

WHO WERE THE HACKNEY FLASHERS?
THE HISTORY AND IMPORTANCE OF A BRITISH FEMINIST COLLECTIVE, 1974-1980

by
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Honors Bachelor of Arts, University of Ottawa, 2007

A thesis
presented to Ryerson University and George Eastman House

in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in the Program of
Film and Photographic Preservation and Collections Management

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2014

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Author's Declaration Page

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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to provide a resource for museum professionals who are working with materials related to the Hackney Flashers. The Hackney Flashers were a radical socialist-feminist collective that was active in northeast London in the 1970s. The goal is to provide a well-researched history of the collective, as well as address current issues surrounding exhibiting and archiving related materials. This has been done by balancing written sources with oral histories by surviving members of the collective. Imbedded in the Women's Liberation Movement and the radical-feminist politics of 1970s Britain, the Hackney Flashers used photography to document women in their community in order to expose social inequality. Heavily influenced by the photomontages of John Heartfield, the collective collaged documentary photographs with cartoons, advertisements and text in order to provide a wider context than what documentary photography could provide on its own.

Acknowledgements

Foremost, I would like to express my deepest thanks to my two supervisors, Alexandra Anderson and Don Snyder. Your dedication, encouragement and enthusiasm has greatly guided me through this project.

I would like to thank Helen Grace, Sally Greenhill, Liz Heron and Christine Roche for agreeing to discuss their former membership as Hackney Flashers. Without you this project would not have been possible.

I would like to thank the Ryerson Image Centre for granting me the 2014 Howard Tanenbaum Research Fellowship. The generosity of this award has allowed me to take my research to exciting new levels.

I would also like to thank David Harris for his continuous support and guidance, as well as the following people for taking time out of your busy schedules to talk with me about this project: Vid Ingelevics, Jini Rawlings and Val Williams.

A special mention to Charlene Heath, Archive Assistant at the Ryerson Image Centre. Your help in the archive made my research always enjoyable, as you are always a pleasure to work with.

And a warm thank you to my loving partner, Tim. Your support means everything to me.

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Introduction

In 1974 Hackney, London, a small group of socialist-feminist women (including well-known British photographer Jo Spence) came together to form the Hackney Flashers – a radical collective that aimed to expose the social conditions of women in the community of Hackney, London through the use of agitprop¹ photography. At the time, the multicultural, working class community was in a poor economic state. Large sections were dedicated to the manufacturing industry where many of Hackney's citizens were employed in un-skilled and semi-skilled factory jobs. The collective was specifically interested in documenting women's work in the community because of the large number of women employed in garment factories.

For their first project, the Hackney Flashers produced an exhibition for the Hackney Trades Council. This exhibition, entitled *Women and Work* (1975), used documentary photographs mounted on display boards to showcase a “window on the world”² representation of women in their daily lives at work. Influenced by the photographic montages of John Heartfield and the popular collage aesthetics used by radical artists such as Victor Burgin, the group produced two more major projects. The first was a second photography exhibition entitled *Who's Holding the Baby?* (1978). The second was an educational package entitled *Domestic Labour and Visual Representation* (1980), which consisted of 24 image slides and a discussion booklet. All three of the projects were aimed at educating the community and widening the discourse about social issues that impacted women. Although these projects were well-received at the time, touring many libraries, colleges, and community centres, the story of the Hackney Flashers still remains relatively unknown within the history of photography today.

¹ The term *agitprop* refers to the spread of political propaganda (usually socialist in nature) through the use of literature, art and music.

² *Three Perspectives on Photography*, Hayward Gallery exhibition catalogue, (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979), 80.

As Jo Spence's photography continues to gain recognition from the art world, mainstream institutions are also exhibiting materials related to her involvement in 1970s activist photography. For this reason, materials produced by the Hackney Flashers are receiving increased exposure. Within the last fourteen years, the work produced by the Hackney Flashers has been exhibited at: *Protest and Survive* at the Whitechapel Gallery in London (2000); *Jo Spence: Beyond the Perfect Image* (a retrospective) at the Museum of Contemporary Art Barcelona (2005); *Jo Spence (Part I and II)* at SPACE and Studio Voltaire in London (2012); *The Hackney Flashers Collective* display of *Who's Holding the Baby?* at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid (on display since 2012); *Transmitter/Receiver: The Persistence of Collage* organized by the Arts Council of England (2013); and *Art Turning Left: How Values Changed Making* at the Tate Liverpool (2013). Yet, despite an increased interest in the materials by museum professionals, few scholarly resources on the Hackney Flashers exist apart from Spence's involvement. The contextual analysis and new research that I will provide in this paper is necessary to assure that materials relating to the collective are best represented in archives and exhibitions.

Researching a collective introduces a particular set of challenges. A collective by nature has multiple members, each serving as an individual resource to draw information. Many of the women involved in the feminist groups of 1970s London have since forgotten specific events that took place nearly forty years ago. Women's Liberation Movement historian Dr. E. H. Frizell describes this as an "incomplete jigsaw puzzle when trying to list their activities."³ Researching the Hackney Flashers has proven to be difficult for this reason. Additionally, sources in the existing literature are not always in agreement with one another. My research has shown that literature written about the Hackney Flashers fluctuates from being representational of the collective as a whole, or alternatively, a sole opinion of

³ Hazel Elizabeth Frizell, "Representations of Specific Concerns of the Women's Liberation Movement in British Feminist Art 1970-1978" (PhD diss., Kingston upon Thames: Kingston University, 2009), 86.

one member. So, how does a researcher begin to balance all of these sources? And what happens when a researcher is faced with conflicting sources of information?

A careful balance of sources is essential in accurately discussing the history of the Hackney Flashers. My research is a compilation of information from three main sources. The first is published literature on the topic of the Hackney Flashers. Literature about the history of the Hackney Flashers is brief and sporadic, omitting important contextual information. Written sources have been referenced on a variety of tangential subjects in order to piece together what is available as the written history of the Hackney Flashers⁴. The second source is oral histories⁵. I conducted interviews with four former members of the Hackney Flashers: Helen Grace, Sally Greenhill, Liz Heron and Christine Roche. In my research I have found that oral histories are an important method of uncovering women's history, as the subject of women's daily experiences tended to be left unrecorded in the moment⁶. However, using solely oral histories as research presents its own set of problems, as memories and opinions often change over time. As Frizell points out, "this often leads to an impression of the era rather than a sustained factual recording of events."⁷ In an interview, one formal member of the Hackney Flashers warned me that "even oral history, within living memory, can go all over the place."⁸ For this reason, I have also gathered information directly from archival materials produced by and associated with the Hackney Flashers. Different archival materials have been referenced at a number of archives. The Ryerson Image Centre in Toronto holds original exhibition prints, installation shots, exhibition posters and flyers associated with the collective – resulting in the largest files dedicated to the Hackney Flashers

⁴ A breakdown of the literature by research subject is available by consulting the bibliography of this thesis.

⁵ A copy of each interview transcript, including a brief biography, can be found in Appendix A.

⁶ Sheila Rowbotham, *Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States in the Twentieth Century*, 1st Edition (New York: Viking Penguin Inc, 2000). 31; as discussed in Frizell, "Representations of Specific Concerns."

⁷ Frizell, "Representations of Specific Concerns," 86.

⁸ Liz Heron, in discussion with the author, February 17, 2014.

in an institutional archive⁹. In addition to the Ryerson Image Centre, I am also referencing original archival materials from several other archives throughout London, UK. These include: MAKE Women's Art Library at Goldsmiths, University of London; Hayward Gallery Library and Archives; the Hackney Archives; the Blythe House of the Victoria and Albert Museum; and the British Library's Sound and Music Archive. Using surviving archival materials as a guide through history, this thesis will work to build a history of the Hackney Flashers by carefully balancing the informational resources available.

This thesis will begin with a literature survey of published writings that mention the Hackney Flashers. Since little has been written about the collective in the field of photography, the literature survey has referenced works published in tangential fields such as feminist and art histories.

Chapter 1 will begin by contextualizing the Hackney Flashers within radical-feminist politics in London at the time and why the Hackney Flashers chose the northeast borough of Hackney, London to anchor their collective. Secondly, this chapter will include a discussion of how Jo Spence and Terry Dennett's collaborative project, Photography Workshop, seeded the Hackney Flashers by calling together their first meeting in 1974. This chapter will also examine the framework for how the collective ran, including its overall organizational structure and the roles of individual members.

In Chapter 2 I will discuss the three major projects produced by the Hackney Flashers between 1974 and 1980, and the aesthetic influence that shaped these works. Former members of the collective have cited being influenced by the photomontage techniques of John Heartfield. However, many radical artists and activists used collage as a way of visually presenting their political ideologies in 1970s Britain. Borrowing examples from photography-based artist Victor Burgin as a comparison, as well as samples from the periodical *Spare Rib Magazine*, Chapter 2 will also explore the popularity of collage-aesthetic at the time and how the Hackney Flashers fit within the medium.

⁹ A comprehensive portion of the Jo Spence Memorial Archive was donated by Terry Dennett in two installments between 2010 and 2011, and is thus a relatively recent addition to the permanent collection of the Ryerson Image Centre.

Chapter 3 will discuss the issue of authorship when representing a collective. Due to Jo Spence's success as a fine artist, archival materials related to the Hackney Flashers are routinely archived under Spence's name. However, this is not an entirely appropriate approach by archivists as it was the purposeful intention of the Hackney Flashers to not have work claimed under individual authors. In this chapter I will explore the ways in which institutions can approach/address this topic.

Works produced by the Hackney Flashers are increasingly getting more exhibition exposure. However, recognition from the art world was never a goal of the collective: rather, the art gallery was seen as an unacceptable exhibition space due to its elitist connotations. Chapter 4 will discuss what happens when the Hackney Flashers' works are no longer seen in libraries and community centres, but are moved into established art galleries.

Overall, this thesis aims to create an informative document that museum professionals can refer to in order to assure that they are best representing the Hackney Flashers collective in libraries, archives and exhibitions as well as in their scholarly writing.

Literature Survey

The purpose of this literature survey is to provide a list of both critical and historical texts about the Hackney Flashers¹⁰ and their use of photography within their social-feminist practices. The literature survey will be used as a launching point for my thesis research.

Histories of Photography

Histories of photography published post-1980 were consulted to see what information (if any) was included about the Hackney Flashers. Given the considerable attention Jo Spence received for the photography she produced after her involvement with the Hackney Flashers, particular attention was given to chapters citing information about her biographical history. However, what was discovered is that the majority of histories of photography do not mention the collective¹¹. One history of photography that did briefly mention of the collective was Mary Warner Marien's *Photography: A Cultural History*, 3rd Edition published in 2010¹². In chapter thirteen "The Postmodern View" she describes the Hackney Flashers as "activists" who aimed to communicate their works to women outside of the art gallery. Graham Clarke's *The Photograph* offers a sentence about Jo Spence's photography denoting the idea of female identity¹³; however, it does not mention her involvement in the Hackney Flashers. Overall, the Hackney Flashers have not been thoroughly discussed by any major history of photography.

Histories of Feminist Art and Photo-Montage Techniques

In order to put the Hackney Flashers within a larger context in history, publications have been consulted on the topics of feminist artistic practices of the 1970s¹⁴ as well as the histories of

¹⁰ The Hackney Flashers are sometimes referred to in literature as just "The Flashers".

¹¹ Such as: Michel Frizot, *A New History of Photography* (Köln: Könemann, 1998); Beaumont Newhall. *The History of Photography: From 1839 to the Present* (New York; Boston: Museum of Modern Art ; Distributed by New York Graphic Society Books, 1982).

¹² The first edition was published in Great Britain in 2002.

¹³ Graham Clarke, *The Photograph*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹⁴ These texts include: Maggie Humm, *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*, 2nd ed (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1995); Cornelia H. Butler and Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles Calif.), *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Museum of

photomontage techniques¹⁵ (including the much earlier works of John Heartfield). Several publications by the leftist-feminist writer Sheila Rowbotham have been consulted to flesh out the political context of Hackney, London and second-wave feminism in 1970s Britain. In Kathy Battista's¹⁶ *Renegotiating the Body: Feminist Art in 1970s London*, the author briefly discusses the group's focus on socialist and gender issues¹⁷. Battista notes that the mission statement of the group was "To encourage the photographic recording of personal, group and local history by people themselves, with or without the assistance of professional photographers." However, further research has proved that a definitive mission statement by the Hackney Flashers was never decidedly agreed on¹⁸. Although Battista's text only briefly mentions the work of the Hackney Flashers, the text thoroughly discusses what was happening in terms of feminist and socialist issues in 1970s London. This history helps to both contextualize and bring agency to the goals outlined by the group.

