

# Articles

## Killed Negatives: The Unseen Photographic Archives



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**RÉSUMÉ** On a beaucoup écrit au sujet des projets photographiques à grande échelle de Roy E. Stryker avec la Farm Security Administration à Washington et la Standard Oil Company du New Jersey, projets qui ont eu lieu entre 1935 et 1950. Cet article est consacré à l'un de ses projets les moins bien connus, la Pittsburgh Photographic Library (1950-1955), et aux archives qui ont été créées par ce projet. Ces archives photographiques contiennent des ensembles d'images qui, pendant plus de cinquante ans, étaient pour la plupart inaccessibles; depuis la fin du projet en 1955, elles avaient en effet été emboîtées et entreposées. Stryker et ses photographes qualifiaient ces images de « mises à mort » (« *kills* »), ou de « négatifs mis à mort » (« *killed negatives* »). Dans un premier temps, cet article offre un aperçu historique de la carrière de Stryker et de sa relation avec la photographie jusqu'au début de la Pittsburgh Photographic Library. Ensuite, il examine la nature de ses « négatifs mis à mort », en les traitant comme des documents d'archives photographiques, tout en explorant les frontières discursives entre le texte environnant, les annotations de rédaction et les images elles-mêmes. Enfin, l'article montre que l'on peut donner un sens non seulement aux documents que les archivistes ont mis en valeur en les classant et en les décrivant, mais aussi aux documents qui demeurent cachés dans leurs voûtes.

**ABSTRACT** Much has been written about Roy E. Stryker's large-scale photographic projects with the Farm Security Administration in Washington, DC and Standard Oil Company of New Jersey – projects lasting from 1935 to 1950. This paper is devoted to one of his less well-known projects, the Pittsburgh Photographic Library (1950–1955), and the archives that subsequently evolved from this project. Within this picture archives there is a subset of images that for over fifty years were mostly inaccessible; since the end of the project in 1955, they were boxed-up and stored out of sight. Stryker and his photographers referred to these images as *kills* or *killed negatives*. First, the paper offers a broad historical overview of Stryker's career and his relationship to photography leading up to the start of the Pittsburgh Photographic Library. Second, the paper examines the nature of Stryker's killed negatives, recontextualizing them as archival photographic records and explores the discursive boundaries at work between surrounding text, editorial markings, and the images themselves. Third, the paper demonstrates that meaning can be derived not just from what records archivists bring to life through their arrangement and descriptive practices, but also through those records that remain buried in their vaults.

## Introduction

I think the best way to put it is that newspictures are the noun and the verb; our kind of photography is the adjective and the adverb. The newpicture is a single frame; ours, a subject viewed in series. The newpicture is dramatic, all subject and action. Ours shows what's back of the action.<sup>1</sup>

Roy Emerson Stryker

There is evidence of a compelling fascination to photograph the city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, by “insiders” such as Charles “Teenie” Harris, Luke Swank, and city photographer Brady W. Stewart; “outsiders” who were drawn in and later left, like Lewis W. Hine, W. Eugene Smith, and Margaret Bourke-White; and “outsiders who were drawn in and stayed,” like Clyde “Red” Hare. The documentary evidence of their work has been published in numerous books, newspapers and magazines, and their photographs are filed away in Pittsburgh’s archives, museums, and libraries.

This paper examines a significant yet lesser-known documentary photography project that took place in Pittsburgh during the years 1950–1955 – the Pittsburgh Photographic Library (PPL). It explores the role of Roy Emerson Stryker as project director, and examines the archival repository in the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh that houses the project’s original prints and negatives along with other significant collections. The Pittsburgh Photographic Library project, the archives that subsequently grew out of this project, and the killed negatives themselves have not been widely written about. Consequently, the essay begins by providing background information on the term “killed” in the context of both photography and Stryker, then proceeds by situating Stryker in a broader historical context, examining the key events leading up to the eventual creation of the Pittsburgh Photographic Library as it currently exists in the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

One key premise of this paper is that Stryker’s earlier experiences influenced his role overseeing the PPL: Stryker was photographic illustrator for the book *American Economic Life* at Columbia University (1925); he was Chief of the Historical Section, Farm Security Administration (1935–1943); and he held the position of director of the photography program at Standard Oil Company of New Jersey (1943–1950). Special attention is given to what Stryker found interesting during these milestones in his photography career, especially to the discourse and rhetorical strategies he deployed during these projects to support his overt social use of photography.

The paper will examine a subset of records within the Pittsburgh Photographic Library that have remained relatively unknown: photographs

1 Roy Emerson Stryker and Nancy Wood, *In This Proud Land* (New York, 1973), p. 8.

known as *kills*, *killed negatives*, or *killed pictures*. The available literature on Stryker's photographic projects failed to capture Stryker's intent as he marked up and stored these killed pictures. Scholarship has tended to treat his killed negatives in a manner consistent with how archivists process *kills*, that is, the negatives are boxed-up, stored in a restricted area, left uncatalogued, and generally made unavailable for browsing or reproduction. They are unseen.<sup>2</sup> This paper explores the relationship between the kills and the accompanying textual and non-textual markings with a view to establishing the impact of this combination on the killed negative's meaning as an archival document.<sup>3</sup>

Further, the paper is as much about Roy E. Stryker as it is about his killed negatives. The paper's main argument is that Stryker refined and formalized his killing process during the Pittsburgh Photographic Library project. The unwanted negatives were seen, interpreted, and then killed. Unlike the destructive process he administered more than a decade earlier during the Farm Security Administration project (where negatives were killed by carefully punching a hole in their centres), this new approach afforded new meaning to the negatives. The Pittsburgh Photographic Library kills were, to Stryker, "*not right*" – they did not in some way serve as a tool for documenting social change – they were nonetheless saved intact and today provide historical evidence.

The final section of this paper aims to "exhume" a select sampling of killed negatives, looking at how their meanings are constructed and conveyed. In the course of examining these records, the author evaluates symbolic markings and text written on and near the contact prints of the killed negatives in an effort to determine how these inscriptions guide or suggest photographic meaning and function and asks what is their relation to the picture.

### **Killed Negatives: Meaning in Context**

During the course of writing this paper, the author found evidence in published literature and unpublished manuscripts of the term "killed" being used in association with discarded or unwanted photographs and negatives. Every occurrence of the term was in the context of Roy Emerson Stryker and his work with the Farm Security Administration and with the Pittsburgh Photographic Library. In the context of the Farm Security Administration project, the term was used to describe negatives that were made unus-

2 Access to the collection and to records relating to the history of the Pittsburgh Photographic Library (PPL) was greatly aided through the research assistance of Gilbert Pietrzak, photo curator for the Pittsburgh Photographic Library.

3 Ideas on the nature of archival documents and the photograph as an archival record have been aided through discussions with Robert Barnet Riter, Doctoral Student, University of Pittsburgh.

able. “Stryker killed – by punching holes in the negatives – about 100,000 [photographs].”<sup>4</sup> Meg Smith, an intern in the Public Affairs Office, Library of Congress, wrote in an Information Bulletin, that “Stryker and perhaps others in his office punched holes in what he felt were inferior or redundant negatives, a process they called ‘killing’ the image.”<sup>5</sup> Arthur Rothstein, a former student of Stryker’s at Columbia University and one of Stryker’s Farm Security Administration photographers, stated during an interview with Richard Doud, “In the Library of Congress you’ll find strips of 35mm film with holes punched in the middle of them – occasional negatives that Roy didn’t think were suitable for the files, not to be printed for one reason or another – maybe they were duplicates, maybe they weren’t the best.”<sup>6</sup>

Hole-punching was not part of the killing process in the Pittsburgh Photographic Library project; the killed negatives remained unaltered but received special processing (described later in this paper) – a treatment that made it clear the kills were deemed unsuitable for inclusion in the file. The author found a single, indirect reference to kills being part of each project Stryker undertook, which suggests inclusion of kills in the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey project and Stryker’s last major project – making the Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation (J&L) picture collection in Pittsburgh (1952–1964).<sup>7</sup> In 1997, Robert J. Doherty stated: “All of the kill negatives for each of [Stryker’s] projects are still available so that we can learn as much from what was used as from what was not. We can see the tangible evidence of Stryker’s decision-making process.”<sup>8</sup>

### Hine and The Pittsburgh Survey

In 1907 and 1908, Pittsburgh, the heart of the America’s steel industry, found itself the focus of a major study that came to be known as The Pittsburgh Survey. Paul Kellogg of the New York Charity Organization Society, along with several other researchers who were well-known in the field of social reform, assembled in Pittsburgh to conduct an in-depth study of “life and labour” in Pittsburgh.<sup>9</sup> The results of this study were published in six large

4 Stryker and Wood, p. 17.

5 Meg Smith, “Hard Times in Sharp Focus,” *Library of Congress Information Bulletin* (August 1998), <http://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9808/fsa-osi.html> (accessed on 8 July 2009).

6 Arthur Rothstein and Richard Doud, “Interview: Arthur Rothstein Talks with Richard Doud,” *Archives of American Art Journal*, vol. 17, no. 1 (1977), p. 21.

7 Rick Starr, “The Jones & Laughlin Picture Collection,” *Image*, vol. 18, no. 3 (September 1975), p. 12. Starr states in his article that it is unclear how long Stryker’s affiliation with J&L continued.

8 Robert J. Doherty, “The Elusive Roy Stryker,” in *Roy Stryker: The Human Propagandist*, ed. James C. Anderson (Louisville, 1977).

