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SILENT

COMMUNICATIONS



BARBOURVILLE

KENTUCKY

SILENT COMMUNICATIONS - BARBOURVILLE, KENTUCKY

By: Douglas Rea

Candidate for the Master of Fine Arts Degree

School of Photographic Arts and Science
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October 6, 1974

Charles Arnold, Jr.
Chief Thesis Advisor

Bradley T. Hindson
Associate Thesis Advisor

Martin Rennalls
Associate Thesis Advisor

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Annie, whose faith and inspiration have helped me so much.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank those individuals at Union College, Barbourville, Kentucky who offered their kindness and hospitality.

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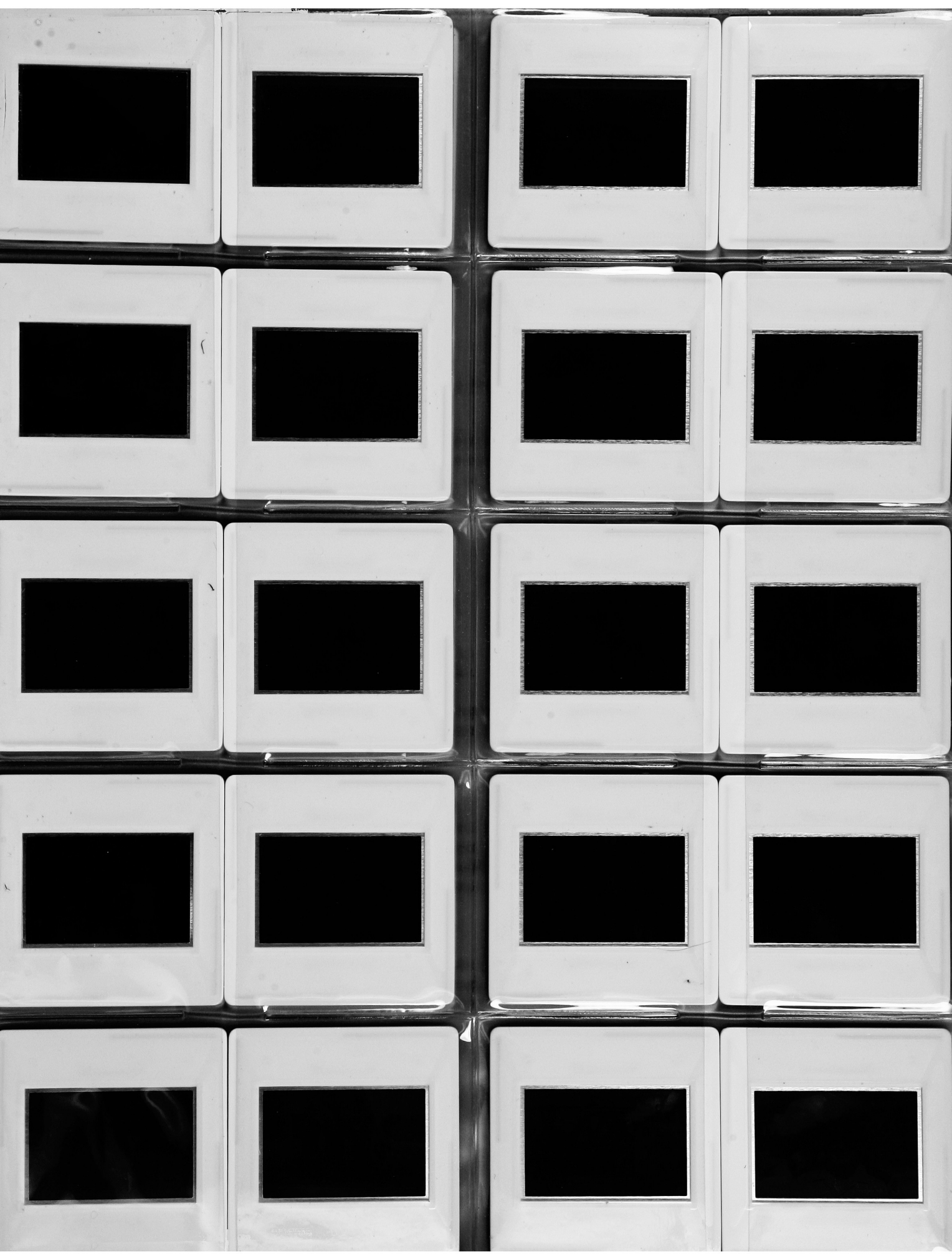
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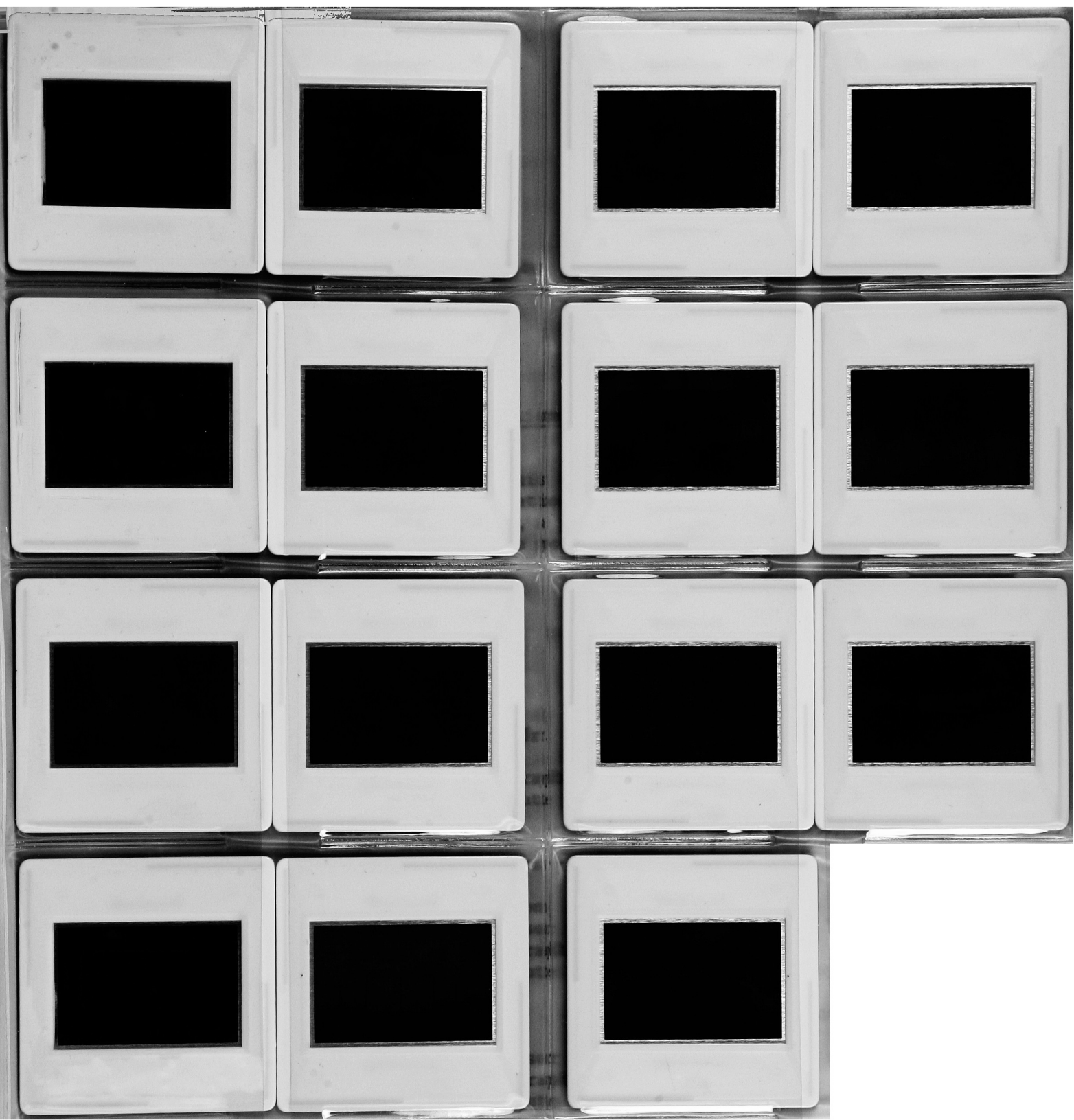
INTRODUCTION TO ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIAL

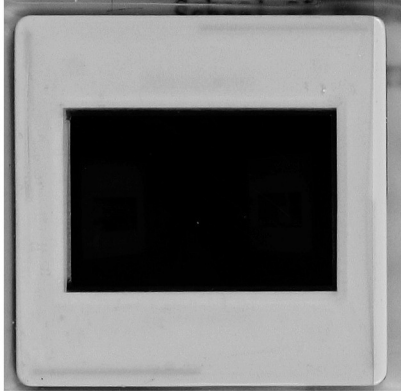
I suggest to those who look at my work that they review the work in a left-to-right direction, starting with photograph 1, and ending with photograph 35. This was the procedure used during the exhibition and will best serve my intentions of presenting Barbourville, Kentucky as I see it and feel about it.



Michael Shea







THESIS PROPOSAL

for
The Master of Fine Arts Degree

College of Graphic Arts and Photography
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences

ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Title: Silent Communications - Barbourville, Kentucky

Purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to explore the "Silent Communications" that transpire between a people, a place and myself; and in turn, create a portrait of Barbourville, Kentucky.

Submitted by: Douglas Rea April 28, 1974

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SCOPE AND BACKGROUND OF THE THESIS

"Silent Communications" is the emotional and physical energy that transpires between any two entities, i.e. the energy exchanged between man-to-man and man-to-object experience. In the context of this thesis, "Silent Communications" refers to the phenomena that exist where interest and concern dominate a relationship. In response to this the artist increases his sense of awareness in order to emphasize in his work the significant "Silent Communications" which help support personal findings and point of view.

I lived in Barbourville, Kentucky for five years. During that time I experienced a variety of personal relationships that eventually led me to reach new understandings about life and human values. From these experiences I have developed a strong interest in the preservation of the rural community lifestyle.

While in Rochester, I have been developing my ability to interpret and understand ideas by using photography as a visual means of exploration. These efforts have increased my desire to investigate certain visually observable phenomena which I have defined as "Silent Communications."

I want to return to Barbourville, Kentucky and explore the "Silent Communications" in an attempt to construct a portrait of this Appalachian community. This study will be a personal commitment and not likely to be interpreted as anything other than an honest means of discovering and interpreting the "Silent Communications" I share with

the people and their habitat. It is these communications which, I believe, reveal significant philosophical and regional characteristics. However, I am not interested in researching the origin of or the importance of these "Silent Communications," but I am concerned with establishing, in a literal sense, that they exist and when sequenced properly, provide a provocative account of any experience. Hopefully, though using the medium of photography, these efforts will reveal a dichotomy: A portrait of not only the people and habitat of Barbourville, Kentucky, but a portrait of myself.

So, in a larger sense, I intend to not only explore Barbourville, Kentucky, its people and landscapes, but also myself. I find the following an attractive thought: "I hope to see how, through the essence of dialogue ("Silent Communications"), all that which I photograph, sees me." I hope to portray the feelings I now have and will experience upon returning to this area. The result will be a document of these experiences.

PROCEDURES

These photographs will be made during the summer months of this year within the geographic limits of the town of Barbourville, Kentucky. The only possible exception to this would be photographing Barbourville residents in any situation outside town limits where I feel it might contribute significantly to the intent of my work as a whole. Otherwise, I place "town-line" restrictions upon myself in order to keep my work within the context of the scope of this thesis.

I will make photographs using the 35mm format and employing the perspectives of wide-angle, normal and short telephoto lenses. At this point, I assume that I will use only available light to make exposures. However, I may have to use electronic flash to complete a thought from a literal standpoint. These photographs will be made with black-and-white and/or color sensitive materials. Final decisions concerning these options will be made after an evaluation of the situation.