In my research findings, many histories of feminist artistic practices do not include specific information relating to the Hackney Flashers. My research also shows that no publications on the histories of photomontage have mentioned the group. However, thorough research was conducted on both topics as they are significant in terms of what was influential in developing the mandate of the Hackney Flashers.

Academic Texts

Contemporary Art, 2007); *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1994).

¹⁵ These texts include: Douglas Kahn, *John Heartfield: Art and Mass Media*, 1st ed (New York: Tanam Press, 1985); Andrés Mario Zervigón, *John Heartfield and the Agitated Image: Photography, Persuasion, and the Rise of Avant-garde Photomontage* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Eddie Wolfram, *History of Collage: An Anthology of Collage, Assemblage and Event Structures*, 1st American ed (New York: Macmillan, 1975).

¹⁶ Kathy Battista is currently the Director of Contemporary Art at Sotheby's Institute of Art, New York. She is a curator and art historian as well as an author of several books on contemporary art and architecture.

¹⁷ Similar discussion about Jo Spence's socialist-feminist photographic projects and her involvement with the Hackney Flashers was found in Griselda Pollock's *Generations & Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996) as well as in the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona exhibition catalog, *Jo Spence: Beyond the Perfect Image : Photography, Subjectivity, Antagonism*, 2005.

¹⁸ This has been proved through oral history interviews conducted by the author.

The most relevant academic text pertaining to the topic of the Hackney Flashers is Dr. E.H. Frizell's "Representations of specific concerns of the Women's Liberation Movement in British feminist art 1970-1978". This dissertation frames the Hackney Flashers, as well as other feminist artists and collectives, within the radical politics of the Women's Liberation Movement of 1970s Britain. Frizell analyzes the aesthetic choices utilized by the group, combining her text with illustrative examples. "The juxtaposition of the images is an extremely powerful way of illustrating the inequalities of childcare situations influenced by class and money."¹⁹ She writes. Although Frizell successfully analyzes the aesthetic approach of the Hackney Flashers, her text lacks the level of detail necessary for a complete history of the collective. This includes but is not limited to: details surrounding the formation of the collective, specific dates, exhibition locations, viewpoints from more than just one former member, as well as a discussion on the recent renewed interest in the collective by various galleries²⁰.

Out of all the members of the collective between 1974 and 1980, Jo Spence has become the most internationally well-known due to her successful career as an art photographer. Because of the dearth of information and critical analysis on the Hackney Flashers, works about Jo Spence have been consulted to see if they hold relevant information²¹.

Susan E. Bell²²'s article "Photo Images: Jo Spence's narratives of living with illness" published in the sociological journal *Health* in 2002 states that by 1979 Jo Spence had been identifying herself as a feminist photographer around the time of her work with the Hackney Flashers. Bell writes,

"Her engagement with feminism, particularly her work with a collective of feminist photographers called the 'Hackney Flashers,' had made her aware of her socialization as a

¹⁹ Hazel Elizabeth Frizell, "Representations of Specific Concerns of the Women's Liberation Movement in British Feminist Art 1970-1978" (PhD diss., Kingston upon Thames: Kingston University, 2009).

²⁰ Frizell, "Representations of Specific Concerns," 207.

²¹ Hard copies of theses were found in the Jo Spence Fonds in the Permanent Archives of the Ryerson Image Centre. These include: Moira McLaughlin. "Another Way of Telling: Photography and Therapy." (Master's thesis, University of Hertfordshire, March 1994); Sue Wilkes. "The Immeasurable is Invaluable." (B.A. thesis, University unknown, 2003); Tanya Peixoto. "Five Artists' Books: Johanna Drukker, Nancy Holt, Joan Lyons, Mary Kelly and Jo Spence." (B.A. thesis, Chelsea College of Art and Design, March 1992).

²² Susan E. Bell is the chair professor of Sociology and Anthropology at Bowdoin College in Maine.

woman and of the process of 'bourgeoisification' which had taken her away from the working class roots and struggles of her family."²³

Similarly, there are several articles written about Spence's health and body photography that reference her involvement with the Hackney Flashers as an earlier project without providing any further details²⁴. Other articles cite Spence's involvement in feminist artistic practices in the 1970s; however, they do not mention the Hackney Flashers specifically²⁵.

While Frizell's dissertation holds the most relevant information surrounding the history of the Hackney Flashers, other academic texts surveyed illustrate only a moderate amount of information about the collective. Moreover, no academic text found has dedicated its thesis topic to solely focus on the group.

Books

Publications that specifically cite the Hackney Flashers have been consulted to see if they successfully analyze the group in detail or if mention of the group lies on a superficial level.

In the chapter "Ten Years of Photography Workshop" in the book *Cultural Sniping: The Art of Transgression* (1995) which features the literary works of Jo Spence, one learns that the collective known as the Photography Workshop²⁶ was instrumental in setting up the Hackney Flashers Women's Photography Collective in 1974 Hackney, London. The chapter describes the Hackney Flashers as an agitprop group and briefly discusses its work surrounding women's issues, work and domesticity. The chapter does not get into any specific details about members of the group nor does it discuss exhibitions put on by the collective.

²³ Susan Bell, "Photo Images: Jo Spence's Narratives of Living with Illness," *Health*: 6, no. 1 (January 1, 2002), 13.

²⁴ Such as: Brian Lobel, "Playing More Than the Cancer Card," *Performance Research* 15, no. 2 (June 1, 2010), 29–33.

²⁵ Caoimhin Mac Giolla Leith "Protest & Survive," *Artforum International* 39, no. 5 (January 2001), 135.

²⁶ Also the essay "The Historical Antecedents of Contemporary Photography Education: A British Case Study, 1966-79" written by May McWilliams discusses how Jo Spence and long-time collaborator Terry Dennett started an educational photography project called the Photography Workshop²⁶ in the early 1970s which went on the help initiate side projects such the Hackney Flashers.

Jo Spence's autobiography, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, 1986 is a compilation of essays written by or about Jo Spence's photography from 1950 until 1986. The introduction to the chapter "Women's Collective Work: 1974 Onwards" discusses the origins and mandate of the Hackney Flashers in considerable detail. The chapter begins listing projects that the Hackney Flashers were involved in as well as members of the group²⁷. The chapter then includes excerpts from an article written by Liz Heron that was first published in *Photography/Politics: I* (1979)²⁸. The article describes Heron's involvement within the group, as well as the mandate of the collective. The article includes descriptions of the exhibitions *Women and Work* (1975) and *Who's Holding the Baby?* (1978). The article goes into detail about the methodology behind the creation of the collage panels for the exhibitions²⁹. The chapter includes published imagery from both exhibitions with descriptions printed below each one that details their connection to the group's goals. This article is important as it contains more information about the Hackney Flashers than any other literature that has been located to date. However, since the article was written in 1979, the text does not include any information about later projects and exhibitions, or why the group stopped working together in the early 1980s.

In the chapter, "Print and Page as Battleground" from the book *Get The Message?: A Decade of Art for Social Change* (1984) written by the internationally known art critic and curator, Lucy R. Lippard, the author briefly references a project by the Hackney Flashers consisting of a slide packet and booklet. Lippard describes this project as "one of the most intelligent and visually effecting teaching aids" she has ever seen.³⁰ The author goes on to talk about the ways in which the group blurred the distinctions between low and high art through their use of collage and borrowed imagery. In the essay *Missing*

²⁷ At various times throughout 1974-1980, members of the Hackney Flashers ranged in numbers. Jo Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture: a Political, Personal, and Photographic Autobiography* (Seattle, Wash.: Real Comet Press, 1988).

²⁸ The full text can be found in *Photography/Politics: 1*, Published by Jo Spence and Terry Dennett as a part of the Photography Workshop, London. (1979), 125-144.

²⁹ Such as how the group received inspiration from the politically charged photomontages of John Heartfield.

³⁰ Lucy R. Lippard, *Get the Message?: a Decade of Art for Social Change* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1984), 209.

Women: Rethinking Early Thoughts on Images of Women (1990), Griselda Pollock³¹ cites similar goals by the Hackney Flashers to expose what is “real” in media imagery. Both publications fail to include specific names and dates of the projects produced by the group. However, Lippard’s text includes one image from the exhibition *Who’s Holding the Baby?* (1978)³². Out of all the literature researched, these two articles contain the largest amount of information and analysis behind the use of photomontage in works produced by the Flashers.

To date, no book has fully surveyed and discussed the work of the Hackney Flashers and its impact.

Periodicals

The periodical *Spare Rib Magazine* (1972- 1993) was consulted to see if any articles were published in relation to the Hackney Flashers³³. *Spare Rib* was a women’s liberation magazine dedicated to issues related to the movement. While the periodical printed photographs by the Hackney Flashers, not much in the way of textual information was given about the specifics of the collective. The *Spare Rib Reader*, published in 1982, was consulted to give contextual information about the Women’s Liberation Movement³⁴.

Noni Stacey, a current PhD student at London College of Communication, University of the Arts London, is studying London-based radical photography collectives of the 1970s. She recently had her article “Noni Stacey on Women & Work, 1975” published in the Winter 2013 issue of *Aperture* magazine³⁵. This article serves as a concise history on how the Hackney Flashers created their first exhibition. Stacey states that *Women and Work* (1975) was an extension of the exhibition *Women on*

³¹ This text is found in: Carol Squiers, *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990).

³² Lippard, *Get the Message?: a Decade of Art for Social Change*, 207.

³³ Marsha Rowe, *Spare Rib Reader* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England; New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Penguin Books, 1982); *Spare Rib*. 1972-1980.

³⁴ Marsha Rowe, *Spare Rib Reader*.

³⁵ Noni Stacey, “Noni Stacey on Women & Work, London, 1975,” *Aperture*, no. 213 (Winter 2013), 48–49

Women, organized by and exhibited at the Half Moon Gallery in 1974. This exhibition featured photography by several women who later became founding members of the Hackney Flashers.³⁶

Conclusion

Although there is brief mention of the Hackney Flashers in the literature available, it is offered only in fragments across many sources outside the history of photography. If materials produced by the Hackney Flashers are going to continue to be represented by institutions in archives and exhibitions, there needs to be a more complete understanding of the group in order to best represent the history of the collective. This thesis will serve as a resource for museum professionals wishing to work with materials related to the Hackney Flashers.

³⁶ Such as Maggie Murray and Sally Greenhill.

Chapter 1: Forming a Collective

In this chapter, I will discuss the milieu of the Hackney Flashers. Contextualizing the group within the radical 'counter-culture' movement happening in London during the 1970s will help to better understand why the collective worked in their particular way. Additionally, the socio-economic state of Hackney, London during the 1970s is vital to understanding why the Hackney Flashers chose to base their work out of this particular suburb of northeast London. This information will help to set the foundation for discussion on the Hackney Flashers' organizational structure and mandate.

By the early 1970s, news of the feminist movement in America made its way to Britain through organizations such as the Women's Workshop of the Artists' Union and the Women's Art History Group³⁷. At this time, American feminist art interventions were already well-funded (something that British feminist artists would struggle with)³⁸. The British feminist movement allowed women of various leftist political backgrounds to unite under the common ground of feminism. Like the American feminist movement, it was common for women in Britain to organize themselves in small collectives in order to discuss issues important to the cause and to collectively investigate ways to take social aim³⁹. British feminist writer and theorist Sheila Rowbotham writes,

"The organizational form proved to be well suited as a means of conveying the dissatisfaction expressed in the first stages of women's liberation. It built on an area of experience in women's upbringing in which there was already confidence – the ability to examine relationships. It transferred the familiar personal culture into politics."⁴⁰

Micheline Wandor agrees with Rowbotham in her essay, "The Small Group" published in *The Body Politic: Women's Liberation in Britain, 1969-1972*. She writes, "The attention to details possible in the informal, intimate small-group discussion is vital for an intricate political understanding of an intricate

³⁷ Frizell, "Representations of Specific Concerns," 90.