9 Maurine W. Greenwald and Margo Anderson, eds., *Pittsburgh Surveyed* (Pittsburgh, 1996),

volumes between 1909 and 1914, four of the volumes taking on the form of monographs. The value of anchoring the current essay to The Pittsburgh Survey is two-fold: first, integrated into the text of these reports are photographs shot in Pittsburgh by Lewis W. Hine, a photographer who “significantly influenced the political and social landscape of the United States at the turn of the century.”<sup>10</sup> They are the first widely publicized, social reform photographs taken in Pittsburgh. Second, there is a link to Roy E. Stryker, who later met with Hine and made use of Hine’s documentary photographs in his first photograph-related project at Columbia University.

As will be shown in the next section, when in the early 1920s Stryker first became interested in the photograph, he was attempting to use pictures to link economic theory and the social problems of the real world, or as Clyde Hare described it, “to make students realize the flesh and blood reality beneath the remorseless economic statistics of the Great Depression.”<sup>11</sup> Stryker discovered that mainstream photographers at that time were no longer interested in social reform or in using the photograph as a tool for social change, so he eventually found the images he needed by turning to photographs taken years earlier by Lewis Hine. “Lewis Hine,” Stryker said, “had a hell of an effect on me; a terrific effect on me.”<sup>12</sup>

### Roy Emerson Stryker

Roy Emerson Stryker was born in 1893 in Great Bend, Kansas (see Figure 1). After ranching, fighting in the ranks of the infantry during World War I, working in a New York City settlement house, teaching economics at Columbia University, and then overseeing two large-scale photographic projects, Stryker found his way to Pittsburgh in 1950 with a well-developed sense of what the photograph was capable of doing in the discourse of social reform. “There must be a marriage of pictures and words,”<sup>13</sup> Stryker claimed. In the epigraph at the start of this paper, he goes so far as to draw an analogy between *his* photographs and the different functions that words perform in sentences; during his years serving as an instructor and research assistant for Columbia University economist Rexford Guy Tugwell, he had learned some-

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p. 1.

- 10 George Dimock, “Children of the Mills: Re-Reading Lewis Hine’s Child-Labour Photographs,” *The Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1993), p. 37.
- 11 Clyde Hare, *Clyde Hare’s Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh, 1994), p. 11.
- 12 Robert J. Doherty, F. Jack Hurley, Jay M. Kloner, and Carl G. Ryant, “Roy Stryker on FSA, SONJ, J&L: An Interview Conducted by Robert J. Doherty, F. Jack Hurley, Jay M. Kloner and Carl G. Ryant, 1972,” *Image*, vol. 18, no. 2 (December 1975), p. 3.
- 13 Leonard Thompson, “Photographer’s Champion,” *The Pittsburgh Press* (Sunday, 22 November 1959), p. 34.

thing about the relationship between the photograph and text as knowledge and representation of social conditions.



**Figure 1:** John Collier, *Roy E. Stryker*, Washington, DC, 1941. Black and white film negative, digitally inverted. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, LC-USF34-082103-C.

In 1924, Tugwell, then chair of the Economics Department at Columbia, announced to Stryker that he was going to write a book called *American Economic Life*. He asked Stryker to look for pictures to illustrate the text.<sup>14</sup> As Stryker was already familiar with Hine's use of the camera as a tool of social documentary in *The Pittsburgh*

*Survey*, he sought him out as a source for images to help illustrate *American Economic Life*. According to Forrest Jack Hurley, of the two hundred and fifteen illustrations used in the book, more than seventy photographs came from Hine.<sup>15</sup>

Stryker chose a Lewis Hine photograph as the first picture in the book, one introducing a chapter focusing on rural poverty. The text near this photograph reads: "Suffering is keen for the poor alike in country and in city; but it is of somewhat different kinds, and arises from different causes."<sup>16</sup> The text then asks, "What do they do, and what things must they do without?" Perhaps motivated by ideology, Stryker chose a photograph he believed reinforced the question and provided an answer. Hine's photograph portrays a social worker coming to check on a family; the family's broken-down house consists of a patchwork of wood lathe, exposed rafters and joists, missing floorboards, and doorless entryways. There is a mother with four children standing on a

14 *Oral History Interview with Roy Emerson Stryker, 1963–1965*, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Conducted by Richard Doud at Stryker's home in Montrose, Colorado, 13 June 1964, [http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/stryke63.htm#june\\_13\\_1964\\_session](http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/stryke63.htm#june_13_1964_session) (accessed on 3 May 2009). Hereinafter Stryker-Doud Interview.

15 Forrest Jack Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade: Roy Stryker and the Development of Documentary Photography in the Thirties* (Jackson, TN, 1977), p. 14.

16 Rexford Guy Tugwell, Thomas Munro, and Roy E. Stryker, *American Economic Life* (New York, 1925), p. 8.

small island of wood-flooring that appears to be receding from the front of what was once an enclosed room – an attachment to the house that was either ripped from its foundation by nature or perhaps dismantled board-by-board to feed a wood stove. Stryker relies heavily on the photograph to “inform and educate” readers, offering only a two-word caption that reads, “Rural poverty.”

Years later in an interview with Richard Doud, Stryker referred to one of his Farm Security Administration photographers, Ben Shahn, as one of two “very interesting boys in Pittsburgh.”<sup>17</sup> On the topic of picture making, Stryker described how Shahn was especially good at photographing people. “[Shahn] made those people feel important; they had dignity. And they sensed this guy could give it to them. Not give it to them. Not make them beautiful, not make them look like something they weren’t. But he put dignity into the picture.”<sup>18</sup> One is left to wonder whether Stryker put poverty into Hine’s photograph just as Shahn put dignity into his photographs. More importantly, in this context Stryker is speaking from the perspective of a former project chief, someone who was in public relations, a position of power, and as Maren Stange put it, managing “a growing file of substantial, socially concerned photographs.”<sup>19</sup>

Stryker left Columbia University in 1934 to join Tugwell in Washington, DC, first in a temporary summer job with the information division of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, and then again in 1935 to work with pictures on a full-time basis with the Resettlement Administration.<sup>20</sup> The last half of the 1930s was a desperate era of American history when President Franklin D. Roosevelt in his second inaugural address reported, “I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished.”<sup>21</sup> One scholar described Stryker’s mission there as being one to “provide photographic evidence of rural poverty and to give later evidence that various New Deal economic policies had successfully alleviated the problems originally documented.”<sup>22</sup>

Stryker’s official title with what came to be known as the Farm Security Administration (FSA) was Chief of the Historical Section in the Division of Information. Years later in an interview with Robert J. Doud, Stryker

17 Stryker-Doud Interview, 17 October 1963.

18 Ibid.

19 Maren Stange, *Symbols of Ideal Life: Social Documentary Photography in America 1890–1950* (Cambridge, UK/New York, NY, 1989), p. 108.

20 In 1937 the Resettlement Administration was renamed the Farm Security Administration (FSA). In 1940 Stryker’s attention shifted from agriculture to war, and in 1942 his photographic division moved from the FSA to the Office of War Information where Stryker remained until his departure for Standard Oil Company of New Jersey in 1943.

21 Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Second Inaugural Address* (20 January 1937), <http://www.bartelby.com/124/pres50.html> (accessed on 2 August 2009).

22 Carol Shloss, *In Visible Light: Photography and the American Writer: 1840–1940* (New York, 1987), p. 189.

preferred to describe his work with the FSA as being more a collector of documents that might later have historical significance for the FSA. Stryker claimed there was very little emphasis on the role of photography in his job description.<sup>23</sup> Tugwell directed him to utilize photography not as a historical record, but as a visual tool to assist field workers in conveying the program goals of the FSA. In spite of Tugwell's intentions, the Historical Division ended up with a few documents and a lot of pictures. Stryker and his first photographer, Arthur Rothstein, recorded everything in photographs. As one writer described it, "the economists, sociologists, and statisticians who were supposed to be part of the historical section never materialized."<sup>24</sup> So as more photographers were added to Stryker's staff –including Carl Mydans, Walker Evans, Ben Shahn, and Dorothea Lange – the corpus of photographs documenting American life grew larger. Nearly one million dollars had been spent by 1943 (the end of the project) to produce 270,000 pictures.<sup>25</sup>

Stryker resigned from the FSA in 1943 to accept a position directing a photographic program for Standard Oil Company of New Jersey (SONJ), a position he held until 1950. At SONJ, he and a new team of photographers (some formerly of the FSA project) involved themselves with industrial photography, documenting every conceivable detail associated with the production and use of oil. At first Stryker was puzzled as to why he was asked to undertake this project. "What would Standard Oil want from me," he wondered, "a New Dealer, the son of a Populist?"<sup>26</sup> It would be redundant to speculate on why his good friend and employee of SONJ, Edward Stanley, offered him the position or why Stryker accepted as photographic historian; Steven Plattner already covers these topics and offers a thorough study of the SONJ photographic collection and its photographers in *Roy Stryker: U.S.A., 1943–1950*.<sup>27</sup> Stryker's motivation during this project is best summed up by Sol Libsohn's description of what he thought Stryker wanted: "... to produce a document meaning something that would remain a valid history of what was happening in the U.S."<sup>28</sup>

Stryker's annual project budget at SONJ dropped from \$220,000 in 1947 to \$130,000 in 1948, and difficult questions were being raised. The main concern, as Charles Rotkin, aerial photographer for Standard Oil, pointed out: "A lot of the pictures were published showing what dandy people the oil companies were ... You can bring in press clippings by the thousands of

23 Stryker-Doud Interview.

24 Hurley, pp. 37–38.

25 Stryker and Wood, p. 16.

26 Roy E. Stryker, "A Portrait of Oil – Unretouched," *Fortune* (September 1948), p. 102.

27 Steven W. Plattner, *Roy Stryker: U.S.A. 1943–1950* (Austin, 1983), p. 15.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 18.



pictures courtesy of Standard Oil. But what that really meant, I don't know."<sup>29</sup> This uncertainty and budget tightening prompted Stryker to begin planning for his next documentary project.