The exhibition of this work is scheduled in the M.F.A. Gallery for a one week period in October of this year. This exhibition will consist of twenty or more photographs (6" x 9" maximum image size) mounted and accompanied by any pertinent information that is intended to explain and support the thesis.

This endeavor will be organized and recorded into a report that will stand as a record of the aesthetic and physical properties that this thesis proposes to accomplish.

CALENDAR OF PROCEDURES

1. January 31 - April 28, 1974: Preparation through completion of Thesis Proposal.
2. April 28, 1974: Thesis Proposal accepted by M.F.A. Committee at Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York.
3. June 22 - July 11, 1974: Photo Session in Barbourville, Kentucky.
4. July 18 - September 22, 1974: Printing, editing and final mounting of exhibition prints.
5. September 22 - October 5, 1974: Final preparations for thesis exhibition including gallery preparation printing and distribution of announcements and publicity.
6. October 6 - October 12, 1974: Thesis presentation, "Silent Communications - Barbourville, Kentucky," M.F.A. Gallery; 2nd floor, Gannett Building; Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York.

SUMMARY OF THE THESIS EXPERIENCE

Looking back on my thesis experience, I would like to mention what these efforts mean to me now. I hope this will function in two respects: first, that it will be a collection of my afterthoughts; second, that these afterthoughts might give better insight to those who view my photographs.

While working on my thesis, I stayed in Barbourville, Kentucky for three weeks in July, 1974, photographing the people and their town. I created a working/living environment at Union College in Barbourville, Kentucky. This environment served many functions for me: its central location provided immediate access to the community; its room and board facilities allowed an uninterrupted manner of living; its darkroom facilities, which were loaned to me by the college, provided a convenient opportunity for me to process and review my photographs on a day-to-day basis.

Returning to Barbourville, after being away for three years, meant becoming reacquainted with the community - the people and the environment. For the first three days, I told everyone to whom I spoke about my plans to photograph their community. These efforts to relate my intentions helped develop a rapport with the people of Barbourville. This was a period of orientation for me and also for the people of Barbourville with me, therefore, I didn't carry a camera for I believe a camera would, at this early stage, have only inhibited matters.

Shortly afterwards, I began making photographs and tried to follow a daily routine. In as much as I had a certain amount of work to complete in a 3-4 week time span, I planned my days to help coordinate and pace my efforts. Generally, the routine occurred as follows:

- a) I divided the town into four sectors (each of which was approximately the same size - 6-8 city blocks). After the first week, I reduced this work area to 2-3 city blocks. In this fashion, I was able to concentrate my efforts in one specific area each day.
- b) I elected to make photographs only during the daylight hours - starting occasionally as early as 6:00 a.m. (sunrise) and working up to 8:00 p.m. (sunset). Since most of the town's activity occurred during the morning hours, I made the majority of photographs at this time. Also, the early morning light (6:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.), often softened by low lying fog, revealed the rich and dense foliage of this community nestled in the Appalachian Mountains. Black-and-White photographic materials (film and paper), in my opinion, best revealed such an atmosphere.
- c) During the evenings, I processed my films.
- d) Before retiring each evening, I reviewed the contact/proof prints from the day's work. From this I was able to make plans for the upcoming day.

It was inevitable that I would face problems on a photographic expedition such as this. The most significant problems were:

- a) I had difficulty photographing those individuals who felt their privacy was being invaded by a camera and/or myself. To alleviate such tensions would require a longer work period in Barbourville (see paragraph "C" below).
- b) My thesis advisors were in Rochester, N.Y. while I was in Kentucky. When considering the value of their input previous to the photographic (image making) segment and criticism prior to the final editing of this photographic work, I felt at somewhat of a disadvantage while making photographs in Barbourville, Kentucky. Not having their input, I had placed myself in a situation in which I had to rely solely on self-criticism of my photographs.
- c) I had limited resources (funds) and, therefore, time to make photographs in Barbourville.
- d) Because of the time limitations, I was unable to develop a broader rapport with the people of Barbourville.

"Photographing the people of Barbourville "..."