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ John Albert Walker, *Left Shift Radical Art in 1970s Britain* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 6-7.

⁴⁰ Sheila Rowbotham, *The Past Is before Us: Feminism in Action since the 1960s* (London: Pandora, 1989).

political situation.”⁴¹ These groups focused on a variety of women’s issues such as women’s health and reproduction, sexuality, education, childcare, and the workforce (including domestic work). These topics were specifically chosen to represent elements of women’s personal lives that overlapped with experiences by other women⁴². It was common for women to involve themselves in several of these different groups at a time.

Of these groups, there was a number of community photography collectives that worked out of London (the Hackney Flashers being one of them). Shaped by the radical-leftist ‘counter-culture’ that occupied 1970s London, community photographers shared a common thread in their desire to use photography to draw attention to social concerns, believing that a new creative approach to the medium could be an instrument of social change⁴³. The Hackney Flashers specifically used this approach to photography to actively demonstrate feminist concerns. In my interview with former Hackney Flasher, Helen Grace, she stated:

“The impact of the British New Left on cultural questions in the UK was the background to these new debates about women, labour, childcare that feminism forced on these previously unexamined aspects of life and struggle; Birmingham School cultural studies was just emerging and film theory (Screen) was in its heyday. There was a real force to these debates that the group embodied in its take on photography, its mix of photojournalism, illustration, design and community activism (rather than ‘theory’ as such) and its attention to women’s lives: how to work, how to balance the demands of childcare and femininity in general.”⁴⁴

Moreover, community photographers in London had a dedication to work outside of the capitalist market, as commercial organizations made it so photographic supplies and distribution costs limited photography to those that could afford to use the medium⁴⁵. The Hackney Flashers illustrated these ideologies through their practices by sharing photo-technical skills and supplies with women in the

⁴¹ Michelene Wandor, *The Body Politic: Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movement in Britain, 1969-1972* (London: Stage 1, 1972) 114.

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Noni Stacey, Exerts from “Community Photography in Britain in the 1970s: Photography, Pedagogy and Dreams” (Blog post based on her MA thesis in Photography at Sotheby’s Institute of Art, 2010). <http://www.archivemagazine.org.uk/?p=515>.

⁴⁴ Helen Grace, email interview with the author, April 10, 2014.

⁴⁵ Stacey, “Community Photography in Britain in the 1970s: Photography, Pedagogy and Dreams”.

collective. This was their method of promoting the use of photography as a vehicle to expose women's oppression within the community.

In addition to being oppressed in their daily lives, many women were marginalized and excluded from male-dominated art establishments⁴⁶. As a response, groups of women in Britain began creating art that was expressive of their lives and experiences as women and aimed to gain new audiences for their art outside of established art institutions⁴⁷. Feminist historian and theorist Rosemary Betterton writes that British feminists "disseminated their work through trade unions, community and women's events, and in the feminist and socialist press, deliberately choosing to place their work in political rather than art contexts"⁴⁸. Exhibitions were shown in libraries, colleges and community centres as opposed to art institutions as a conscious effort to represent and support the working class⁴⁹. The Hackney Flashers held exhibitions almost exclusively in non-traditional art spaces between the years 1974-1980. Further discussion on this topic can be found in Chapter 4.

Another theme addressed by feminist artists was the way that women were being represented in the media. This was being questioned by feminists who saw a distinct disconnect between media representations of women and *real* working class women. Frizell writes, "The myth of the glamorous housewife was perpetrated by media, and in particular, women's magazines that pictured beautifully groomed women enjoying their domestic surroundings." As a result, many women's collectives (both in America and Britain) concentrated on the idea of women being oppressed by domestic duties and childcare; this was referred to at the time as 'women's work'. Through oral histories I've learned that British feminists paid particular attention to class differences among women, as this subject had greater importance within British society. For example, by pairing media-constructed visualizations of women

⁴⁶ Frizell, "Representations of Specific Concerns," 69.

⁴⁷ Griselda Pollock, "Feminism, Femininity and the Hayward Annual Exhibition 1978," *Feminist Review*, no. 2 (January 1, 1979): 36.

⁴⁸ Betterton, "Maternal Embarrassment," 2.

⁴⁹ A more thorough discussion of exhibiting outside of established gallery spaces can be found in Chapter 4: Radical Exhibitions.

with documentary photographs of 'women's work' the Hackney Flashers drew attention to the specific conditions of the working class of Hackney.

The multicultural northeast suburb of Hackney was specifically chosen to demonstrate the contribution that women were providing to the economy. Hackney during the 1970s was home to working class labourers and the garment industry was the largest employer of women in the community. Labour itself was badly paid and monotonous factory work⁵⁰. The borough being politically left, had a considerable number of trade unions established to represent working class men, but little in the way of representation for working women. In an effort to bring awareness to the working women of Hackney and their social and economic concerns, the collective named themselves "the Hackney Flashers". The name intentionally played with the word 'flasher', as the collective aimed to 'shed light' on the conditions of Hackney just as a camera flash *exposes* its subjects.

However, the double meaning of the word *flasher* was not overlooked by the members, as the word *flasher* was an important reminder of the collective's agenda. The reference of a *flasher*, or one who exposes his or her body inappropriately, brought focus back onto the group's shared gender. In declaring themselves "the Hackney Flashers", the collective reclaimed the word to empower the gender that usually falls victim to a *flasher*. This notion held particular relevance as photography was, and largely still is, a male dominated field. Female photographers were constantly made aware that they were the 'second sex' in their profession and were fed up with the unbalance⁵¹. For this reason, the name "the Hackney Flashers" sought to illustrate that they were a *women's* photography collective.

⁵⁰ Frizell, "Representations of Specific Concerns," 142, 259.

⁵¹ In interview with the author, Sally Greenhill remarked upon her own frustration that women photographers were constantly being overshadowed by male photographers at the time. This frustration eventually drove her to end her photography collaboration with her husband (who was also a professional photographer) so that her photographs were solely credited as her own work.

In 1974, Jo Spence and Terry Dennett started the Photography Workshop⁵². It was a small, independently run educational organization that was solely directed by Spence and Dennett. Their main project was the periodical *Camerawork*, which dedicated its pages to expanding a critical discourse surrounding photography and its greater relation to politics and society. The Photography Workshop also helped groups in the community to use photography as a method of expressing leftist political ideologies. Spence and Dennett referred to this as “a better understanding of the progressive potential for making and using photography”⁵³. It was Spence and Dennett that seeded the beginnings of the Hackney Flashers by calling together their first meeting in 1974. The two, along with Neil Martinson (a member of the Hackney Trades Council union) were interested in starting a collaborative project to represent women’s work in the community as apart the Hackney Trades Council’s 75th Anniversary⁵⁴. However, the group of women that came to the meeting realized they were interested in doing more than a single project. The Hackney Flashers took off on their own from this point. Collaboratively, the few women that began the group agreed on becoming a women’s only collective⁵⁵.

My research has found that in total there were sixteen members of the Hackney Flashers (although the exact number is still unknown)⁵⁶. The women came from a variety of backgrounds and skills sets; some were academics, others trained photographers - but many belonged to the working class. Membership into the Hackney Flashers was fluid in nature and over the six years of its activity (1974 – 1980) it was constantly fluctuating in numbers. Being a member offered no capital benefit and

⁵² The Photography Workshop carried out extensive research until 1979 and even became a registered charity in 1980. The project collaborated with Half Moon Gallery in 1974/1975 and was briefly known as Half Moon Photography Workshop. However, due to irreconcilable differences between the two organizations, they split after only a short period of time together. At this time Spence and Dennett chose to return the organization back to its original name. The Photography Workshop closed officially in 1992, after Jo Spence’s death. Shortly after, Terry Dennett founded the Jo Spence Memorial Archive. Many of the materials associated with the Photography Workshop and *Camerawork* can be found in the Jo Spence Archive at the Ryerson Image Centre.

⁵³ Jo Spence, “Ten Years of Photography Workshop,” *Cultural Sniping: The Art of Transgression* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 89.

⁵⁴ Ironically, the Hackney Trades Council officially named the celebrations “75 Years of Brotherhood”.

⁵⁵ At this time, Terry Dennett and Neil Martinson stopped attending meetings.

⁵⁶ This list comes from “Women’s Collective Work 1974 Onwards”, page 66 of Jo Spence’s autobiography *Putting Myself in the Picture* (1986) and can be found in Appendix B.

was completely voluntary. Moreover, members were not required to devote years of work to the collective, live in Hackney or be professionally trained photographers in order to be welcomed into the group⁵⁷.

Through oral histories and the official Hackney Flashers website, I've learned that only women were considered to be members of the collective⁵⁸. However, in Jo Spence's autobiography, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, Spence lists both Terry Dennett and Neil Martinson as belonging to the collective⁵⁹. Although it may not have been expressed at the time, or even during the publication of Spence's autobiography in 1986, former members now feel that it is important that the history of the Hackney Flashers states that it was a women's only collective. This is largely due to the feminist politics that were being shaped at the time; namely, women were creating a voice for themselves that was specific to their concerns without interference from men.

The mandate of the Hackney Flashers was not clearly established from the beginning—nor was an official mandate ever agreed upon to the degree that it could be formally published. First and foremost, the collective was strongly a feminist-socialist group that was dedicated to supporting the community of Hackney⁶⁰. A catalogue from the 1979 exhibition, *Three Perspectives on Photography*, held at the Hayward Gallery states:

"The collective's original aim was to document women in Hackney, at work inside and outside the home, with the intention of making visible the invisible, thereby validating women's experience and demonstrating women's unrecognised contribution to the economy."⁶¹

⁵⁷ Members of the group that possessed more technical skills in the dark room often spent time teaching less technically skilled women. Liz Heron, in discussion with the author, February 17, 2014; Sally Greenhill, in discussion with the author, February 18, 2014.

⁵⁸ "History," *Hackney Flashers Collective*, last updated March 19, 2014, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://hackneyflashers.com/history/>.

⁵⁹ Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, 66.

⁶⁰ Helen Grace, email interview with the author, April 10, 2014.

⁶¹ *Three Perspectives on Photography*, Hayward Gallery exhibition catalogue, (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979), 80.

Although an original aim for the group was decided in the beginning, as the group progressed and grew in membership, discussion was ongoing among the women as how they should execute their main goal: to demonstrate the social inequalities for women in the community.

There existed a divide in the collective about how they should be spending their time and resources⁶². Some members, such as Sally Greenhill and Maggie Murray, were particularly interested in the photographic elements of the collective and thus were satisfied by exhibiting their photographs in an effort to express their political opinions. Other members, however, wanted to further reach out to the community and go beyond what a photography exhibition could solely provide. Members such as Jo Spence and Liz Heron were equally interested in exhibiting photography as they were in setting up workshops within the community to provide education to women on a variety of feminist issues⁶³. The debate around the focus of the collective was ongoing over the years the Hackney Flashers were active. However, disagreements such as this one did not necessarily rock the foundation of the collective, as opening up a discussion on a complicated political subject was exemplary of the members' feminist politics.

There exists a misconception today that Jo Spence was the leader of the Hackney Flashers. Spence was an active member of the collective during the entire six years of its activity; however, according to interviews I conducted, her role did not hold any specific power within the group. As is the case in many collectives, every member had equal say and authorship⁶⁴. This misconception could exist for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it is possible that Spence's success as an art photographer and an overall lack of knowledge of the Hackney Flashers has led the collective to be categorized as one of Spence's

⁶² Jo Spence, "Oral History of British Photography," interview with Val Williams, (British Library Sound Archive, 1991).

⁶³ In an interview with Val Williams, Jo Spence described Greenhill and Murray as "straight photographers" while she considered herself and Heron as more of "ideas people". Jo Spence, "Oral History of British Photography," interview with Val Williams, (British Library Sound Archive, 1991).