### **The Beginnings of the Pittsburgh Photographic Library**

During his last two years at SONJ, Stryker began formulating ideas for a civic photographic library in Pittsburgh. In April 1948 Stryker met with Philip S. Broughton, executive secretary of the A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust in Pittsburgh, to discuss the potential role photography might play in promoting Pittsburgh's plan for rebuilding. Broughton, a former chief of the Office of Health Education in the US Public Health Service, was instrumental in bringing the Pittsburgh Photographic Library into existence and defining its operational goals.<sup>30</sup> Over the next two years Stryker successfully scripted what would become his third major photographic project, this time documenting a major American city and its people – the first such project of its kind.

In the initial 1949 draft proposal for establishing a Civic Photographic Center in Pittsburgh (the original name for what became known as the Pittsburgh Photographic Library), the Allegheny Conference on Community Development offered a new approach for educating the citizens on the Conference's civic efforts. It stated that the Conference must change, "from publicity, to photograph; from the use of 'WORDS', to the use of 'PICTURES'."<sup>31</sup> The proposal went on to say that as the photographic arm of the Allegheny Conference, the Civic Photographic Center would pictorialize and produce a documentary photographic record of the Civic Program and that a photographic library would be at the heart of the project.

The Pittsburgh Photographic Library (PPL) was created under the auspices of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, the A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, the Edgar J. Kaufman Charitable Trust, and the Howard Heinz Endowment. R.H. Fitzgerald, chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh at that time, provided partial financial support for the project, as well as darkroom facilities and office space on the thirty-sixth floor of the University's Cathedral of Learning. In 1950, during a time when Pittsburgh was undergoing a significant rebuilding program, Fitzgerald offi-

29 Ibid., p. 24.

30 Constance B. Schulz and Steven W. Plattner, eds., *Witness to the Fifties: The Pittsburgh Photographic Library, 1950–53* (Pittsburgh, 1999), p. 4.

31 "Proposal for the Establishment of the Civic Photographic Center under the Sponsorship of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development," December 1949, revised 20 February 1950. Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, Box 56, Folder File 1, A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pgh., PA Records 1930–1980.

cially announced the establishment of the Civic Photographic Library of the University of Pittsburgh saying, “We are glad pictures can be taken to record these changes, so Pittsburghers today and tomorrow may see the progress made in the city.”<sup>32</sup> In time, the pictures that Fitzgerald saw as vehicles for recording change began transforming into archival records.

### The Civic Eye is Watching

The nature of Stryker’s documentary tradition contradicted the notion that the photograph served as a neutral instrument for recording social change or the need for change. For example, his overt social use of photography created a conflict between himself and Walker Evans during their years together at the Farm Security Administration. On the one hand, Evans was interested in straight photography, “no ideology, no polemic, no extrinsic excitement, no razzamatazz technique.”<sup>33</sup> Stryker, on the other hand, was concerned with producing photographs useful to his employer for promoting political or social change, a method he had become accustomed to doing during his years working for Tugwell. Stryker’s philosophy of photography was articulated in February 1950 in a document drafted by the Allegheny Conference on Community Development outlining the purpose of the Pittsburgh photographic project.<sup>34</sup> Stryker wrote:

I look upon photography as primarily a means of communication. It is a language, with its own rules and techniques, and with the great advantage of being universally understood. It conveys information with an impact comparable to direct experience – with an impact, which is sometimes greater, because good photography is the product of extraordinary insight and selectivity. The photographer is skilled in observation and can see better than the untrained person. He brings a focus to bear on what is significant in a mass of visual impressions. The photograph helps us to see, to concentrate upon the object itself, and for these reasons is one of the most reflective media we have to inform and educate in a society as large and complex and difficult to experience at first hand as ours.”<sup>35</sup>

How would Stryker’s photographers approach this “mass of visual impressions” in Pittsburgh? Two years into the project the *Pittsburgh Courier*

32 “Pitt Plans Photograph Library,” *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph* (18 June 1950), p. 22.

33 William Scott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York, 1973), pp. 16–17, quoted in Shloss, p. 189.

34 Access to historic records relating to the PPL’s history was greatly aided through the research assistance of Miriam Meislik, Media Curator for the Archives Service Center at the University of Pittsburgh.

35 “Summary of a Proposal for the Establishment of the Civic Photographic,” unpublished data, 20 February 1950. Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, Box 56, Folder File 2, A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pgh., PA Records 1930–1980.

warned Pittsburghers just how selective Stryker's photographers were becoming.<sup>36</sup> "They may have a photo of you playing with your youngsters," staff writer George Barbour cautiously warned. "To be frank with you women, they may have one of you bargain-shopping in a department store basement. And that secret game of stud poker you men played also may be on record."<sup>37</sup> Barbour was referring to the PPL photographers who were on location shooting what John Grierson called the "living scene."<sup>38</sup>

The photographer's role was to be the "Civic Eye" and pictorialize the total Civic Program.<sup>39</sup> The photograph's role would be to provide a documentary record of Pittsburgh as its rebuilding program was being undertaken so that Pittsburghers and outsiders would not "forget what the city looked like a few years back."<sup>40</sup> The photographs were sometimes "opportunity shots but most of them were planned and taken to tell a specific story ... an effective media to inform and educate in a society large and complex and continually growing and changing."<sup>41</sup> In addition to the photograph's documentary function, they were given the task of educating the Pittsburgh community, helping citizens understand the problems that the civic programs were attempting to solve. The photographs were also charged with creating a documentary record of the region's industries and capturing the planning process of Pittsburgh's

- 36 It is often claimed that Stryker was not a photographer and never thought of himself as a photographer. Stryker once said, "Perhaps my greatest asset was my lack of photographic knowledge. I did not subscribe to anybody's particular school of photographic thought ... I was never a photographer." Quoted in Stryker and Wood, p. 11. Even though Stryker maintained he was never a photographer, there is evidence that he shot photographs in Minnesota during his work with the Farm Security Administration. In Robert L. Reid, ed., *Picturing Minnesota, 1936-1943* (St. Paul, 1989), Reid states, "The Minnesota material shows that on at least one occasion, Stryker did take pictures for the file. When he joined Lee in the field in the spring of 1937, Stryker used a 35mm Leica to take scenes of northern Minnesota ..." p. 6. For a rare glimpse of some of these images on-line, visit the Digital Collections at the Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/library/libarch-digital.html>, and search "photographer Stryker, Roy Emerson" and then limit by media type "Photograph" (accessed on 9 May 2009).
- 37 George E. Barbour, "20,000 Candid Observations," *Courier* (13 June 1953), p. 16.
- 38 Forsyth Hardy, ed., *Grierson on Documentary* (London, UK, 1946), quoted in Terry Morden, "Documentary.Past.Future?" in *Photography/Politics: Two*, eds. Patricia Holland, Jo Spence, and Simon Watney (London, 1986), p. 171.
- 39 Memo, 20 February 1950, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, Box 56, Folder File 1, A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pgh., PA Records 1930-1980.
- 40 "Pittsburgh Photographic Library," ca. 1952. Photocopy of article without citation filed in the PPL. It appears to have been published when the PPL was housed at the University because contact information is given at the end of the article as Cathedral of Learning and there is a statement, "the Pittsburgh Photographic Library of the University of Pittsburgh came into being two years ago."
- 41 Memo, 20 February 1950, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, Box 56, Folder File 1, A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pgh., PA Records 1930-1980.

rebuilding program.<sup>42</sup> The PPL's photographs derived their meaning from this social and historical context, a context that also included cultural and commercial imperatives expressed in its publications and exhibitions.

Tensions between Stryker and the PPL's sponsors led to his early resignation from the Pittsburgh project in October 1951. In his Terminal Report, Stryker claimed that too much emphasis had been placed on making money and that it should have been enough to simply focus on building a collection of pictures.<sup>43</sup> Marshall Stalley succeeded Stryker, directing the Library until the University released him and permanently shut down the Library in February 1955.<sup>44</sup> The photographic prints and negatives were boxed and stored in the University of Pittsburgh's Cathedral of Learning until October 1959, at which time a decision was made to move the material to the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh (CLP). Transferring the Pittsburgh Photographic Library to the CLP and preparing a new home for the collection took time, but by January 1961 the work was complete and the Pennsylvania Division of the CLP announced the opening of the new collection.

### **Pittsburgh Photographic Library Today**

On the topic of building photographic archives, or "files" as he called them, Stryker said: "It seems so simple to start one, but there is something strange about it when it gets under way – it's like a huge machine that won't stop."<sup>45</sup> In the case of the PPL, it is an accurate description for its early years, but it can be argued that the machine has almost ground to a halt with very few new photographs being accessioned in recent years.