When photographing the people, I tried to remain open and direct in the belief that this approach would lead to "Silent Communications." "Open and direct" in the sense that I explained my purpose of making photographs, i.e. "... create a portrait of Barbourville, Kentucky" (as described in the thesis proposal), to all the people I photographed. This approach seemed productive because with it came a relaxed atmosphere for communication. Relaxed in that we, the subject and myself seemed relatively free from anxiety, free to be open to exchange different gestures and expressions. Communications of this nature were brief, serene and non-verbal experiences. As important as "seeing" these experiences was "feeling" these experiences. I can most easily describe them as being similar to a segment of a film that has been slowed to a fraction of its normal pace and eye contact and movements acquire special meaning. Special because I felt my subject and I were sharing a brief segment of our lives. We experienced these instances by looking directly at one another. I can only define this as "touching one another in a visual sense" by sharing expressions and gestures.

As originally intended, my response to "Silent Communications" was to make photographs. I have attempted to photograph every possible instance they occurred. Occasionally, the use of a camera would prevent, interrupt or terminate these communications depending on the attitude of my subject and/or myself. Usually such difficulties occurred when I would introduce my camera prematurely.

"Silent Communications" were aggravatingly brief. Lasting for what seemed to be only a few seconds, there was very little margin for me to misjudge when I would release the shutter. Additionally aggravating was my inability to predetermine when "Silent Communications" would occur. They seemed to happen spontaneously during a conversation or immediately afterward.

"Photographing the environment..."

Photographing the environment was challenging in a different respect. I felt more responsible for these photographs in the sense that I was able to determine the "what, where and when." I approached this part of my work to support what I had found in the people of Barbourville - a proud, but private people. It is my belief that both the environment and its people, in one form or another, reflect the character of each other. They both had a proud appearance in most every situation I encountered. Proud in the sense that they (the individuals), their business enterprises, personal properties, etc., were most often conservative and well maintained which is often the atmosphere reflected by that of a small rural community.

Nevertheless, I could only react to the environment and not share myself with it as I was able to share myself with the people of Barbourville. Initially (when I began to make photographs), this seemed to be the easier task, but as I came to know the community better, the more I felt the influence of its people on how I photographed their environment. For example, the majority of businesses, homes and playgrounds reflected the humble quality of the people, in the sense, that they didn't show many noticeable signs of reoccurring change, i.e. new storefronts, modern lighting, electric garage door openers, etc., etc. Much of town's environment looked stable, and in many cases similar. There were very few signs of "current trends, fads or changing styles" as are more prevalent in the larger metropolitan and suburban areas of this country.

In this sense, the people had a similar appearance to their environment, and consequently, seemed to derive meaning from one another. As a result, I photographed the environment and people of Barbourville in a similar fashion.

In summary, I believe "Silent Communications" became the visual exchange I had hoped for, from which I was able to create a portrait of Barbourville, Kentucky. Through them, the people of Barbourville expressed themselves and pride for their community.

This body of work is very personal for me - personal in the respect that its meaning and content directly reflect my feeling about Barbourville and illustrate my understanding of its people and place.

TECHNICAL DATA

Camera and Lenses -

1. Camera - Leica rangefinder
2. Lenses - Leitz 28mm, 35mm, and 50mm

Film and Film Developer -

1. Film - Kodak Plus-X Pan (asa rated at 200)
2. Developer - Edwal FG-7 (diluted 1 part stock developer to 15 parts water). Films were processed 6 1/2 minutes at 70°F.

Enlarger and Lens -

1. Enlarger - Omega Pro Lab (Model "D-6")
2. Lens - 80mm Schneider Componon

Paper and Paper Developer -

1. Paper - Agfa Brovira (contrast grades 2, 3, 4)
2. Developer - Printofine (diluted 1 part stock developer to 3 parts water). Prints were processed in developer for 2 1/2 minutes at 72°F.

Illustration Board -

Strathmore Brand - 100% Cotton Fiber Illustration Board - 3 ply in thickness

Archival Standards -

All photographic materials were processed to archival standards.

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