⁶⁴ "History," *Hackney Flashers Collective*, last updated March 19, 2014, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://hackneyflashers.com/history/>.

early art projects. This also allows for institutions to attach a celebrity name to the Hackney Flashers, increasing the value of their work by association. Secondly, it is possible that this misconception has stemmed from the belief that the Photography Workshop constructed, supported, and ran the Hackney Flashers. As previously discussed, the Photography Workshop 'seeded' the idea opposed to completely constructing the group. I suggest here that a lack of knowledge about how the two organizations differed from one another may have led people to believe that one powered the other. Lastly, my research has shown that Spence was a natural leader and that she may have thought of herself as the primary organizer of the group⁶⁵. She was a serious feminist theorist and artist, and for her the issues of social inequality should be vetted on a larger scale than just the community of Hackney. Spence aimed to expand the feminist theories informing the Hackney Flashers to a broader scope, promoting the work of the collective along the way⁶⁶. The main problem that arises from Spence being perceived as the leader of the Hackney Flashers is that it goes against the political structure of a collectively run organization. For this reason, it is important to separate Spence's dedication to feminist activity from her having a more prominent role within the collective.

⁶⁵ Jo Spence, "Oral History of British Photography," interview with Val Williams, (British Library Sound Archive, 1991).

⁶⁶ Ibid

Chapter 2: Major Projects and Aesthetics

*Women and Work*⁶⁷ (1975) was the first exhibition to be put on by the Hackney Flashers.

Illustrating a variety of occupations that women possessed in Hackney, it aimed to use documentary photography to record a “window on the world”⁶⁸ view of women in their daily lives at work. In its debut exhibition, it consisted of 250 black and white photographs plainly pinned on display boards and juxtaposed with handwritten texts. The texts ranged over a variety of women’s issues, but all aimed to inform viewers about the working conditions of women in Hackney⁶⁹. Figure 1 illustrates an installation shot of one of the panels dedicated to women’s health.

The second exhibition put on by the Hackney Flashers debuted several years later at the Centerprise Community Centre in Hackney. The show entitled, *Who’s Holding the Baby?* (1978) was a response to criticisms lodged at their first exhibition for failing to highlight the role of motherhood as women’s work⁷⁰. The theme of the show was an important topic that affected a large portion of mothers in Hackney, especially those belonging to the working class, as there was a growing problem existing in the community concerning the lack of childcare provisions available to women⁷¹. The title itself was chosen to raise questions about the social construction of women being the main childcare providers. In addition to public criticism, *Who’s Holding the Baby?* responded to the group’s self-criticism about the limits of Realism. In interview, Helen Grace declared that “There was a search for

⁶⁷ This exhibition happened shortly after Kay Hunt, Mary Kelly and Margaret Harrison’s 1975 exhibition, *Women & Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry*. The two exhibitions both used documentary photography to take up themes such as wage gaps between women and men, and issues of domestic labour. Cornelia H. Butler and Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles Calif.), *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007), 242.

⁶⁸ *Three Perspectives on Photography*, Hayward Gallery exhibition catalogue, (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979), 80.

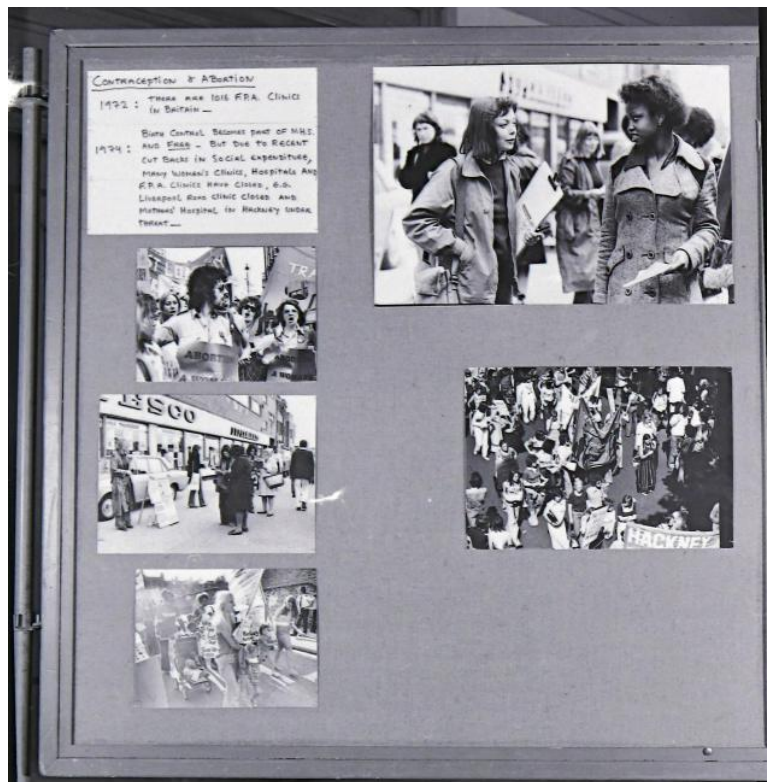
⁶⁹ “Women and Work, 1975,” *Hackney Flashers Collective*, last updated March 19, 2014, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://hackneyflashers.com/history/>.

⁷⁰ “Who’s Holding the Baby?, 1978,” *Hackney Flashers Collective*, last updated March 19, 2014, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://hackneyflashers.com/history/>.

⁷¹ Although full time childcare was provided during WWII in London, after the war 85% of childcare nurseries closed down. With over one thousand children on waiting lists for childcare, women were forced to leave their jobs in order to take care of their children at home. As a result, men did not have to compete with women for jobs and it allowed for men to continue to dominate the public sphere. As a result, women forced back into domesticity became increasingly isolated, with many turning to cigarettes, alcohol and prescribed medications. This in turn enabled drug companies to exploit these growing social issues. Frizell, “Representations of Specific Concerns,” 205; Betterton, “Maternal Embarrassment.”

alternatives to 'decisive moment' photography and a challenging of a whole tradition of documentary photography that photo agencies like Magnum circulated."⁷² Members agreed that there was a limit to the medium of photography when used as a documentary tool. The collective met this challenge by pairing photography with a variety of different mediums, such as texts, illustrations and re-appropriated media imagery.

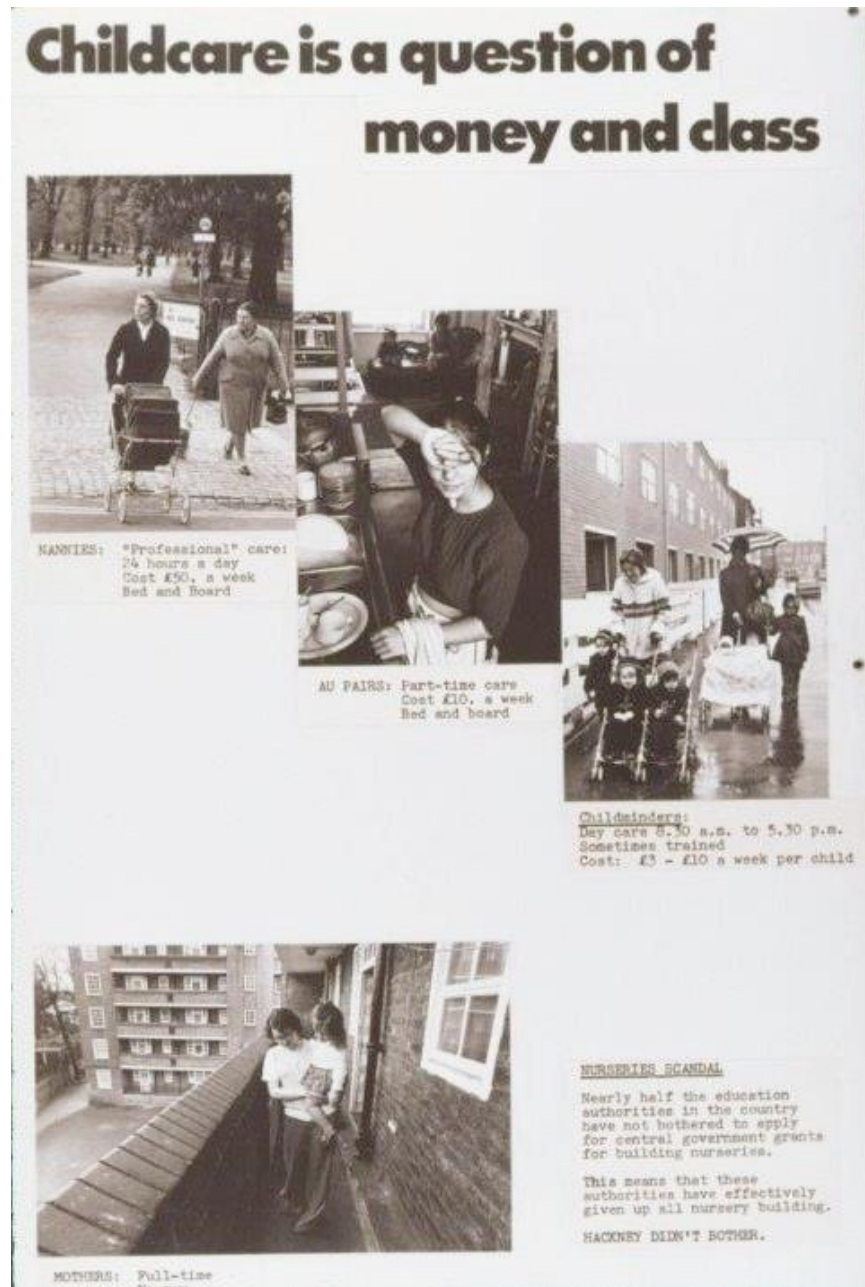
Figure 1



The Hackney Flashers, installation shot from *Women and Work*, 1975, photographs and text on display panels. Photograph ©HackneyFlashers.

⁷² Helen Grace, email interview with the author, April 10, 2014.

Figure 2



The Hackney Flashers, panel from *Who's Holding the Baby?*, 1978, photographs and text on panels. Photograph ©HackneyFlashers.

Figure 3



The Hackney Flashers, comic strip panel from *Who's Holding the Baby?*, 1978. Collage ©HackneyFlashers.

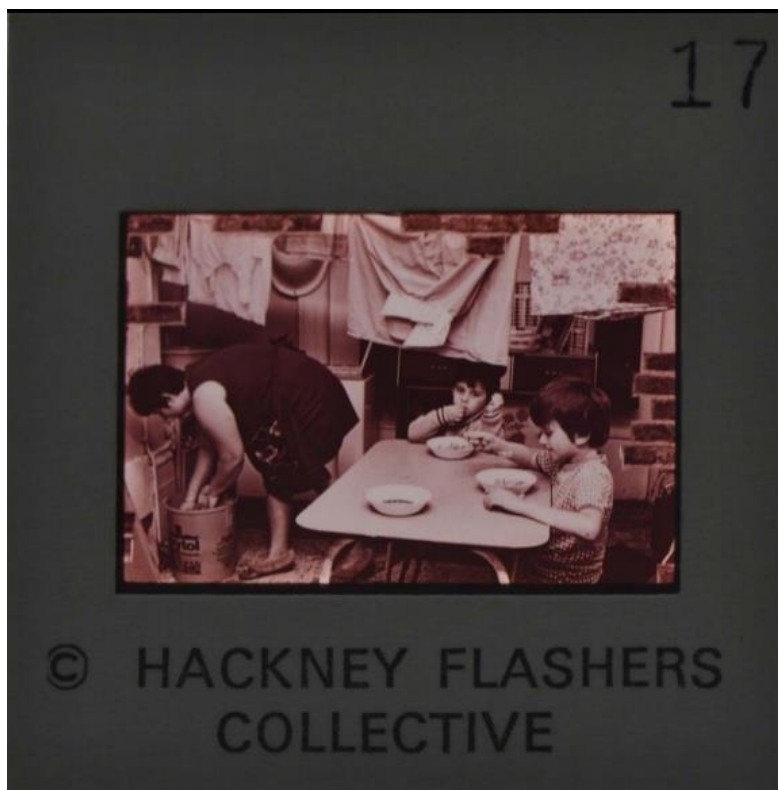
Figure 4



The Hackney Flashers, comic strip panel from *Who's Holding the Baby?*, 1978. Collage ©HackneyFlashers.