The current PPL is best described as a hybrid archives applying a mix of practices traditionally found in archives, libraries, and museums. Sometimes single, museum-quality, collectable items are accessioned into the PPL. For example, Luke Swank's collection was originally entered into the PPL collection; curators later removed the signed prints so that they could take up a more privileged space in the Carnegie Museum and the Library's own William R. Oliver Room.<sup>46</sup> Of the total body of Luke Swank's work known to

42 "Pittsburgh Photographic Library," *Greater Pittsburgh* (December 1952), pp. 12–13.

43 Roy Emerson Stryker, "Terminal Report on the Pittsburgh Photographic Library," 30 November 1951. Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, Box 56, Folder File 1, A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pgh., PA Records 1930–1980.

44 Schulz and Plattner, p. 22.

45 Roy Stryker to Douglas Courseline, 26 November 1951. *Stryker Papers*, cited *ibid.*, p. 20.

46 In 1981, Charles Brodsky, Assistant Professor of Photography, Carnegie-Mellon University, recommended that the photographic prints of W. Eugene Smith, Margaret Bourke-White, Luke Swank, and others be transferred to the Carnegie Museum of Art. Charles Brodsky, "A Recommended Course for the Collections in the Pittsburgh Photographic Library," Revised, 23 October 1981. Pittsburgh Photographic Library.

exist, the PPL reports having 2,562 nitrate negatives and 689 prints, as well as glass plate stereographs and colour transparencies.<sup>47</sup>

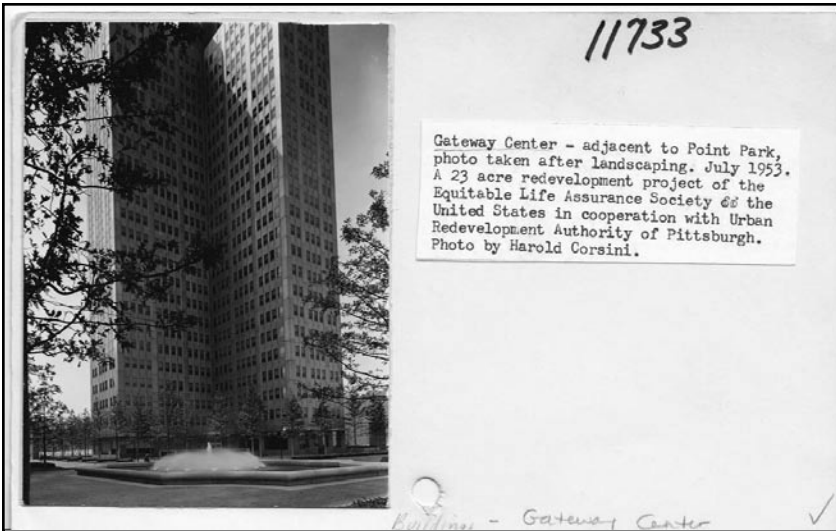
The archives' core collection of original Pittsburgh Photographic Library photographs from the early 1950s is comprised of 12,669 medium-format negatives, approximately 1,200 of which are killed. There are 3,899 35mm negative strips with four to six frames per strip. The total number of killed 35mm strips is unknown because they are interfiled with the approved strips. There are several smaller collections that have been added since the Library reopened as an archives in 1961, including the work of a *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph* photographer, Frank E. Bingaman, a collection consisting of over 1,000 photographs taken during the first quarter of the twentieth century; the Abram Brown Collection, which includes local scenes, especially of the Pennsylvania Railroad for which he worked; and the Stefan Lorant Collection, which consists of copywork of the images that appeared in his book, *Pittsburgh: The Story of an American City* (1999). Another body of Stryker's work held by the Pittsburgh Photographic Library is the collection of copywork that Stryker assembled for *A Pittsburgh Album*, originally published in 1959 as part of the city's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. There is not a clear record or complete inventory showing just how many named collections exist within the PPL; however, an estimate made in March 2000, calculated the holdings for the Library at 57,008 prints, 58,292 negatives, 1,234 slides, 310 lantern slides, and 13,000 contact prints.<sup>48</sup>

The PPL's power and authority is derived from its parent institution, the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, and it is on this authority that the PPL predicated its procedures and practices. The curator of the Pittsburgh Photographic Library, Gillbert Pietrzak, reports to the Director of the Pennsylvania Department. The William R. Oliver Room, the Carnegie Library archives, is a separate department overseen by archivist Greg Priore.

Only traces of a small sample of the PPL's photographic collection are catalogued. The catalogue records are over-sized index cards with photographic contact prints attached to them along with cataloguers' ubiquitous codes and typewritten descriptions. The cards are taxonomically arranged under popular topics and filed in a card catalogue near the entrance to the Pennsylvania Department's reading room. A sample taken from the card index is presented in Figure 2. The number 11733 without a letter prefix indicates that the photograph "Gateway Center" is part of Stryker's original Pittsburgh Photographic Library project.

47 Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh Photographic Library (PPL) Preliminary Inventory, [http://216.183.184.20/exhibit/ppl\\_plan.html](http://216.183.184.20/exhibit/ppl_plan.html) (accessed on 21 January 2009).

48 Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh Photographic Library (PPL) Preliminary Inventory.



**Figure 2:** Index card from the Pittsburgh Photographic Library picture index. (Reprinted with permission.) Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized reproduction or usage prohibited.

### Nature of the Killed Negative

“Our photographers saw, really saw,” Stryker remembered when discussing the FSA project, “and the more they were encouraged, the more they saw.”<sup>49</sup> In 1952, Broughton described photography in Pittsburgh as a new instrument of understanding created by man, “extending the eye in time and place, in circumstance and position. A lens in the hand of a man trained to see may reveal to all men things that their own untrained eyes would have missed on direct observation.”<sup>50</sup> Certain photographs, however, were seen by the Pittsburgh photographers but never revealed to the *untrained eye* or made available to press, magazines, book publishers, or historians. Stryker and his photographers called them *killed negatives*. The killed negatives, by virtue of never having been catalogued or described in any finding aid, have remained hidden from the general public’s eye since they were boxed up at the close of the original project in 1955. Today, the negatives are physically grouped together in their original order by format – 35mm negatives are stored in one

49 “The Lean Thirties,” *Harvester World* (February–March 1960), p. 13.

50 P.S. Broughton, “Stryker Photographic Project,” 2 March 1950. Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, Box 56, Folder File 1, A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pgh., PA Records 1930–1980.

set of metal file drawers and the medium-format negatives are stored in a metal cabinet. They are accessible only to library staff and researchers who go into the Pittsburgh Photographic Library's closed collections room. It is only by serendipitous discovery that a researcher would happen to open the unlabelled cabinets holding the unlabelled containers of killed negatives.

There is no evidence that Stryker had an explicitly stated methodology for classifying images as killed. Historical evidence presented in the following section suggests that picture killing was an administrative responsibility, a task that Stryker, as director of the FSA and PPL, assigned to himself.<sup>51</sup> One journalist described Stryker as someone who "made his photographers go beyond the mechanical techniques of the camera, to see, feel and understand the social meaning of a scene and then to record it."<sup>52</sup> Perhaps the killed negatives failed to represent this social meaning of a scene. Whatever their shortcomings, the contact prints were usually marked-up with cropping lines giving the impression that Stryker gave the process some thought.

Contrary to the cataloguer's practice of describing photographs not only in terms of content and form, but also in the context of their creation, Alan Sekula believes that once an image is accepted and accessioned into the archives, it loses the meaning that was embedded in the relationship with its creator and previous users: "[I]n an archive, the possibility of meaning is 'liberated' from the actual contingencies of use. But this liberation is also a loss, an *abstraction* from the complexity and richness of use, a loss of context."<sup>53</sup>

The envelope illustrated in Figure 3 presents one example of a killed negative, although in this sample the photographer's name inscribed on the envelope is a rare exception to the anonymity usually afforded the killed negative. Contextual information is absent in the majority of enveloped negatives.<sup>54</sup> Figure 4 depicts the unifying characteristic of the killed negatives – the *form not filled out* – which highlights the fact that the negative is only a minor contribution to the value of the contact print as a record. Other data including

51 It is not certain whether picture killing took place after Stryker resigned his position with the PPL in late 1951. After reviewing the filing systems for all of the negatives in the collection, it appears that filing numbers on medium-format killed negatives do not go much beyond the low 3,000s in a numbering scheme that eventually went well over 12,000 before the PPL was closed down in 1955.

