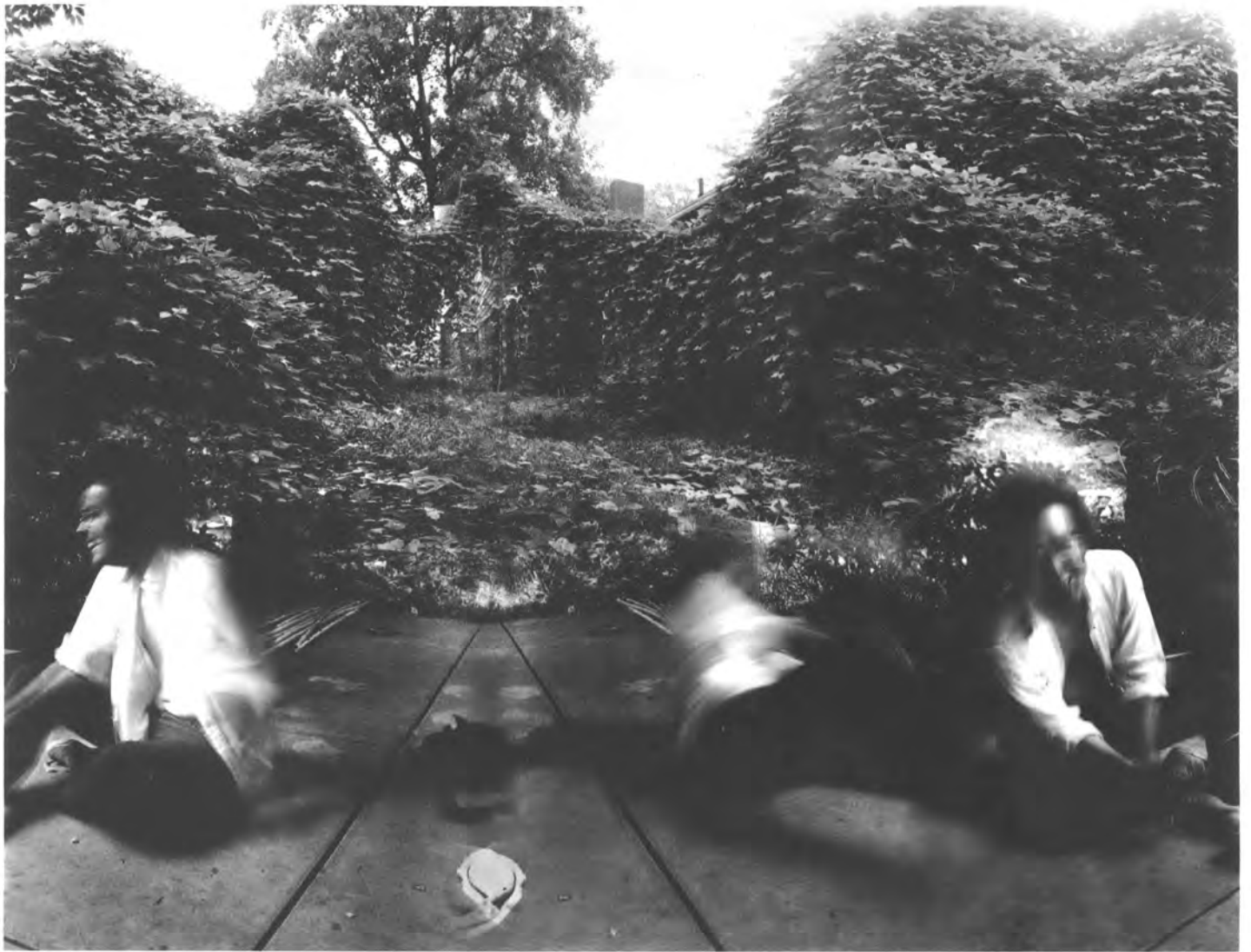




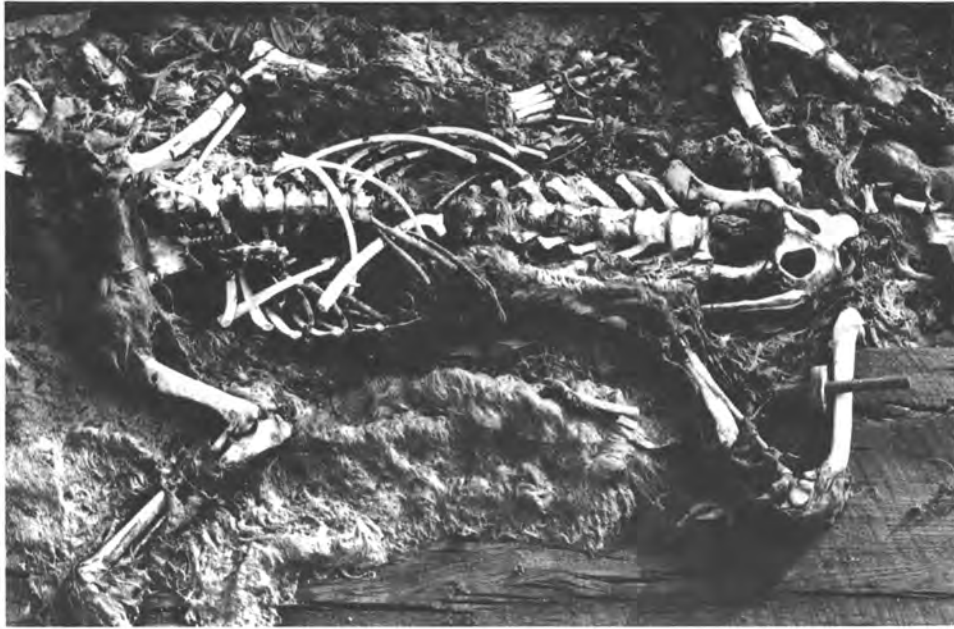








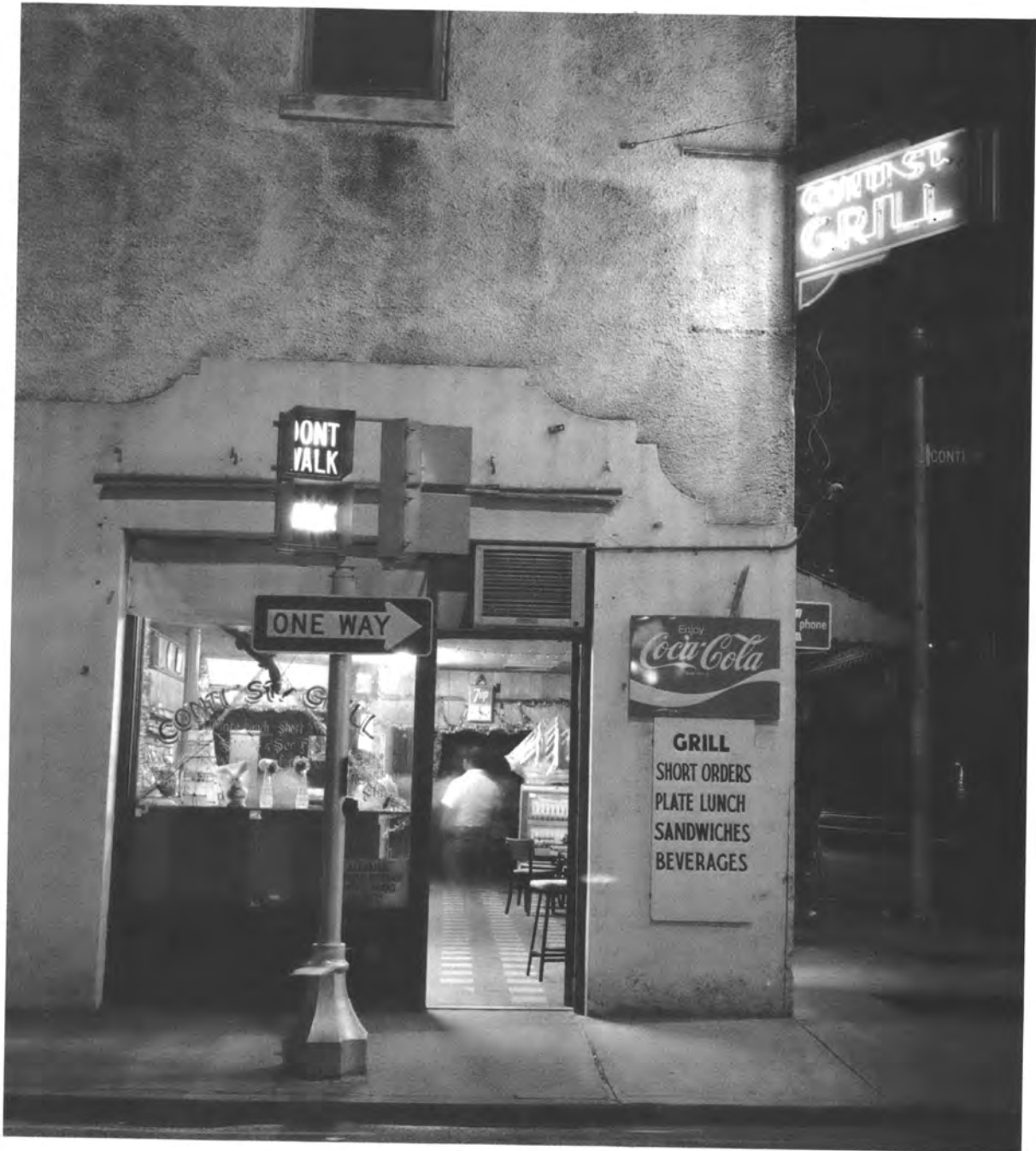


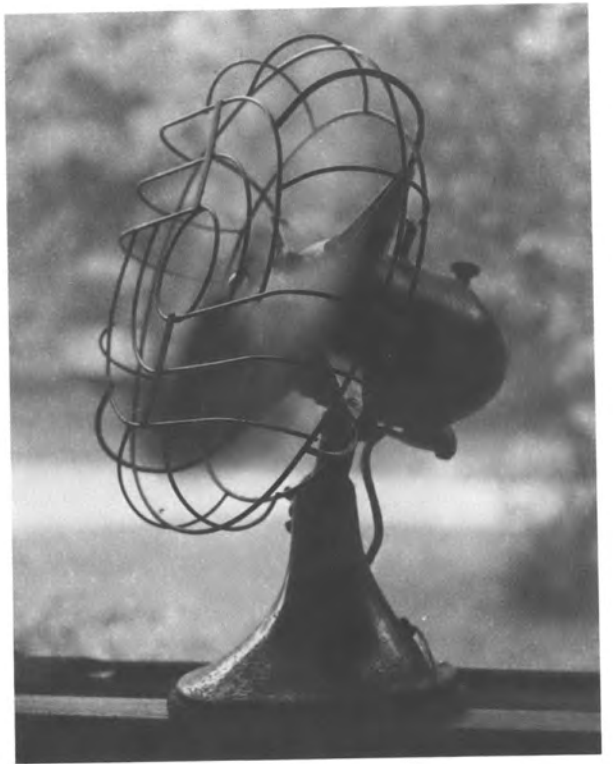




