The third and final project produced by the Hackney Flashers took a different form than the two previous exhibitions. *Domestic Labour and Visual Representation* (1980) was designed as an education package that could travel to schools and community centres to teach the public about social issues impacting women. The package included 24 image slides featuring the Hackney Flashers' photography. The slideshow was accompanied by a booklet containing discussion questions and suggested readings pertaining to each slide⁷³. Examples of what the original slides looked like can be seen in Figures 5 and 6⁷⁴. The main principle of the project was its portability, allowing information to reach a wider audience outside of exhibition spaces.

Figure 5

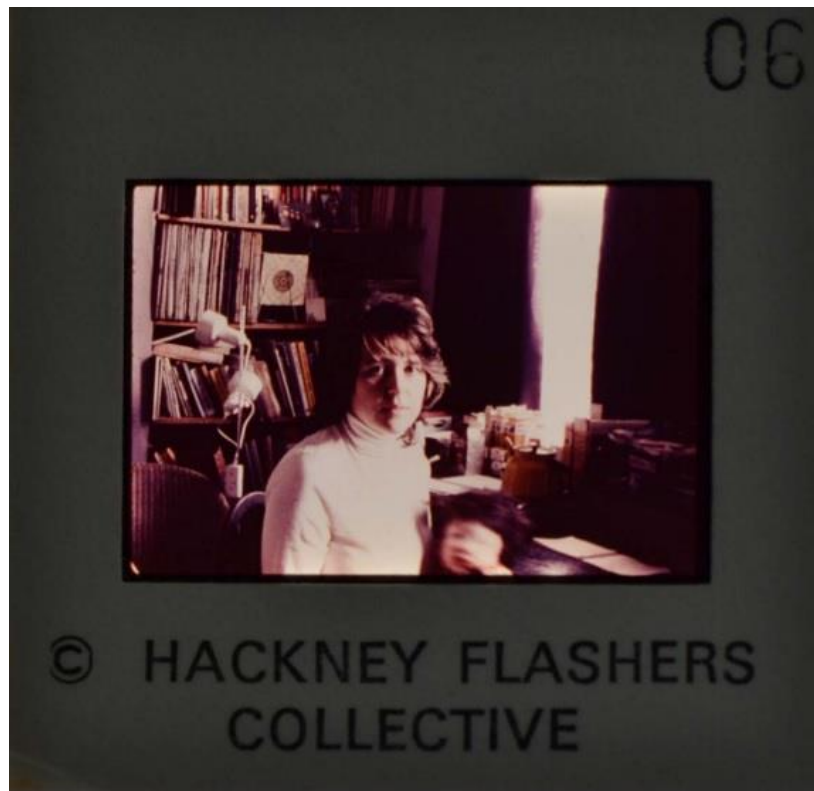


The Hackney Flashers, *Domestic labour and Visual Representation*, 1980, digital slide made from original slideshow (2012). Photograph © Goldsmiths, University of London.

⁷³ "Domestic Labour and Visual Representation, 1980," *Hackney Flashers Collective*, <http://hackneyflashers.com/history/>.

⁷⁴ A digital copy of the original slideshow was produced by the Women's Art Library at Goldsmiths University of London in 2012.

Figure 6



The Hackney Flashers, *Domestic labour and Visual Representation*, 1980, digital slide made from original slideshow (2012). Photograph © Goldsmiths, University of London.

The large quantity of photographs chosen for each project was exemplary of the style of the collective; they were not as concerned with the formal qualities of the medium as they were with demonstrating the subject the images highlighted. Photographs were used from both professionally trained photographers within the group as well as more amateur photographers, as some members were learning about the medium for the first time.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the handwritten text panels and photographs for *Women and Work* were ‘crudely’ pinned onto larger display boards—although more permanent panels were eventually constructed for traveling exhibitions⁷⁵—and the photographs remained unmatted and unframed for the

⁷⁵ According to documents in the Hackney Archives’ ‘Women and Work Exhibition (1975)’ file, a grant for £250 issued by The Greater London Arts Council in July 1976 funded the mounting of the prints.

next few years⁷⁶. As a result, the original panels from *Women and Work* have not survived; installation photographs as well as some reprints from the original negatives are the only imagery from the exhibition that remains. Similar to the first exhibition, the photographs for *Who's Holding the Baby?* were spread out over numerous panels with multiple images and text attached to each. Twenty-nine panels were created for the original exhibition, although only twenty-three have survived⁷⁷. These panels were made of up lightweight, laminated materials that were designed to be easily hung in non-gallery settings⁷⁸. The quick and easy display method of the photographs for the two exhibitions is illustrative of the lack of concern for the photographs to be judged for artistic aesthetics.

The available literature does not offer definitive information on why the collective stopped work after their third project in 1980. Through oral histories I learned that one of the reasons that the Hackney Flashers did not have the impetus to embark on a new project was due to political disagreements among the members. In interview with Liz Heron she stated, "There were differences between us—as there usually are in groups or collectives—which is something that is good to recognize and it also may make a group more dynamic when you add these differences. You have to think about your own opinion and your own experience."⁷⁹ However, beyond these disagreements, Heron offered that the collective had a natural ending. "After we worked on those two big projects, people were doing other things and perusing other political projects as well as their own work." The collective stopped being active that year, but the politics that shaped the production of the Hackney Flashers were not dissolved. Helen Grace states, "those few months of dynamic activity and activism and the focus of this group of women completely transformed my way of thinking about the image, about photography, cinema and the world...it was the most valuable period of my life in terms of learning and it shaped

⁷⁶ A list of the locations in which the exhibition traveled to between 1975 and 1978 can now be found on the Hackney Flashers website at www.hackneyflashers.com.

⁷⁷ 23 of the 29 original panels are on permanent display at the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid.

⁷⁸ "Who's Holding the Baby?, 1978," *Hackney Flashers Collective*, <http://hackneyflashers.com/history/>.

⁷⁹ Liz Heron, in discussion with the author, February 17, 2014

everything I've done subsequently."⁸⁰ Oral histories agree that members applied what they had learned from their time with the Hackney Flashers onto new political projects⁸¹.

Photomontage and Collage

After their first exhibition, the collective became increasingly aware that 'straight' photography did not always cater to their desire to depict a greater context outside of what the camera documented. Curator John Tagg wrote in the exhibition catalogue *Three Perspectives on Photography* (1979) that the Hackney Flashers believed that photography alone did not show the "complex social and economic relationships with which women's subordination is maintained."⁸² The limits of photography became a challenge that the Hackney Flashers embraced. Their solution was to creatively juxtapose 'straight' photography with additional visual and textual examples to heighten the viewer's intake of information. This method was chosen to accommodate a large group of women coming from a variety of backgrounds, not all of whom had formal training in photography⁸³. Influences of this cut-and-paste aesthetic derived from politically charged artists such as John Heartfield and his photomontages⁸⁴. However, the Hackney Flashers did not work in a vacuum. Many radical artists and activists utilized collage-style aesthetics as a visual display of their political ideologies.

As many artists grew dissatisfied with art establishments, they began to turn away from traditional art-forms, such as painting, and replace them with a variety of new mediums, such as posters, films, cartooning, mixed media and photomontage⁸⁵. The combination of these mediums provided a solution to the formal limits of documentary photography⁸⁶. By juxtaposing documentary photography with advertising images the Hackney Flashers were able to question the difference

⁸⁰ Helen Grace, email interview with the author, April 10, 2014.

⁸¹ Sally Greenhill, in discussion with the author, February 18, 2014.

⁸² *Three Perspectives on Photography*, Hayward Gallery exhibition catalogue, (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979), 80.

⁸³ Christine Roche, email interview with the author, January 19, 2014.

⁸⁴ Jo Spence, "Oral History of British Photography," interview with Val Williams, (British Library Sound Archive, 1991).

⁸⁵ Walker, *Left Shift*, 6-7.

⁸⁶ Frizell, "Representations of Specific Concerns," 200.

between a 'reported image' and photography with an alternative motive⁸⁷. In the article, *Who's Still Holding the Camera?* (1979), Heron writes, "It became increasingly clear that the context in which an image was used could dramatically alter its meaning."⁸⁸ Therefore, by pairing one of the photographs of 'real' women at work, with a glamourized image of a woman in an advertisement, the Hackney Flashers were making a commentary about social constructions of femininity.

Take for example the montage illustrated in Figure 7 created by the collective circa 1978⁸⁹. A photograph of a woman working in a garment factory is paired with a hyper-glamourized advertisement for women's clothing. By combining the two images, the Hackney Flashers are drawing attention to the economic relationship present; the women sewing in the garment factory will never be able to afford the three-figure price of the dress⁹⁰. Frizell writes, "The prices are circled to draw attention to the irony, while other images merely present statistics to support their photographic documentation revealing women's experience of poor pay for what was seen as a traditional female housework-type task."⁹¹ The motive presented by the clothing company through the advertisement is to get women to associate femininity with wearing the clothing. "These images are not simply a distortion of how we 'really' are, but are part of a process of constructing us and prescribing our feminine role." writes Liz Heron⁹². While the Hackney Flashers' documentary photographs emphasize issues of social inequality, the addition of the advertisement allows the photograph to speak of the unrealistic feminine standards that weight women's oppression. By juxtaposing the images together, the collective allows for the two images to say more than the sum of their individual parts.

⁸⁷ Val Williams, *Women Photographers: The Other Observers, 1900 to the Present* (London: Virago, 1986), 8-9.

⁸⁸ Liz Heron, "Who's Still Holding the Camera?" in *Putting Myself in the Picture: A Political, Personal, and Photographic Autobiography* (Seattle, Wash.: Real Comet Press, 1988), 72.

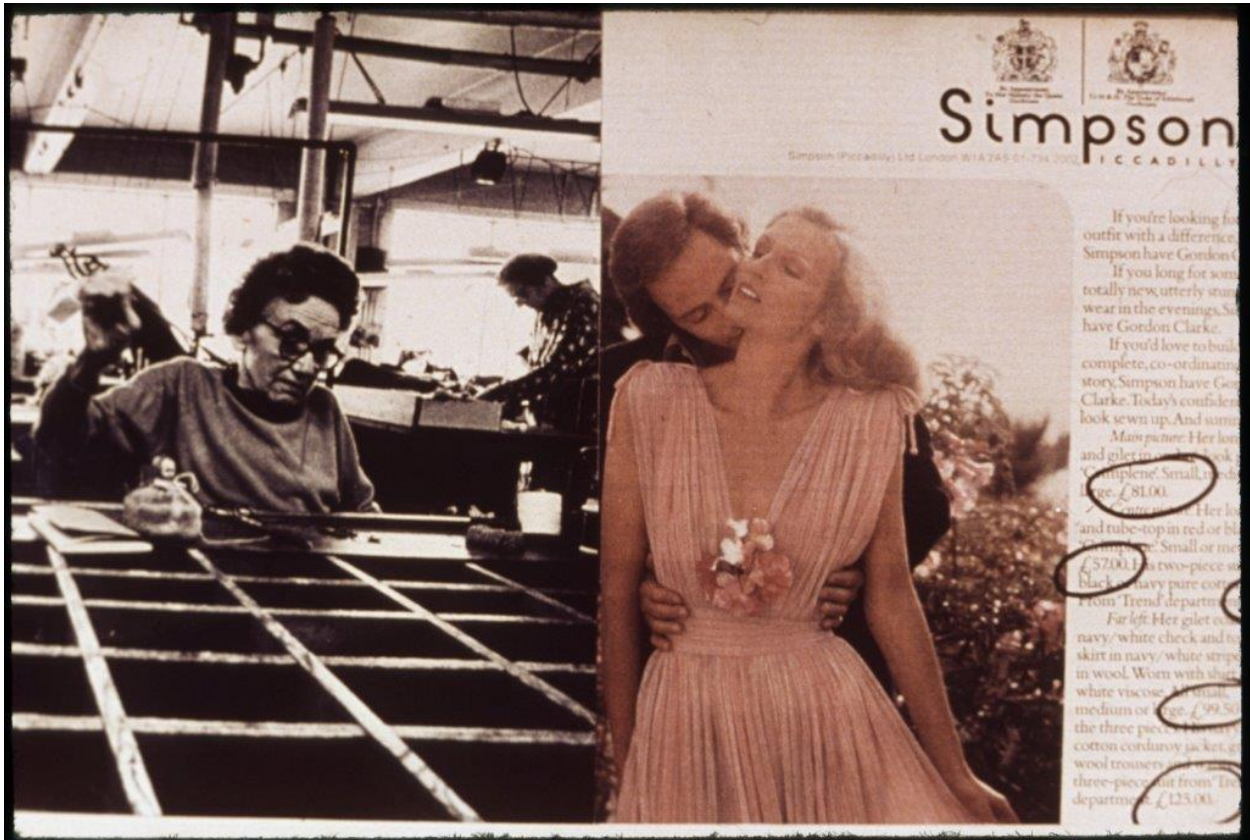
⁸⁹ "Slideshow: Who's Holding the Baby?, 1978," *Hackney Flashers*, <http://hackneyflashers.com/history/>.