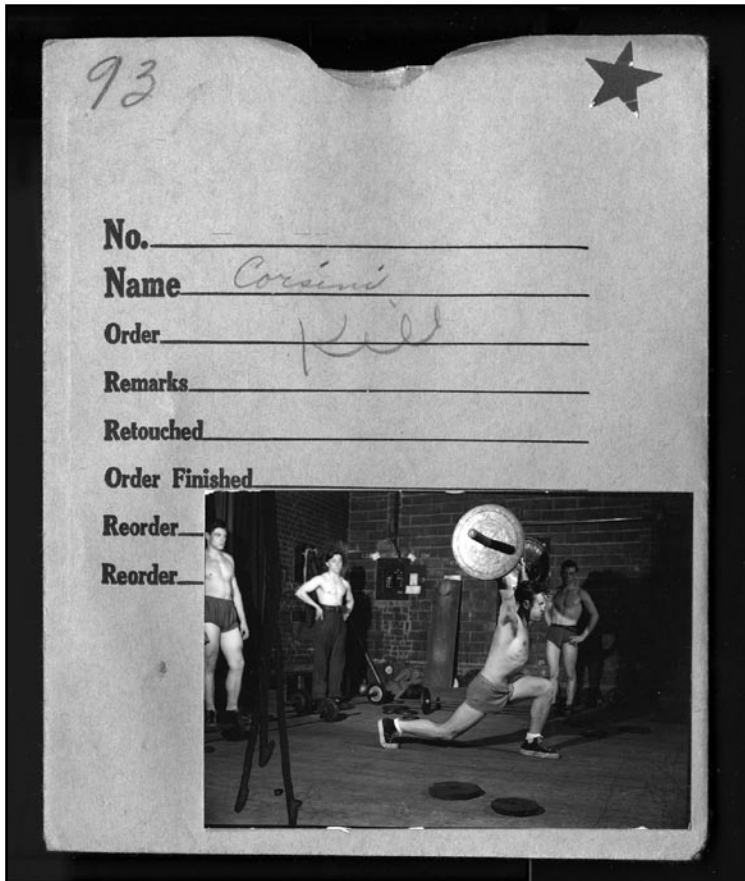
52 Clarence E. Olson, "A Backward Look at the Bitter Years," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (Sunday, 4 November 1962), p. 21.

53 Alan Sekula, "Reading an Archive: Photography Between Labor and Capital," in *Photography/Politics: Two*, p. 154.

54 Before the elaborate single-negative filing system was developed, contact prints of killed negatives were mounted alongside approved pictures. The contact print books include contextual information for series of photographs, often listing the photographer's name, series name, and date created.

photographers' names, dates, locations, subject headings, and the usual decorative markings and schemata of the cataloguer are noticeably absent.

The killed negative shown in Figure 3 is unique for its detail, which although sparse, is telling. Negative number 93 is given the prerequisite blue star that designates the negative has been killed. In the vast majority of cases this is the only sign for kill, but on number 93's envelope "kill" is also inscribed in red pencil. Perhaps the photographer (Corsini on this photograph), had set the envelope aside for reconsideration, and Stryker saw it and reconfirmed the kill with his red pencil.



**Figure 3:** [Harold] Corsini. Killed negative original envelope. Negative number 93; gelatin silver contact print, 6 x 9 cm. (Reprinted with permission.) Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized reproduction or usage prohibited.



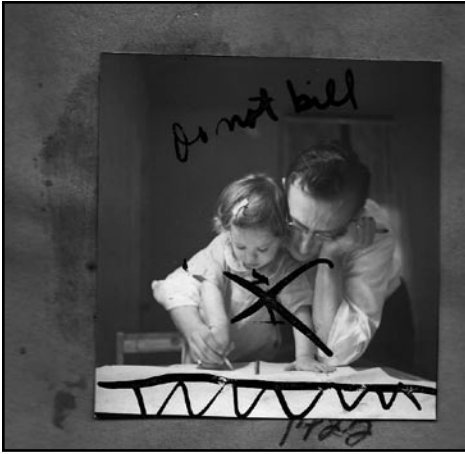


**Figure 4:** Allen Benson, *Boxes of killed, medium-format negatives, Pittsburgh Photographic Library. The Pittsburgh Photographic Library Series, 2009.* Scanned 35mm black & white negative, digitally inverted.

Each individual, medium-format, killed negative is methodically processed. It becomes a site where meaning is made and remade. The archival record becomes a construction made from the original black and white film negative, a glassine envelope in which the negative is inserted, and a thumb-cut paper envelope in which the glassine envelope is inserted.

The negative number – a unique identifier within this closed system of the Pittsburgh Photographic Library project – is inscribed with black ink on the transparent margin of the negative and again in pencil in the upper, left-hand corner of the outer envelope. A contact print of the enclosed negative is glued in the lower, right-hand corner of the envelope (this is typically the site of cropping marks and other notations). The killed negatives are filed vertically in numerical order in four shallow-lid negative boxes with reinforced metal edges.

Figure 5 illustrates an example of a photograph that is layered with meaning, taking an unexpected turn in the end. The markings indicate that the image was first marked for cropping along its bottom edge and then finally an “x” was drawn on Mr. Pantalís and his daughter signifying the picture is killed.



**Figure 5:** [Esther Bubley. *Pantalis family*, 1950.] Negative number 1425. Gelatin silver contact print, 6 x 6 cm., mounted in contact print book. (Reprinted with permission.) Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized reproduction or usage prohibited.

What is unusual in this example is Stryker's change of mind and his instructions inscribed on the surface of the

contact print that say: "do not kill." The corresponding negative for this picture is now interfiled with the approved negatives housed in the archives.

While this paper draws all of its examples from a portion of the Pittsburgh Photographic Library file containing only medium-format negatives, there is a small set of killed 35mm negatives in another filing system. Figure 6 presents an example of the system used for storing killed 35mm strips of film. The envelope in this example illustrates a rare example where a stamp designating KILL was used in conjunction with the phrase "all killed" written with a red pencil. Contact prints like the one shown in Figure 6 are sometimes found with the filmstrip inside the makeshift sleeves made from University envelopes.



**Figure 6:** 35mm killed file. Makeshift storage envelope, strip number 253M (top); Gelatin silver contact print, strip number 94M (bottom). (Reprinted with permission.) Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized reproduction or usage prohibited.

The processing and numbering of negatives, and assembling of contact print books was all performed by Stryker's processing technicians during the operation of the original Pittsburgh Photographic Project. There has been no subsequent processing performed on these materials since the PPL reopened in 1961. The reproduction of images for use by magazines, newspapers, visual researchers, and the general public was common during the original project and to this day continues to be an ongoing service provided by the curator and his staff. Discussions about the fate of a photograph, whether it should be cropped, straightened, killed, or added to the file, ceased when the project officially ceased its operations in 1955.

### The Nature of Picture Killing

Roy sent [Elliott Erwit] out on a job to do transportation one time on the streetcars. He came back with a gnarled hand of a nun, with a hood, hanging on to the strap for dear life and Roy hated it and made him kill it right now, so Elliot sold it to Vogue.<sup>55</sup>  
Clyde Hare

The decision to kill was sometimes made quickly and decisively as described in this amusing epigraph where Erwit's nun with the gnarled hand was killed "right now!" But the idea of killing pictures was troublesome for others, and explains why years later several employees expressed their objections to this practice. Reflecting upon days with the FSA, Edwin Roskam discussed the issue of Stryker's picture killing. "The method by which this was done, which was a punching of holes through negatives, was barbaric to me because I'm sure that some very significant pictures have in that way been killed off, because there is no way of telling, no way, what photograph would come alive when."<sup>56</sup>

In the 1960s, Richard Doud interviewed Ben Shahn, one of the original FSA photographers, asking him about the practice of killing negatives. Shahn said, "Roy was a little bit dictatorial in his editing and he ruined quite a number of my pictures, which he stopped doing later. He used to punch a hole through a negative. Some of them were incredibly valuable."<sup>57</sup> Helen Wool, Stryker's personal secretary at FSA, defended Stryker's kills, suggesting that it is possible "he knew he was doing something but he wasn't aware of what he was doing."<sup>58</sup>

55 "An Evening with Clyde Hare," *Clyde Hare at the Silver Eye Center for Photography*, DVD, 14 November 2003.

56 Oral history interview with Edwin and Louise Roskam, 3 August 1965, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

57 Ben Shahn interview, 14 April 1964, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

58 Charlotte Aiken and Helen Wool interview, 17 April 1964, Archives of American Art,

Arthur Rothstein, another one of Stryker's FSA photographers, argued the contrary. Rothstein said that Stryker had a clear idea of what he wanted, claiming that he ran the FSA photographic section, "more like a seminar in an educational institution than a government agency."<sup>59</sup> Rothstein described Stryker as being both selective and indiscriminate, interested in both significant and insignificant things. "He did a lot of editing of the pictures; there were many he went through and didn't put in the files."<sup>60</sup> Before it was all over, Rothstein and the other FSA photographers had produced a file totaling 270,000 photographs. The Library of Congress subsequently accessioned a total of 170,000 negatives; 70,000 prints were reproduced from those negatives. Stryker killed the remaining pictures – approximately 100,000 – by punching a hole through the negative.<sup>61</sup> During the Pittsburgh project Stryker reviewed the photographers' contact prints after each day's shooting, killing some and approving others.<sup>62</sup> The decision, however, was sometimes overturned without Stryker knowing it. Hare, a former student of Henry Homes Smith, characterized what he and Erwitte valued compositionally as being "pattern things" or "strange juxtapositions."<sup>63</sup> Hare recalled: "There were a lot of nights Elliott and I would go in and erase Roy's kill marks, so that the things we wanted to go into the file wouldn't be killed out because they didn't visually indicate social responsibility."<sup>64</sup> This leads one to recognize the importance of the larger context in which the photographs were created. Stryker did not see in the negative a carefully crafted visual argument expressing the socio-cultural aspirations of Pittsburgh's revitalization. In some way it fell short. Stryker recognized this, intervened, and killed the negative.

### Sample Kills

This section closely examines a small number of the images exhumed from the Pittsburgh Photographic Library's killed files. The killed negative shapes

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Smithsonian Institution.

59 Rothstein and Doud, p. 20.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

61 Stryker and Wood, p. 17. Punching a hole through the negative was a more destructive method of marking killed negatives than the process used later in Pittsburgh.