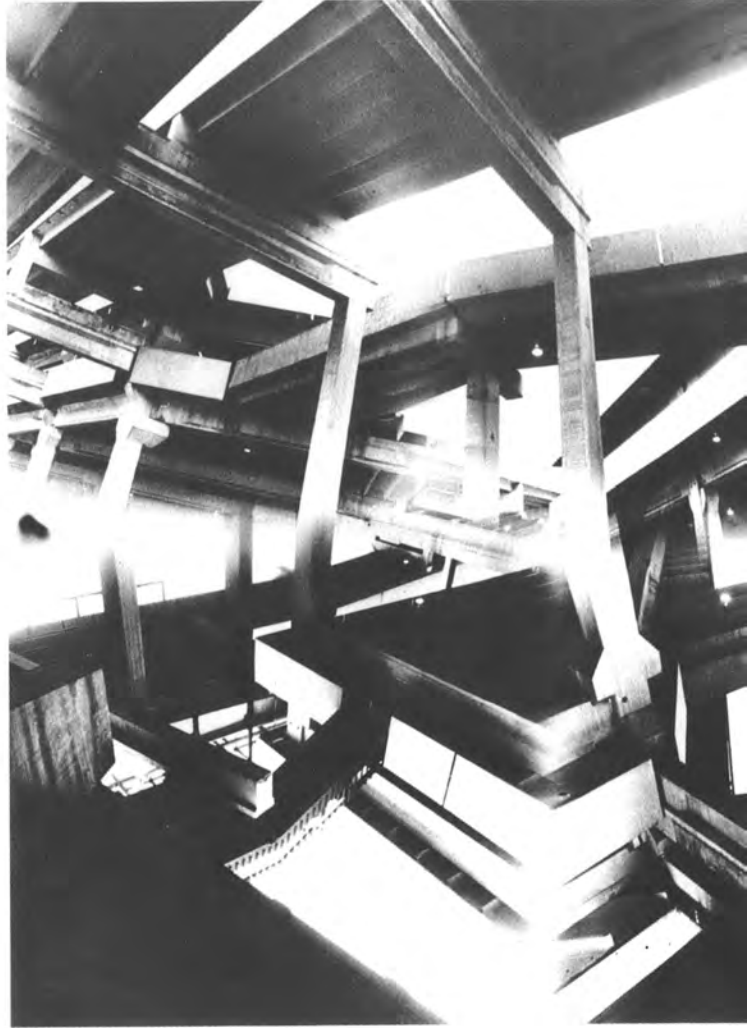








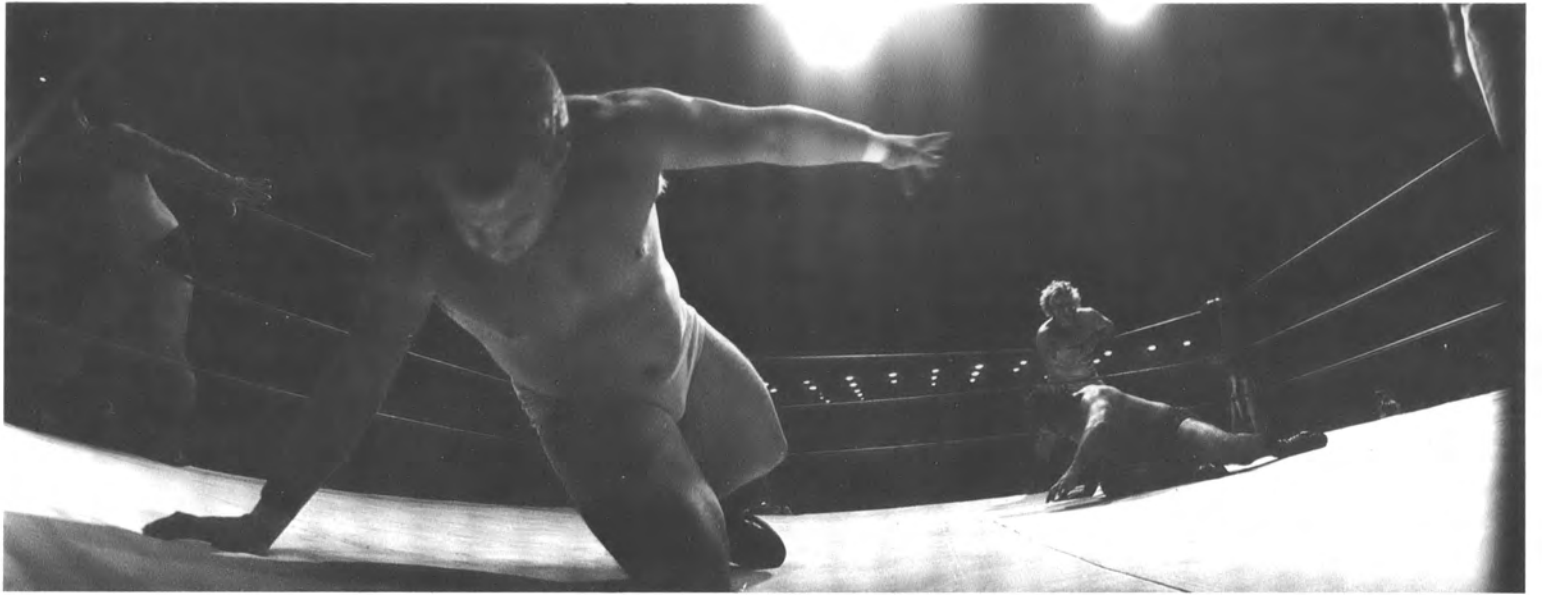












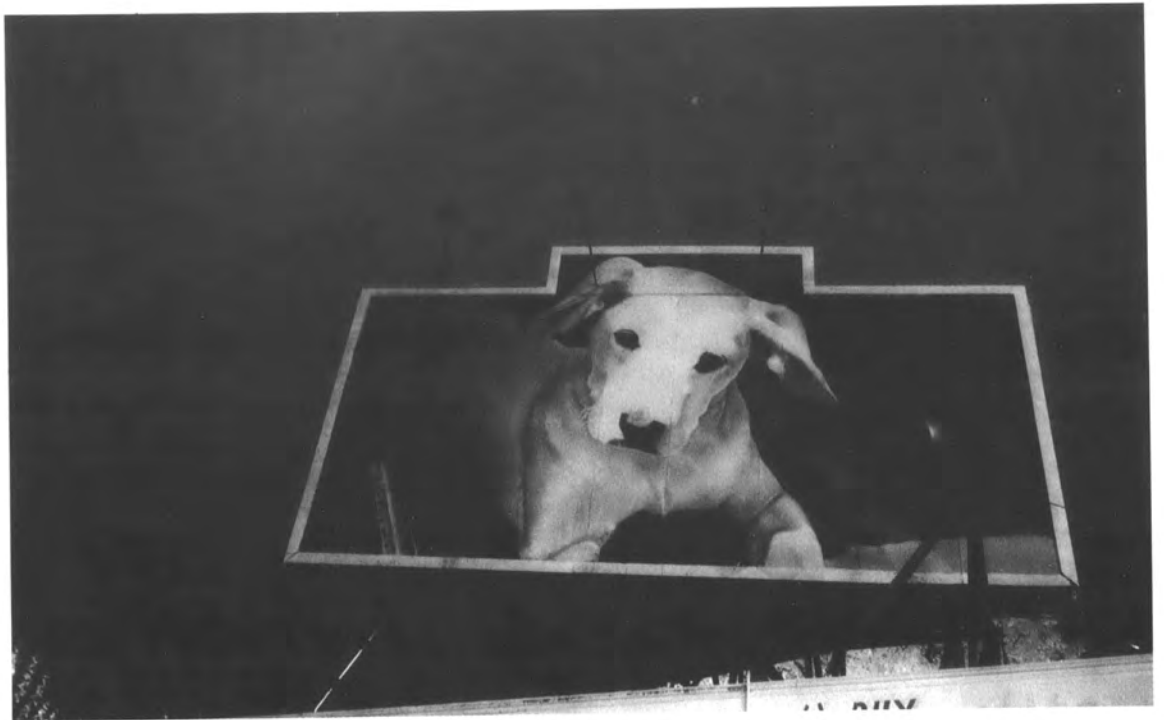