⁹⁰ Frizell, "Representations of Specific Concerns," 142.

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² Liz Heron, "Who's Still Holding the Camera?"

Figure 7



The Hackney Flashers, garment industry panel, ca. 1975, photograph and advertisement juxtaposition. Photograph ©HackneyFlashers.

Figure 8



The Hackney Flashers, photograph from *Who's Holding the Baby?*, 1978, photomontage. Photograph ©HackneyFlashers.

Furthermore, the Hackney Flashers were attracted to collage because of the ease that came with the do-it-yourself medium. Former member Christine Roche (an illustrator by profession) did not see it as an aesthetic choice, but rather a question of accessibility. As someone who did not have fine technical skills in photography, she found the medium's usability attractive. "A concept, a bunch of magazines, a pair of scissors, done. The beauty was that anyone could produce these images⁹³," claims Roche. Figure 8 illustrates how the Hackney Flashers used collage for this reason. This image was created by members spray-painting a wall and then photographing it. A photomontage was made by adding in another photograph of a mother and her children. Added to these images was the text "Who's Still Holding the Baby?". Overall, the ease of the medium allowed numerous members to participate in the creation of this work—ultimately conveying their political message quickly and efficiently.

The Influence of Collage

Former members have stated that they were influenced by the photomontage techniques made popular in the 1930s by Avant-Garde artists, as it allowed for a solution to go beyond the veracity of the documentary image; this was something that the collective became increasingly interested in after their first exhibition⁹⁴. Spence in particular was influenced by the photomontage techniques of John Heartfield. "Heartfield was able to construct visual scenarios in which easily recognizable (and previously apparently disparate) elements could take on ambiguous or new meanings by being juxtaposed in non-naturalistic ways (but not in illogical or random ways)."⁹⁵ Similarities can be drawn between Heartfield's

⁹³ Christine Roche, email interview with the author, January 19, 2014.

⁹⁴ Liz Heron, in discussion with the author, February 17, 2014.

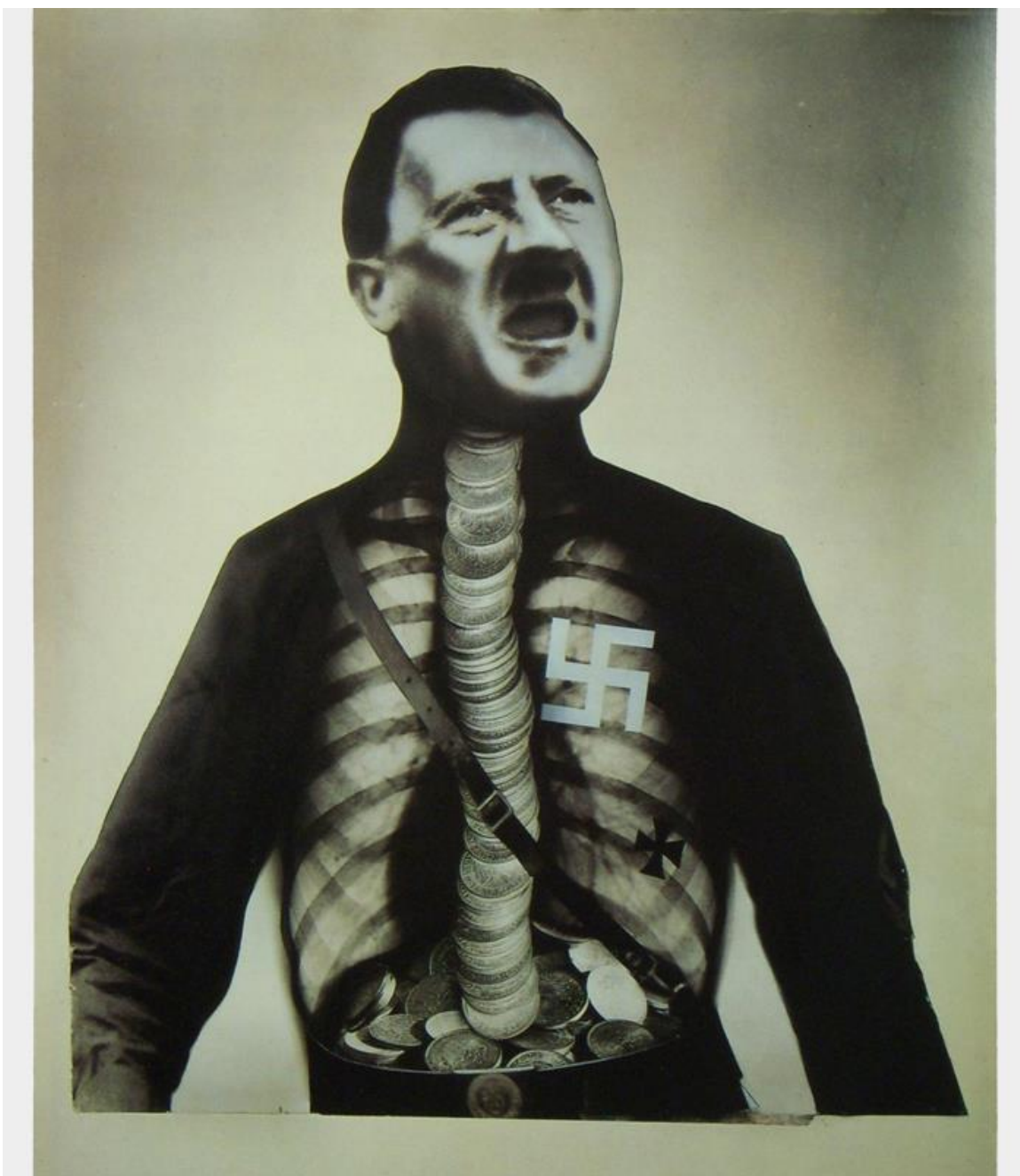
⁹⁵ Jo Spence, "The Sign as a Site of Class Struggle: Reflections on the work of John Heartfield," in *Cultural Sniping: The Art of Transgression* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 52.

photomontages and the Hackney Flashers' collages, as both used their work to approach the political struggles of their period⁹⁶.

Figure 9 illustrates Heartfield's photomontage *Adolf, the Superman: Swallows Gold and Spouts Junk*, 1932. In Heartfield's photomontage, Adolf Hitler is shown with coins lining his throat and stomach, while a swastika replaces his heart. This image exemplifies how Heartfield carefully arranged photographs to convey political messages about Germany during the 1930s. Similarly, the Hackney Flashers used collage in their second exhibition, *Who's Holding the Baby?* (1978) to convey political messages about struggles faced by women in 1970s Britain. An example of this can be seen in Figure 10 which illustrates a panel from the exhibition. In this panel, an image of a woman dressed as a bride is juxtaposed with various images and texts—most of which were cut out from newspapers and magazines. The images used were carefully chosen to represent the social construction of women's roles as childcare providers and home caretakers. The collage features images of domestic symbols such as infants, cleaning supplies and baked goods. The texts in the panel are chosen carefully to highlight a specific political message. The heading reads: "What Are Mothers Made Of?". The outcome is an easily digestible collage that questions the social construction of femininity. The final product bears an uncanny resemblance to Heartfield's *Adolf, the Superman: Swallows Gold and Spouts Junk* – as both creative works use the juxtaposition of imagery to convey easily graspable, yet highly politicized, messages.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 56.

Figure 9



John Heartfield, *Adolf, the Superman: Swallows Gold and Spouts Junk*, 1932, photomontage.

Figure 10



The Hackney Flashers, panel from *Who's Holding the Baby?*, 1978, photomontage. Photograph ©HackneyFlashers.

Furthermore, oral histories have indicated that Victor Burgin was highly influential to the group⁹⁷. Burgin was a political photographer, conceptual artist and academic working out of London in the mid-1970s, running within similar leftist circles to the Hackney Flashers. He exhibited with the Hackney Flashers in the exhibition *Three Perspectives on Photography* (1979) under the same category 'A Socialist Perspective on Photographic Practice' curated by John Tagg.

Burgin was particularly influential to the collective in terms of his "scripto-visual techniques"⁹⁸ as he worked to question consumer society through the use of photography and text. Often using imagery from the media, Burgin parodied ad slogans by replacing advertising text with political statements⁹⁹. Figure 11 illustrates Burgin's photomontage *Going Somewhere?* (1975). In this composition, Burgin juxtaposes an image of a woman working in a factory with a car advertisement. Burgin uses the two images to draw attention to differing classes among women. At first the image may be mistaken for an ordinary advertisement, but at a closer examination Burgin's use of the texts "Going somewhere?" and "Class consciousness: you're nowhere without it" makes clear that he is making a political statement about social and economic inequalities among classes. Comparably, the photomontage of the bride in Figure 10 exemplifies how the Hackney Flashers used text in a similar way; the heading: "What Are Mothers Made Of?" was specifically chosen to challenge social inequalities among men and women.

⁹⁷ Liz Heron, in discussion with the author, February 17, 2014;
Christine Roche, email interview with the author, January 19, 2014.

⁹⁸ Frizell, "Representations of Specific Concerns," 212.

⁹⁹ Ibid

Figure 11



Victor Burgin, *Going Somewhere?*, 1975, photomontage.

Spare Rib Magazine

Spare Rib was a collectively-run, London-based magazine with ties to the underground press movement of the 1960s¹⁰⁰. It first debuted in 1972, and by 1976 it formally declared itself the official magazine of the Women's Liberation Movement¹⁰¹. In a male-dominated profession, *Spare Rib* provided an outlet for female photographers to get their work published¹⁰². The photography that appeared in the periodical accompanied articles on a variety of topics taken up by the Women's Liberation Movement¹⁰³. By looking at the covers of *Spare Rib* between 1972 and 1979, it is easy to recognize that the cut-and-paste aesthetic was a popular choice for female photographers at the time. Figure 12 illustrates what a typical cover looked like during the mid to late-1970s. On the cover, a glamourized image of a woman (most likely borrowed from an advertisement) is paired with cartoon imagery. The text laid over the images reads: "Take cover." The cheekiness of the overall juxtaposition is comparable to collages done by the Hackney Flashers. Christine Roche's comic-strip narratives made up two panels in *Who's Holding the Baby?*. These cartoons provided humour amidst the heavy subject matter presented by the photography and texts, but were nonetheless informative in themselves. Another example of cheekiness through collage can be seen in the unbearably large grin fixed on the face of the bride in Figure 12 – the irony being that the image is making a statement about gender oppression. Comprehensively, *Spare Rib* parallels the Hackney Flashers use of collage as a method for making sarcastic or ironic commentary on important feminist issues.

Overall, collage and photomontage techniques were a way for the Hackney Flashers to tackle the limitations that came along with documentary photography. These techniques first became popularized by Avant-garde artists of the 1930s, such as John Heartfield. However, the cut-and-paste

¹⁰⁰ *Spare Rib* was founded by two editors, Marsha Rowe and Rozsika Parker, before being collectively run.

¹⁰¹ Frizell, "Representations of Specific Concerns," 70.

¹⁰² Val Williams, *Women Photographers: The Other Observers*, 172.

¹⁰³ Common article subjects were women's work, childcare, education, women's health, sexuality and politics.

aesthetics were a product of the times, as they were used by many radical artists and activists throughout 1970s London, many of whom were interested in questioning the validity of the image.

Figure 12



Spare Rib Magazine cover, issue no. 76, 1978.

©Spare Rib

Chapter 3: The Question of Authorship

An important area of discussion remaining is how to accurately represent authorship for works produced by the Hackney Flashers. A tendency exists for archives to assign individual authorship to acquired materials, as building an intellectual record around an object is good archival practice. However, what is to be done when a collective's original mandate was to eradicate individual authorship for its materials? This chapter will discuss how the Hackney Flashers intended to have their works represented, and what this means for museum professionals archiving and exhibiting these works today.