62 In a telephone conversation with the author on 8 August 2009, Mrs. Clyde Hare recalled her husband saying that Roy Stryker met with her husband "Red" and the other photographers at the end of each day to discuss that day's shooting assignments. The finishing laboratory technician, George Cooper, developed the film and printed contact sheets for review by Stryker and all the photographers. The photographers sat around a large table together sharing their opinions about which pictures should be saved for the file and which pictures should be killed. Stryker listened to everyone's opinions, but had final say in the matter.

63 Schulz and Plattner, p. 177.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

how the collection is understood and how things are done in the PPL.

### *Peering through the Door*

Just as John Berger believed “the photographer’s way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject,”<sup>65</sup> it might be said that the writer’s way of thinking is reflected in his choice of words. Many previous efforts at explaining photographic meaning have focused on the semantics of this text–image relationship. It is common to see a photograph in a book, journal, or newspaper, “supported by a caption that inscribes it in a field of meanings and associations for the observer.”<sup>66</sup> Roland Barthes describes the linguistic message accompanying the photograph as having a twofold function: anchorage and relay. According to Barthes, text that replies to the question “What is it?” corresponds to the identification of picture elements and the interpretation of symbolisms, thus anchoring the reader to a predetermined meaning. The notion of relay pertains more to film where a series of linguistic messages advance the action rather than describe objects in the image.<sup>67</sup>

The first example (see Figure 7) illustrates how words set to work the Pittsburgh Photographic Library photographs in specific contexts. “Slum child in Pittsburgh’s Wood Run district half-opens the door to peer at case worker and photographer.”<sup>68</sup> These are the words a *Life* magazine editor chose when captioning the image when it first appeared in print in the early 1950s. The words “slum child” take on a special suggestiveness that suddenly revises the social and cultural connotations of the image. This photograph is closely related to negative number 18 stored in the PPL killed files and shown in Figure 8. The primary difference between these two images is the angle of the girl’s eyes and face. In the published photograph she is peering off to the side, possibly at the caseworker coming to visit. The killed negative shows her in a different position, turned, looking more directly at the camera lens.

In Figure 8, which shows the contact print next to a positive scan of the negative, Stryker exercised his editorial control on the contact print by cropping out the borders. He later decided to kill the picture by marking an “x” over the girl’s image. He used a ballpoint pen, pressing so hard it cut into the glossy surface of the print. Almost fifty years later the photograph shown in Figure 8 was published with a new caption in Constance B. Schulz and Steven

65 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London, 1972), p. 10.

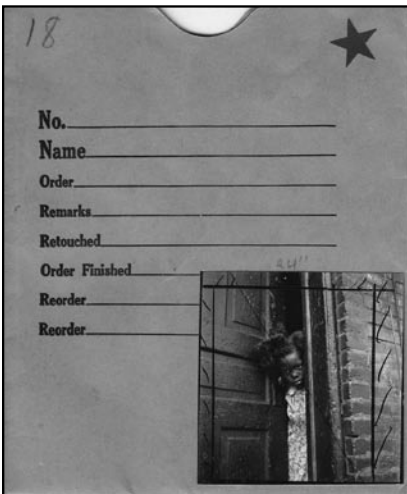
66 Michel Frizot, “Who’s Afraid of Photons?” in *Photography Theory*, ed. James Elkins (New York, 2007), pp. 282–83.

67 Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text* (New York, 1977), pp. 38–41.

68 “Speaking of Pictures,” *Life* (n.d.), pp. 22–24. Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, Box 56, Folder File 1, A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pgh., PA Records 1930–1980.

W. Plattner's *Witness to the Fifties* (1991). The picture's new caption reads: "Esther Bubley. Girl at the door, Woods Run District. May–June 1950."<sup>69</sup> The photograph has been recontextualized – rejoined with its creator Esther Bubley – and the caption's informational value has changed, framing the photograph in a new context.

**Figure 7:** Esther Bubley, Pittsburgh Photographic Library, contact print for negative number 17. (Reprinted with permission.) Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized reproduction or usage prohibited.



**Figure 8:** [Esther Bubley. *Untitled*, 1950.] Killed negative original envelope, negative number 18; gelatin silver contact print, 6 x 6 cm (left). Negative number 18 scanned as a positive (right). (Reprinted with permission.) Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized reproduction or usage prohibited.

69 Schulz and Plattner, p. 76.

Where should the subject look? Like other stylistic variables that contribute to a viewer's level of involvement, the gaze of the portrait's subject reflects the subject's immediate response to the current situation. According to Aaron Siskind, "documentary photography means making a picture so that the viewer doesn't think about the man who made the picture."<sup>70</sup> For the viewer the photograph thus becomes a document of recognition or unawareness, naturalness or self-consciousness. To cite Susan Sontag: "There is something on people's faces when they don't know they are being observed that never appears when they do."<sup>71</sup> The young girl's eyes in killed negative number 18 draw attention to the presence of the camera. Here Stryker intervened between photographer and viewer, exercising his power on the photograph, shaping a particular visuality by making one version of this scene visible and another version – the killed negative – invisible. By escaping the frontality of picture number 18 and retaining for his file the portrait of the girl gazing into space, Stryker adhered to a commonly held notion that the person who is photographed unaware of the camera reveals the truth about himself or herself.

### ***Bandaged Boy***

The next photograph offers evidence of an ongoing struggle – a site of indecision in the archives that surrounds the use of a photograph showing a Bandaged Boy's head. Should he be shown smiling or not smiling? Stryker chose to kill his unsmiling image, but even his smiling image attracts markings in the archives. The images in Figure 9 present two different samples of the same flyer promoting the sale of photographs from the Pittsburgh Photographic Library to members of the Community Chests & Councils of America.<sup>72</sup> In the document on the left, found buried deep in the University of Pittsburgh archives, the approved Bandaged Boy is crossed out with a large red "x" as if to kill the picture after it had been published. In a second archived copy of the flyer, he is marked again, this time with a less precise penciled-in "x" along with some red pencil scribbles and "OK" written in red pencil above his photograph.

Stryker originally had his technicians mount contact prints in large books chronologically – sequentially as photographs were taken (the system was

70 Aaron Siskind, quoted in Gretchen Garner, *Disappearing Witness: Change in Twentieth-Century American Photography* (Baltimore, 2003), p. 46.

71 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York, 1977), p. 37.

72 *Pittsburgh Red Feather Photos Series No. 1*. Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, Box 56, Folder File 1, A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pgh., PA Records 1930–1980.

later abandoned in favour of a taxonomically organized set of books that Library users could browse through by subject). Figure 10 shows how the Bandaged Boy (negative numbers 1861 and 1862), began their lives as dry mounted contact prints in one of the diachronically arranged books. In this early filing system, the picture-killing site was visible to anyone viewing the contact print books.



**Figure 9:** [Esther Bublely. *Untitled*, 1952.] Two versions of *Pittsburgh Red Feather Photos Series No. 1*, page one. Negative number 1861 (upper right-hand corner of each flyer). (Reprinted with permission.) Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized reproduction or usage prohibited.

Figure 10 illustrates the difference between the killed and approved negative. The killed negative shows a boy who is pouting and unhappy. He has a red "K" written above his head. The smiling boy, approved for reproduction and inclusion in the file, was given a check-mark. This early contact print book includes a label briefly describing the photographs. The Bandaged Boy, it is discovered, was a patient photographed in the pediatrics ward at Montefiore Hospital in Pittsburgh, July 1952, by PPL photographer Esther Bublely.





**Figure 10:** [Esther Bubley. *Untitled*, 1952. ] Two gelatin silver contact prints, 6 x 6 cm. Mounted in diachronically arranged contact print book. Negative number 1861 (left) and killed negative number 1862 (right). (Reprinted with permission.) Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized reproduction or usage prohibited.

At a later date, the unsmiling Bandaged Boy was contact-printed once again, reexamined, and again he was condemned to the kill file. This time, however, the Library technicians followed the newer procedure of filing away the killed negatives in envelopes. Figure 11 shows evidence of cropping marks drawn with a blue ink pen closing in on the boy's face. Perhaps this cropped view would draw more attention to some yet undiscovered meaning. It did not. The print was given a blue star and filed away with the other killed negatives.

Ulrich Baer argues that for practical reasons, archives should make room for contingency, “for those things that may acquire a significance retroactively.”<sup>73</sup> He contends that many objects are acquired, classified, and filed away in archives without fully understanding their meaning and purpose. The killing process in the Farm Security Administration file – hole-punching the centre of negatives – was in opposition to contingency in which there was hope that “a yet-to-be-developed understanding of them” would surface in the future or that they might “ensure that the past will not be forgotten.”<sup>74</sup> In the Pittsburgh

73 Ulrich Baer, “Deep in the Archive,” *Aperture*, vol. 193 (Winter 2008), p. 54.

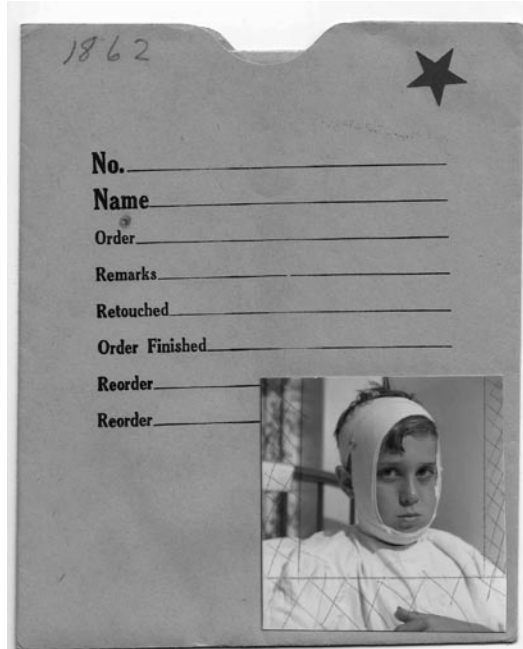
74 *Ibid.*

Photographic Library, Stryker exercised a preference for adding his editorial markings to the contact prints, and then asked his finishing technicians to systematically process and file the killed negatives, thus giving them the status of photographic records. This, in Baer's terms, provides a contingency in the archives; it creates an opportunity to consider and reconsider Bandaged Boy for new uses.