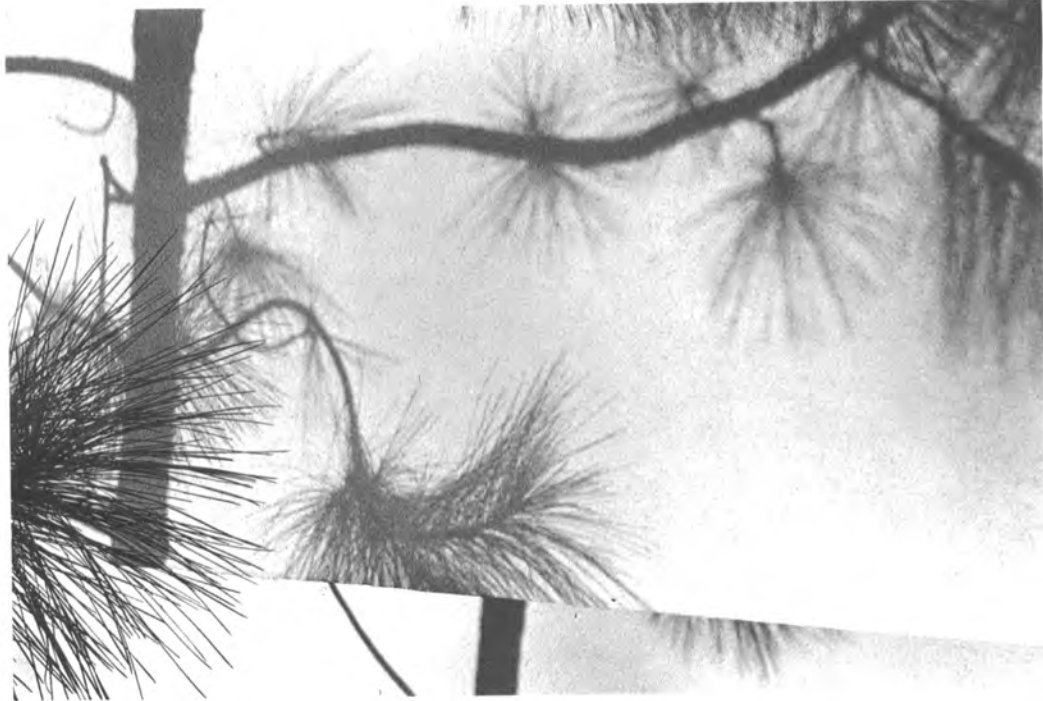






























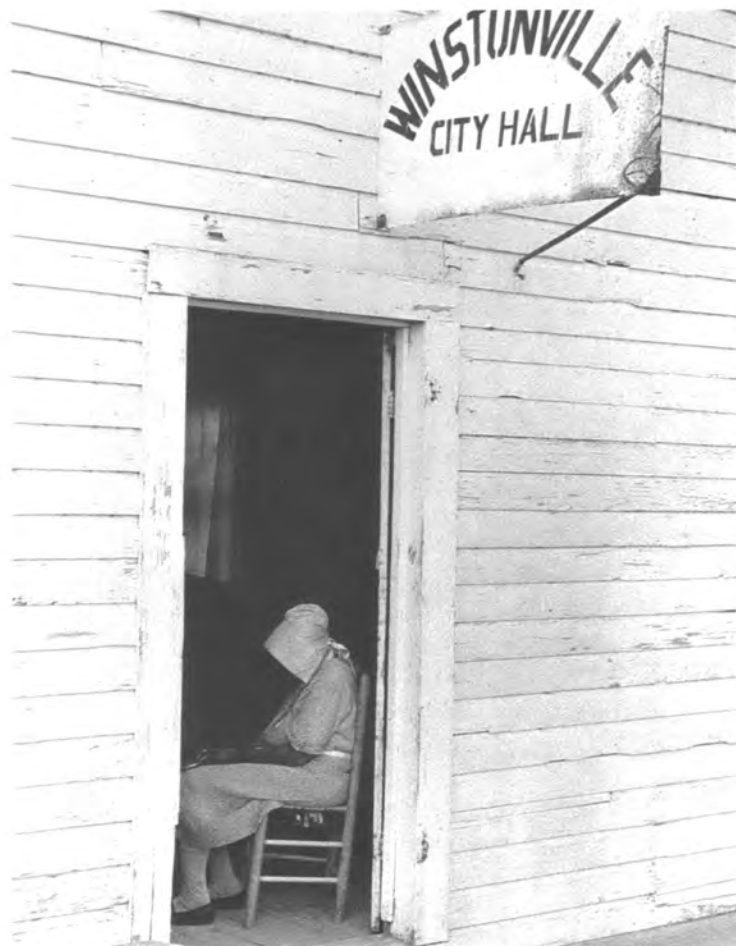


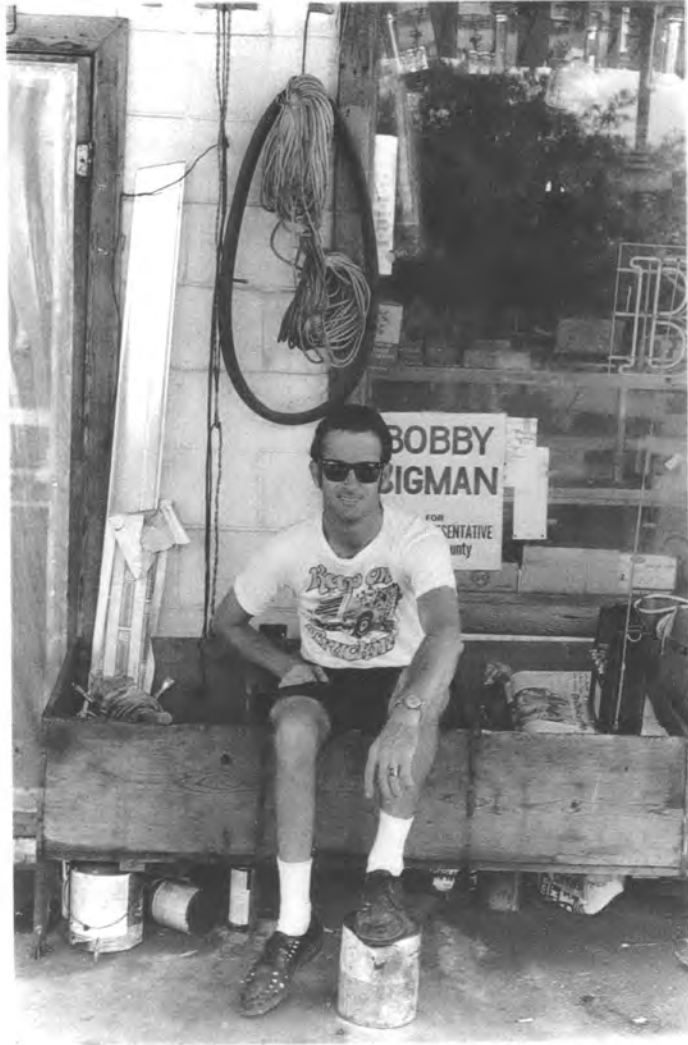


















































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| | 15. Byron A. Baldwin
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<i>"Gatherin," Effingham, Ga. 1971</i> | |
| 57.(A) Tom Coffin | **71. Carter Tomassi
<i>Untitled</i> | |
| *57.(B) Tom Coffin | | |
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- * In The Traveling Show
** Juror's Picture
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Duotones and color separations for this book (excepting the duotone on page 9) were made by Graphics Atlanta, Inc. on a "Magnascan 460" from the original prints and reproduced by Shield Printing Co., Inc. using 175 line screen duotone plates on a single color offset press. The paper used is Quintessence 80 lb. dull.

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