Within the last five to ten years there has been an increased level of interest by museum professionals to work with the photographs of the Hackney Flashers¹⁰⁴. In addition to what has been acquired by the Ryerson Image Centre and what remains in the Jo Spence Memorial Archive¹⁰⁵, materials related to the Hackney Flashers are spread across several archives in London. Moreover, in the last ten years the Hackney Flashers have been featured in numerous international exhibitions. Despite this increase in interest, a cohesive understanding of how the Hackney Flashers should be credited has not been established. There needs to exist a level of accuracy in representing the works of the Hackney Flashers based on the collective's original intentions.

When the collective came together in 1974, it was decided that all works produced by members would solely credit "The Hackney Flashers". An excerpt from the Hackney Flashers official website reads:

"The Flashers productions were always published as the work of a collective. Individuals were not named; specific images or writing were never credited. This was a conscious, political decision and has led to some misunderstandings about who the members of the

¹⁰⁴ British scholar Noni Stacey is currently working on her PhD at the University of Arts London. Her research focuses on British Photography Collectives in 1970s London. Her dissertation is yet to be published, however, she recently had her article "Noni Stacey on *Women and Work, 1975*" published in the Winter 2013 issue of *Aperture Magazine*. This article briefly discusses the Hackney Flashers debut exhibition.

¹⁰⁵ What remains of the Jo Spence Memorial Archive is in possession of Terry Dennett and gallery owner, Richard Saltoun, who represents Jo Spence in London, UK.

Hackney Flashers were, who collaborated on which projects and where the copyright for their work lies. (It lies with the collective.)”¹⁰⁶

The majority of photographs exhibited by the Hackney Flashers were shot and printed by two or three members - mainly the ones who had the most technical skill in the darkroom; however, it was never an issue of concern for their names of to be isolated out¹⁰⁷. Rather, the Hackney Flashers were a medley of theorists, writers, photographers, illustrators and overall feminist thinkers who worked collaboratively on every project. For this reason, assigning individual authorship to a photograph was not considered representational of the collective effort put into each project.

In an interview with Sally Greenhill, a major concern she vocalized was that photographic materials produced by the collective are now being credited as the work of Jo Spence. “Jo Spence had very little to do with the Hackney Flashers apart from setting it up. [Terry] was crazy about Jo Spence, and he kind of saw Hackney Flashers as something in her own pocket. We didn't want that to be true, because we had been a collective.” Oral histories confirm that Spence was never considered as a hierarchal figure among the women¹⁰⁸. After the collective stopped being active, Spence went on to have a successful art career and is now known internationally for her photography. However, institutions should be wary about using Spence’s fame to overshadowing the wishes of the collective to still have their work exhibited anonymously.

The second area of concern by former members today is that they are not being consulted when their materials are being exhibited. “(We) discovered that in Madrid, the Reina Sofia Museum had a show with pictures we knew nothing about...that kind of woke us all up a bit,¹⁰⁹” Greenhill admitted in interview. Former members argue that although materials may be in possession of individual archives,

¹⁰⁶ “History,” *Hackney Flashers Collective*, <http://hackneyflashers.com/history/>.

¹⁰⁷ Liz Heron, in discussion with the author, February 17, 2014.

¹⁰⁸ Sally Greenhill, in discussion with the author, February 18, 2014.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

the copyright of the materials still belongs to the Hackney Flashers¹¹⁰. For this reason, it is important for institutions to thoroughly research the copyright status of any archival materials associated with the Hackney Flashers prior to exhibition. The Hackney Flashers official website directs researchers on how to contact former members.

The decision of how to credit works produced by a collective is not an easy one to be made by institutions. In the archive there are many benefits to assigning authorship to materials. The first is that it allows for a searchable history. Researchers may not be aware of who the Hackney Flashers were, but by archiving the materials under the authorship of Jo Spence, the materials become more accessible. For this reason, if an institution chooses to credit Jo Spence, an effort should also be made to include the names of other members as well. This will assure that the institution is maximizing 'searchability' for its materials. Secondly, by naming individuals in the archive, it allows for biographies to be created with greater ease. In this case, historians can create a timeline for former members by drawing from their connection to the Hackney Flashers. Lastly, in the archive there exists a strong desire to preserve everything accurately. Metadata for objects can vary in content according to what is known about the object. By limiting the information included in a cataloging record, an archivist is limiting the potential research to be done. Therefore, by linking individual authorship to the materials of the Hackney Flashers, the information is available for future researchers. For all of these reasons, it is understandable why archives assign individual authorship to materials when the information is available.

In good archival practice, the best source of information in terms of how artworks (or materials) are defined comes directly from the artists¹¹¹. One methodology that archives can practice is to include both the original intent of the collective and individual's name in their metadata records. For example,

¹¹⁰ Former members of the Hackney Flashers launched a website in March, 2014. They hope that by providing a first-hand account of detailed information it will help dissolve some discrepancies that exist in the literature about the collective.

¹¹¹ Rebecca A Buck, Gilmore, and American Association of Museums, *MRM5: Museum Registration Methods* (Washington, DC: AAM Press, American Association of Museums, 2010), 78.

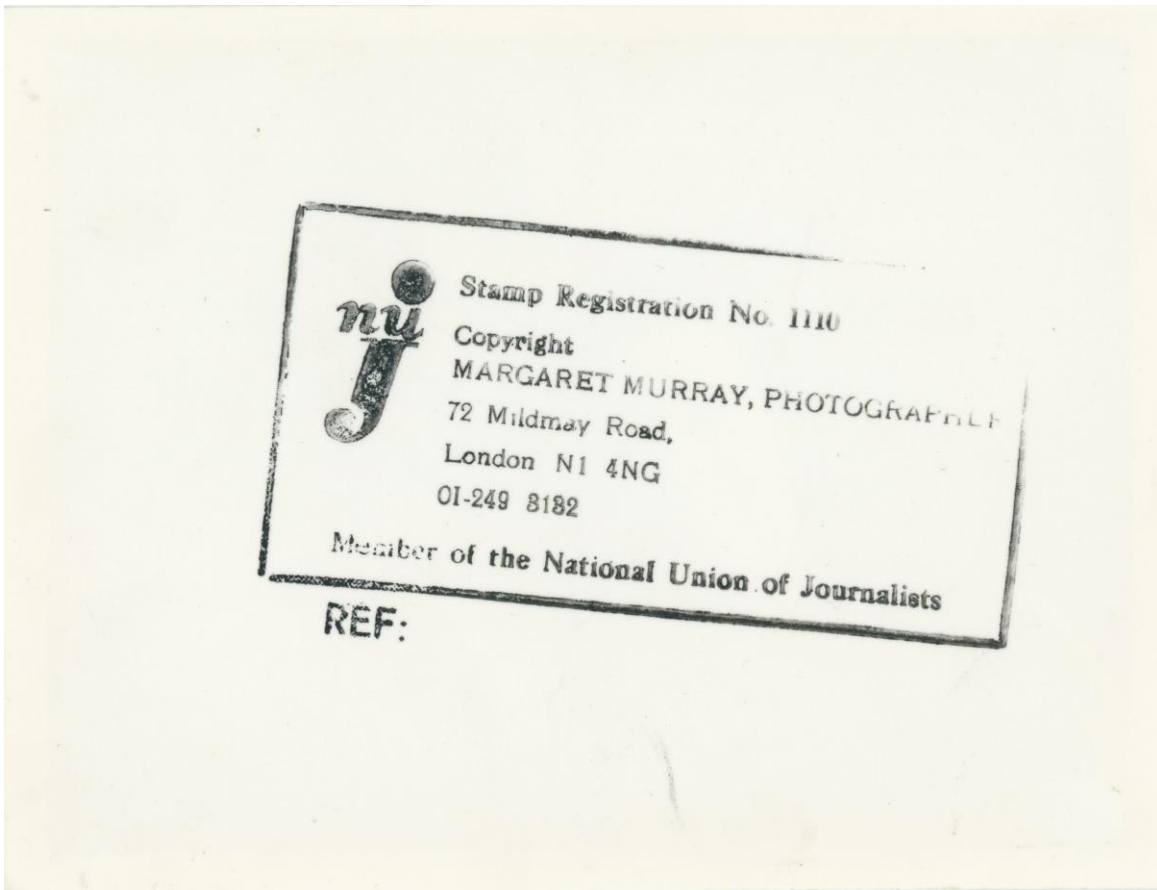
Figure 13 and 14 illustrate the recto and verso of a photograph belonging to the Hackney Flashers collective. A stamp on the verso of the object indicates the photograph was taken by Margaret Murray. By including both the intent of the collective and individual authorship (if available) in the metadata, the archive is assuring that the highest level of factual information is attached to the object.

Figure 13



The Hackney Flashers, recto of photograph from a panel exhibited in *Women and Work*, 1975, re-print from original negative. Courtesy of the Jo Spence Memorial Archive, Ryerson Image Centre.

Figure 14



The Hackney Flashers, verso of photograph from a panel exhibited in *Women and Work*, 1975, re-print from original negative. Courtesy of the Jo Spence Memorial Archive, Ryerson Image Centre.

Chapter 4: Radical Exhibitions

By the 1970s, a shift had taken place amongst feminist artists to work outside of established art institutions. This was a conscious and political choice by feminists who saw themselves as marginalized by male-powered art establishments that encompassed traditional gallery spaces¹¹². Fed up with existing art institutions and wanting their art to reach people outside of 'elitist' galleries, radical-feminist artists began exhibition in non-traditional spaces such as libraries, community centres and the streets¹¹³. In doing so, the relationship between the curator and the artist was removed from the equation, allowing for the artist to take control over her work¹¹⁴. As a result, both exhibitions put on by the Hackney Flashers debuted outside of the gallery in non-traditional spaces¹¹⁵. Figure 15 illustrates one of the community centres that the Hackney Flashers hung their exhibitions in.

Although individual members later identified themselves as artists¹¹⁶, as a collective the Hackney Flashers only ever identified themselves as social activists and photographers. However, it was common at the time for radical-feminists to display their political ideologies through various visual artifacts and yet not consider themselves as artists. This was again a way for feminists to distinguish themselves from the 'elitist', male-dominated, higher class art world from which they withdrew.

Although feminist artists worked outside of institutional spaces and most mainstream galleries "were slow to involve themselves in the full, momentous extent of the changes initiated by radical

¹¹² Frizell, "Representations of Specific Concerns," 60.

¹¹³ Walker, *Left Shift*, 3.

¹¹⁴ Williams, *Women Photographers*, 170-172.

¹¹⁵ There exists a long list on the Hackney Flashers official Webpage of all the non-traditional spaces that the collective exhibited their work in while they were active. From the list one can see that *Women and Work* travelled extensively between 1974 and 1978, as it was requested by many colleges, libraries and community centres for exhibition.

¹¹⁶ Such as Jo Spence (art photographer) and Christine Roche (illustrator and painter).

artists”¹¹⁷ there existed some exceptions. In 1979, the Hackney Flashers exhibited photographic panels¹¹⁸ in the tri-curated exhibition *Three Perspectives of Photography* exhibition which debuted at the

Figure 15



The Hackney Flashers, installation shot from *Women and Work*, 1975, panels on wall. Courtesy of the Jo Spence Memorial Archive, Ryerson Image Centre.

¹¹⁷ “Four Covers of *Studio International*, 1975 – 1976”. In Richard Cork, *Everything Seemed Possible: Art in the 1970's*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003, p. 6. Highlighted in Frizell, “Representations of Specific Concerns,” 101.