**Figure 11:** [Esther Bublely. *Untitled*, 1952.] Killed negative original envelope. Negative number 1862; gelatin silver contact print, 6 x 6 cm. (Reprinted with permission.) Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized reproduction or usage prohibited.

### *Straightening*

The lines drawn with ink could not bring order to the image, straighten it, or make it right. In the contact print shown in Figure 12, an impatient hand pushed on the image's freshly drawn frame, smearing the wet ink. As archivist Brien Brothman noted in his discussion about the concepts of order and disorder, ink that flows and forms letters is orderly; pen ink that leaves the pen and leaks onto the paper, staining it, is disorderly. "A 'leak,' in other words, whether of ink or information, means that the substance has moved into an improper space, along improper lines."<sup>75</sup> In killed negative number 2153, the impropriety of the ink smear leaves one with a question about whether it was at that particular juncture – the smearing – that this picture was killed. A technician stored the negative in a glassine envelope; the contact print with its smeared, straightening lines was firmly glued to the outer envelope as evidence of actions taken; a "K" was penciled-in, effectively killing negative number 2153.



75 Brien Brothman, "Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), p. 80.



**Figure 12:** *Untitled*, n.d. Killed negative original envelope, negative number 2153. Gelatin silver contact print, 6 x 6 cm (left). Negative number 2153 scanned as a positive (right). (Reprinted with permission.) Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized reproduction or usage prohibited.

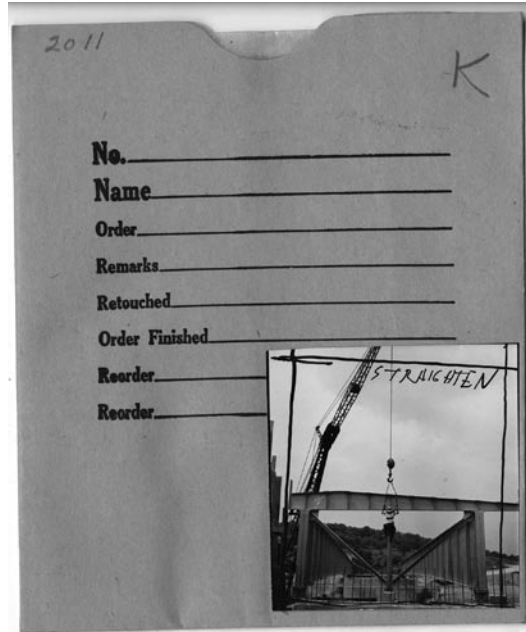
What gives this killed negative its order, its perpetual meaning, or as Brothman has described it, a permanent and absolute value in the Pittsburgh Photographic Library? When Brothman states, “Order means that things are in their proper place,”<sup>76</sup> the question becomes, what *things* are we talking about? Is it the pre-photographic referents, or the signifier? In the case of Stryker’s kills, the straightening lines were part of his image vocabulary, that is, the grammar he used to communicate his attempt to bring order to disorder and to the picture elements that were not right. The straightening lines are technical in nature and influence the content and meaning of the photograph; they affect the presentation of information. To straighten out and level the steep Pittsburgh hill shown in kill number 2153 would not make it more real looking. It would cause new visual confusion in the brick apartment building’s orientation to the world. The telephone pole in the foreground would remain stubbornly out-of-plumb with the vertical lines in the building behind it.

Negative number 2011, shown in Figure 13 (another crooked view of Pittsburgh progress), also received special editorial handling by Stryker. The hand-drawn vertical and horizontal lines tried to set the structure straight, but failed. The order “STRAIGHTEN” was inscribed across the overcast sky, but

76 Ibid.

still the image was stubborn and remained tilted. Negative number 2011 was killed; it is not legitimized with the archivist's record of inventory or finding aid, but it is written upon, carefully sleeved and filed, given a document number, and made part of the current archives collection.

**Figure 13:** *Straighten*, n.d. Killed negative original envelope, negative number 2011. Gelatin silver contact print, 6 x 6 cm. (Reprinted with permission.) Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized reproduction or usage prohibited.



### *Zombie Girl*

As Roland Barthes says of himself when being photographed, “Now, once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of ‘posing’, I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image.”<sup>77</sup> The girl shown in Figure 14 has tried and failed many times to avoid the kill file. Even in Figure 15, when in Barthes’s words she has “constituted herself in the process of posing ... making another body for herself,” she is again killed. It is, however, useful to see her in this pose before exploring why this section of the paper is titled “Zombie Girl.”

77 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York, 1981), p. 10.



**Figure 14:** [Sol Libsohn. *Homemaker Service, Conference of Catholic Charities*, 1950.] Killed negative number 1048 scanned as a positive. (Reprinted with permission.) Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized reproduction or usage prohibited.

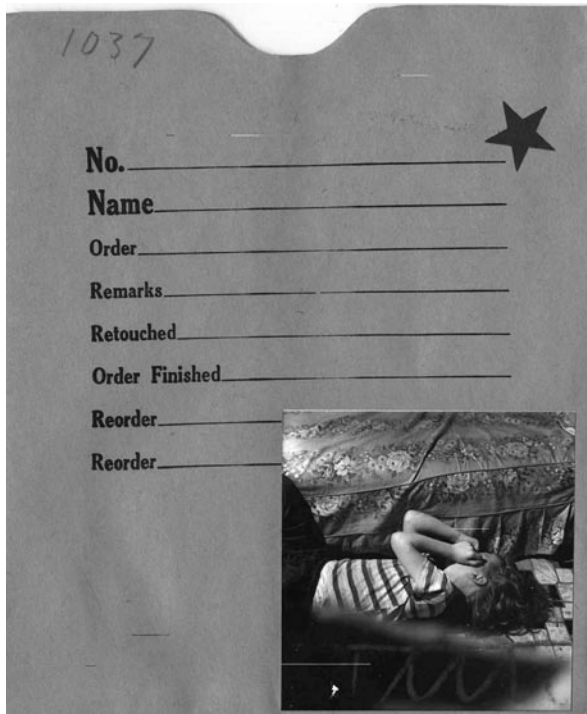
In 1950, PPL photographer Sol Libsohn shot this series of photographs that show this girl living in a Pittsburgh flat with her family. Her images first appear in the contact print book accompanied by a label that reads, “Soho Community House social worker interviews families about to lose homes to highway.” Figure 15 illustrates one of many shots showing her with members of her family. There is something troubling about this image when considering the context. The “K” inscribed above the picture numbered 1348 confirms the negative was killed. The children are about to lose their home to a highway and they are asked to pose. The plain-dressed little boy with messy hair and slightly pursed lips, stares at the floor while his sister is smiling, bathed in a bright light.

**Figure 15:** [Sol Libsohn. *Homemaker Service, Conference of Catholic Charities, 1950.*] Killed negative number 1348; gelatin silver contact print, 6 x 6 cm, mounted in contact print book (left). Negative number 1348 scanned as a positive (right). (Reprinted with permission.) Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized reproduction or usage prohibited.



The little girl appears later in a contact print dry-mounted to a kill envelope shown in Figure 16. This image finds her in a different mood, crying, lying on the floor. She is wearing the same shirt as the one shown in Figure 14, so perhaps both pictures were taken during the same shoot. In Figure 16, Stryker marked for removal the blurred object in the lower foreground, but that alone did not save the picture. Negative number 1037 was killed.

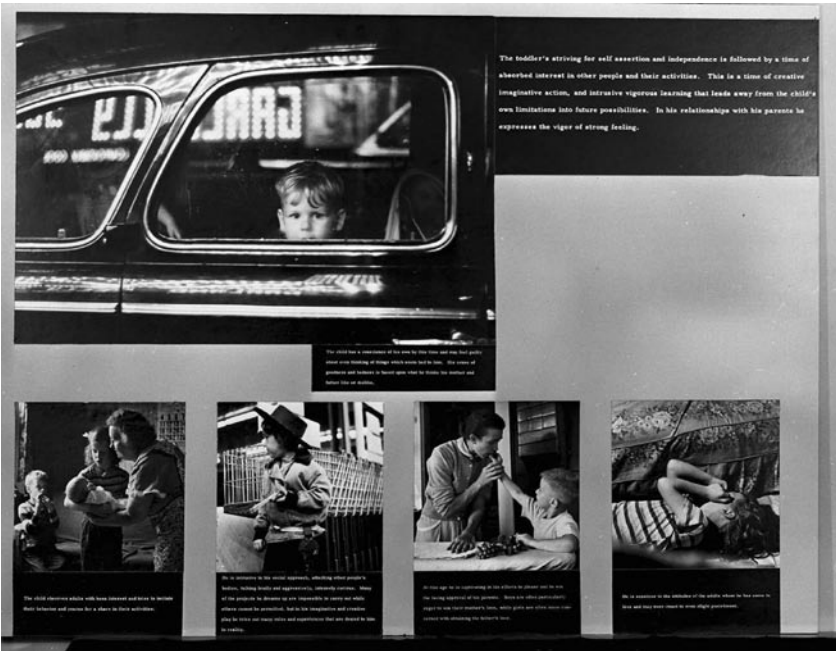




**Figure 16:** [Sol Libsohn. *Untitled*, 1950.] Killed negative original envelope, negative number 1037; gelatin silver contact print, 6 x 6 cm. (Reprinted with permission.) Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized reproduction or usage prohibited.

Emphasizing ownership and exchange within archives, Sekula suggests that, “not only are the pictures in archives often *literally* for sale, but their meanings are up for grabs.”<sup>78</sup> The meaning of this little girl’s archival record was also up for grabs. Negative number 1037 shown in Figure 16 was later exhumed and set to work in a new context as part of a Child–Parent Exhibit placed on display in 1952. In this photograph’s new context shown in Figure 17 – what Baer might consider a *retroactive significance* – it is made part of an assemblage; cropped on the top and sides; the blurred object in the foreground is not cut. The caption below the picture reads, “He is sensitive to the attitudes of the adults whom he has come to love and may over-react to even slight punishment.” Within the archives she is remade, losing her identity as a girl; now *he* is a poster child.

78 Sekula, p. 154.



**Figure 17:** [George Cooper. *Child-Parent Exhibit*, 1952.] Gelatin silver contact print, 4 x 5 in., negative number 9868. (Reprinted with permission.) Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized reproduction or usage prohibited.

The contact print presented in Figure 17 was discovered in a contact print book where an accompanying label explains that negatives number 9864 through 9868 were created in September 1952. The name associated with the print is [George] Cooper, a finishing laboratory technician who was employed by the original Pittsburgh Photographic Library project.<sup>79</sup>

79 Before leaving this picture behind, there is a parallel worth noting that exists between the little cowboy in the bottom row of pictures and Susan Sontag's view of the camera as a predatory weapon, "a sublimation of the gun ... to photograph people is to violate them ..." (Sontag, p. 14). The meaning given to this little cowboy with drawn pistol is set in the caption, which reads: "He is intrusive in his social approach, attacking other people's bodies, talking loudly and aggressively." So, here one witnesses the aggressive, predatory camera, aiming and shooting, violating the little cowboy who in turn draws his pistol and attacks other people's bodies.



### *Cutting and Cropping*

The kill file's medium-format photograph frames reality in its raw form, cutting out a square size 56mm X 56mm, fine grain, black and white negative. No attempt is made to predicate the framing on keeping reality whole, a reality Linda Nochlin describes as having “no narrative beginning, middle or end ...”<sup>80</sup> First there is the cutting or cropping of the picture when the round lens image is captured onto a square- or rectangular-shaped piece of film, dissecting sky and earth, bodies and buildings. Then there is the deliberate cropping performed by the technician in the darkroom, dissecting the image for aesthetic reasons, what Nochlin refers to as the “formal organization of the picture surface, which becomes the realm of the pictorial *signifier*, not a simulacrum of reality ...”<sup>81</sup>



**Figure 18:** *Untitled*, n.d. Killed negative original envelope, negative number 24. Gelatin silver contact print, 6 x 6 cm (left). Negative number 24 scanned as a positive (right). (Reprinted with permission.) Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized reproduction or usage prohibited.

80 Linda Nochlin, *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity* (New York, 1994), p. 34.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

In kill number 24 (Figure 18), Stryker participated in constructing the archival record when he used his blue ink pen to draw a line of dissection across the towering woman's torso, and above this an array of criss-crossing lines marking the territory to be cut. A determined-looking boy clasps the hand of what will become a dismembered limb and a little girl closes her eyes to the site, just escaping the cropping of the right side of the frame. Perhaps the negative was killed because the woman's head did not escape being cut-off by the upper margin of the photograph. Or maybe it is the ambivalence of the two suspended children who show conflicting reactions to their fragmented mother.

Framing aligns the camera with the subject at the time the picture is taken. It is part of the compositional process and can be used to emphasize the main point of interest. As David MacDougall describes it, "Through selection, framing also distills and concentrates experience."<sup>82</sup> Stryker used cropping as a post-framing tool to transform images, tighten borders and shift emphasis after the shutter had been pressed. In kill number 1906 (Figure 19), another woman is selected for decapitation. Esther Bublely, the photographer, cut off the top portion of her subject's head, which left only a fragment of her face lying on the pillow next to her newborn daughter. The cropping marks in blue ink leave only a few body parts as picture elements lying in the blankets: a baby's head equal in size to her mother's hand and part of an elbow and forearm below this.

The discourse outside the cropped borders of negative number 1906 are recorded in the same brittle contact print book housing many of the other records described in this paper. Handwritten inscriptions and a typewritten label adjacent to the photograph, provide evidence of this woman's early life in the archives back when Stryker began the Pittsburgh Photographic Library. There, in the contact print book, she is identified as an unmarried mother holding her 24-hour-old daughter; Esther Bublely took her photograph at the Roselia Foundling Homes in July 1950.

82 David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image* (Princeton, 2006), p. 4.



**Figure 19:** [Esther Buley. *Unmarried mother holding her 24-hour-old daughter*, 1950.] Killed negative original envelope, negative number 1906; gelatin silver contact print, 6 x 6 cm (left). Reverse side of original contact print found in contact print book (right). (Reprinted with permission.) Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized reproduction or usage prohibited.

Baer's argument is once again revisited: while the archivist exercises the power of the document, "imposing order on contingency," contingency must not be entirely ruled out.<sup>83</sup> The original contact print book arranged images in chronological order, gluing several photographs to sheets of paper, creating a kind of Mikhailovian association among images.<sup>84</sup>

83 Baer, p. 54.

84 Gilda Williams describes how Mikhailov began printing multiple photographs in his 'Series of Four' (1982–1983) on a single sheet of photographic paper, a practice that "arose more or less by chance due to a shortage of photographic paper" (p. 70). Williams writes that Mikhailov liked the effect: "unexpected associations arose between images, and at the same time the works became a metaphor of the struggle for resources ..." There is a similarity in physical form (not in intellectual form or content) between Stryker's contact print pages and another series by Mikhailov named "Unfinished Dissertation." Mikhailov inserts what Williams calls "abandoned text" (p. 72) scribbled by hand below and to the side of photographs glued to torn and crumpled sheets of cheaply made paper, much like the scrapbook-quality paper used in the contact print books in the Pittsburgh Photographic Library. See Gilda Williams, *Boris Mikhailov* (New York, 2001).



**Figure 20:** [Esther Bublely. *Unmarried mother holding her 24-hour-old daughter, 1950.*] Killed negative number 1906; gelatin silver contact print, 6 x 6 cm (row two, third from left). Reverse side of this contract print is shown in Figure 19. (Reprinted with permission.) Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized reproduction or usage prohibited.

The page shown in Figure 20 discloses an early contingency associated with the unmarried mother. Instructions inscribed in the dried glue on the back of the contact print (Figure 19) and again inscribed in the contact print book read: “Do not use without retouching to be sure girl not recognizable.” Stryker did not mark-up the other three related unmarried mother photographs in the contact book that fill the second row from the top. Did Stryker have something else in mind here, another way of making her unrecognizable without cropping? There is no evidence the images were ever published; a faint “K” in pencil is inscribed above all four contact prints.

There is a touch of irony in this last picture – a deteriorating page filled

with killed negatives and unglued, missing contact prints. It is a product of a photographic project, the very purpose of which was to show how a great city could rehabilitate itself, where photographs, “could play a key role in focusing national attention on its improvements.”<sup>85</sup> Now, over fifty years later, the archival photographs themselves are in need of rehabilitation. Even though the original intent of the civic photographic library became irrelevant, the archival records and killed negatives can now be revisited and framed in a new context. There remains room for contingency in the PPL, a way of seeing retroactively what was killed and made unseen over half a century ago.<sup>86</sup>

## Conclusion

The killed negatives of the Pittsburgh Photographic Library are an unusual set of archival records that provide insight into the mind of one of America’s foremost social commentators. As director of the PPL project, Roy Stryker made photographic life and death decisions. Through the use of contact print books, he exercised the power of making what he deemed good, social documentary photography visible and accessible. Additionally, he exercised the power to remove the killed negatives from sight, making them unseen.

In 1961, six years after the cessation of the project, all of the original Pittsburgh Photographic Library prints and negatives were moved from storage to a permanent home as a picture archives in the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh (CLP). The discursive space of the archives in the CLP reinforces Stryker’s actions through established systems of arrangement, description, and storage: the picture card catalogues make Stryker’s “approved” photographs visible and accessible; the killed negatives are boxed-up, uncatalogued, and thus unseen. Their entombment, however, produces a contradictory effect, a desire to look, to open the killed storage boxes and inspect the remains (the death metaphor again!), to view the killed negatives in a new context. Formal processing, textual and non-textual inscriptions, and the very act of preserving the killed negatives all served to legitimize them as records that could be considered, reconsidered, and reused in different contexts, both during the project and now, half a century later during a reexamination by this author. The killed negatives have become archival records, although vague and uncertain, possessing historical facticity, and meriting critical interpretation and further scholarly investigation.

85 Schulz and Plattner, p. 4.

86 Baer, p. 54.