¹¹⁸ The panels chosen were from the Flashers’ second exhibition, *Who’s Holding the Baby?*, 1978.

prestigious Hayward Gallery. By showing at the Hayward Gallery, the Hackney Flashers were re-entering the established art world from which they had previously withdrawn. The choice to exhibit at the Hayward gallery was not an easy decision for the members to make. The collective spent months deciding on whether to accept the invitation from curator John Tagg to show under his section: 'A Socialist Perspective on Photographic Practice'¹¹⁹. There was a debate that existed at the time whether feminist artists should continue to remain in declared feminist spaces outside of male-dominated institutions, or if this was only creating a separate sphere—further marginalizing them, and therefore risking that their works be completely disregarded outside of a narrow feminist audience¹²⁰. In interview with Sally Greenhill, she expressed that the decision to show at the Hayward was pivotal to her continuation with the collective:

“I took issue with them putting our exhibition up in the art gallery at Hayward. A lot of people felt uncomfortable about it in the group, but they wanted to go ahead with it... It just felt completely wrong to me. The exhibition wasn't intended as an art object. It was intended to help women in their work and with their children. That was its purpose. It was inappropriate for it to appear in an art gallery and that's how I felt.”¹²¹

Interviews confirm that other members were wary at first about showing at the Hayward as it went against shared political ideologies. “We weren't sure whether we wanted to be involved in the art establishment – to have our work shown in such a place. We saw our work as agitprop, so it didn't seem immediately appropriate to put it in a gallery like the Hayward...”¹²² stated Liz Heron. However, through these interviews I learned that the majority of members decided that it would be a positive experience for their work to be shown at the Hayward Gallery, as making the works more accessible by expanding their audience was seen as an opportunity to further liberate women. It is important to note that

¹¹⁹ The other two sections included in the exhibition were 'Feminism and Photography' curated by Angela Kelly and 'Photographic Truth: Metaphor and Individual Expression' curated by Paul Hill.

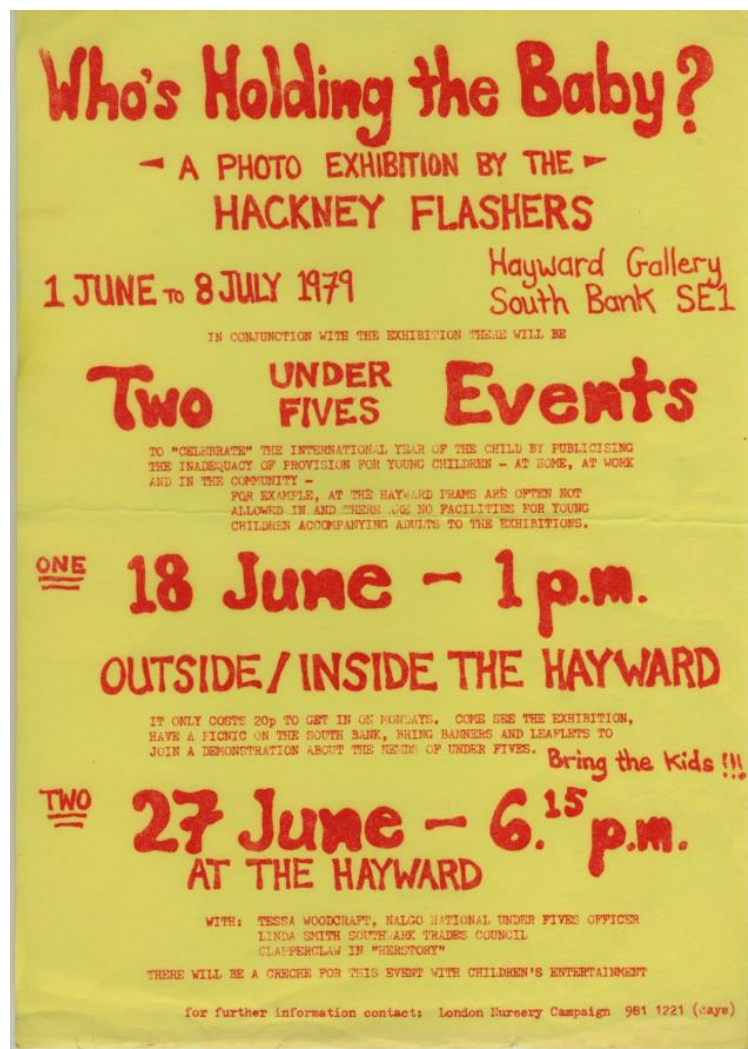
¹²⁰ Griselda Pollock, "Feminism, Femininity and the Hayward Annual Exhibition 1978," *Feminist Review*, no. 2 (January 1, 1979): 37-8.

¹²¹ Sally Greenhill, in discussion with the author, February 18, 2014.

¹²² Liz Heron, in discussion with the author, February 17, 2014.

despite showing at the Hayward, the collective continued their efforts to extend their work beyond the art world. For example, the leaflet shown in Figure 16 illustrates an effort by the Hackney Flashers to welcome mothers and children. Greenhill, however, would not compromise her politics. She left the collective at this time due to strong beliefs that the collective should not collaborate with established institutions. Greenhill's choice to withdraw membership of the collective is evidence that political beliefs were held as a high priority for feminist-radicals.

Figure 16



The Hackney Flashers, poster advertising *Who's Holding the Baby?* in the exhibition *Three Perspectives on Photography* at the Hayward Gallery, 1979, ink on paper.

Photograph ©HackneyFlashers.

Since showing at the Hayward Gallery in 1979, the Hackney Flashers have been a part of a number of exhibitions held at art institutions internationally, almost exclusively within the last ten years. This indicates that a growing number of museum professionals are interested in exhibiting the photographic works of the Hackney Flashers. But what does it mean when political-based ‘non-art’ that was deliberately exhibited outside of the boundaries of the art world now gets exhibited within mainstream institutions? And what do we have to gain from viewing this work in an institutional setting today?

It is important to note that only in recent times has there been a recognition of the contribution made by radical-feminist artists by established institutions. Frizell notes this shift in her research, describing it as “an emerging appreciation of the complex meanings of feminism”¹²³. In my interview with Liz Heron she commented on this topic:

“It's encouraging that there's interest in our work. How what began as a very serious agitprop project, where we did not think about what we were doing as art, has then ended up in Hayward, and then subsequently in the Reina Sofia. Categories have changed from our intentions to what became of the work--but this is often true with photography—it crosses different categories.”¹²⁴

Nearly forty years have elapsed since the Hackney Flashers first produced their photographs, and this has provided a degree of historical distance from the political issues and climate which informed their work. The politics that informed the Hackney Flashers work are no longer current, and thus the exhibiting institution is able and encouraged to exhibit the political history along with the photography. As a result, many feminist radicals (including Sally Greenhill) now find the gallery an acceptable exhibition space for radical art of the time¹²⁵.

Much can be gained from exhibiting the Hackney Flashers works in the gallery. By showing these works internationally in large public institutions, curators are preserving the history of the Hackney

¹²³ Frizell, “Representations of Specific Concerns,” 283.

¹²⁴ Liz Heron, in discussion with the author, February 17, 2014.

¹²⁵ Sally Greenhill, in discussion with the author, February 18, 2014.

Flashers, as the public is able to view their photography as exemplary of the political atmosphere of the period. However, what is at stake by exhibiting the collective's photographs in established institutions is still important to address.

By placing the Hackney Flashers photographs into the art gallery, it allows for them to be critically analysed for their formal and aesthetic qualities. This can be problematic as it implies that the collective was concerned with artistic merit, when in reality the formal qualities of photography were not greatly considered. Many members of the Hackney Flashers never had formal training in art or photography, often leaving their work to look 'amateurish'¹²⁶. This is a problem that exists beyond the work of just the Hackney Flashers, as feminist artists of the time never aimed to gain recognition from established institutions through their works¹²⁷. Therefore, there exists no justification from a feminist point of view to assess feminist photography on merits that did not exist within the genre¹²⁸. Instead attention needs to be paid to what these women chose to photograph and how they photographed in order for us to observe the limits that existed within the genre. Only then can the photographs be judged for what they aim to show and say¹²⁹. Therefore, when the Hackney Flashers work enters an institutional setting it is important for curators and critics to not strongly judge the photography on formal or technical aesthetics. Rather, they must have in mind the intentions of the genre. In the case of the Hackney Flashers, particular attention should be paid to how the medium of photography was used to document and express feminist political concerns within the working class community of Hackney.

¹²⁶ As learned through oral histories conducted by the author.

¹²⁷ Frizell, "Representations of Specific Concerns," 247.

¹²⁸ Fiona Carson and Claire Pajackowska, *Feminist Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 107.

¹²⁹ Ibid

Conclusion

Collectives are often hard to discuss definitively. However, in order for museum professionals to best represent the collective and its work, institutions should be made aware of certain details and topics of concern surrounding the Hackney Flashers. As we have learned, the Hackney Flashers are representative of their time in both photographic and feminist history. The Hackney Flashers did not work in a vacuum but existed amongst many radical collectives, activists and feminist artists—many of whom expressed their political ideology through creative visual mediums in non-traditional spaces. The collective was not as concerned about the fine technical skills of photography, as they were about using the medium to educate the public about social inequalities and women's oppression in the community of Hackney. It was the women's original intentions to display their photographic works as a collective as opposed to individual authorship, and this is something that institutions should be made aware of when displaying and archiving materials associated with the group. Today, there does not exist an extensive amount of literature on the collective; however this may change as the Hackney Flashers increasingly gain exposure through works being exhibited in large institutions. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to serve as an information resource for future academics, curators, archivists and researchers.

Appendix A
Interview Transcripts

Helen Grace
Oral History on the Hackney Flashers Collective

Interviewed by Julie Dring
April 10th, 2014
Email correspondence

Helen Grace was a member of the Hackney Flashers from 1975-76. Over the last 30 years, Grace has published widely in the field of art, cinema, photography, cultural studies and education. She is now an award winning filmmaker and new media producer. She is the founding director of the MA Programme in Visual Culture Studies at the University of Hong Kong. She currently works as an Associate Professor for the Department of Gender & Culture Studies at the University of Western Sydney.

JD: When did you first join the Hackney Flashers? Were you a founding member or had you heard about the existing group?

HG: I joined the group in late 1975, when I was living in London. I think I first read about the group in the feminist magazine *Spare Rib*, where I was volunteering (I'd been editor of a student magazine at university in Australia & had production skills¹³⁰). I'd been doing socially-engaged photography in Australia and working with unions before coming to the UK, so I had things in common with the aims of the group. I contacted Jo Spence (by postcard I think) and was invited to a meeting.

JD: From what years were you a member of the collective?

HG: I was a member from late 1975 to mid-1976 when I returned to Australia to live.

JD: What was your main role within the group? Did you have a key focus area or were the roles more fluid and changing?

HG: I worked on the Child Care project, photographing in community childcare centres in Hackney in winter 1975-6 & in spring 1976. That work became part of the *Who's Holding the Baby?* Exhibition that was first shown in 1978, I think (by which time I was back in Australia, holding a baby of my own and working on community childcare projects here). I don't know if any of my images were used and because it was a collective and we believed in collective ownership, the negatives I took were left behind with the group when I returned to Australia. I don't remember clear roles in the group; everything was very fluid at that time.

JD: Were you a member of the Hackney community?

HG: No, I lived in Compton Terrace in Islington, in a room in the house, where Julia Vellacott lived (she was then working as an editor at Penguin). This wasn't so far from Hackney, and I spent quite a bit of

¹³⁰ I later wrote a feature on Australian women's health centres for them (*Australian Womens' Health Centres* (*Spare Rib* -U.K., August 1978) and they also used some photographs I'd taken at the annual National Women's Liberation conference in the UK in 1976

time in Hackney because, if I remember correctly, An Dekker had a studio in Hackney & we had some meetings there.

JD: Do you recall how the group came about developing their mandate? Was this something that was developed over a period of several years or was there a clear focus for the group from the beginning?

HG: I wasn't there at the beginning, but in the time I was in London--there were lots of meetings, lots of discussion; this was a very dynamic time – pre-Thatcher, there seemed to be a tremendous amount of debate about culture and politics. It was especially a place where debates about the image came to the fore – and especially 'images of women' in advertising. Photography was a focus, and community photography in particular. This is what interested me – the way that debate about the nature of photography and its relations to power was foregrounded. The impact of the British New Left on cultural questions in the UK was the background to these new debates about women, labour, childcare that feminism forced on these previously unexamined aspects of life and struggle; Birmingham School cultural studies was just emerging and film theory (Screen) was in its heyday. There was a real force to these debates that the group embodied in its take on photography, its mix of photojournalism, illustration, design and community activism (rather than 'theory' as such) and its attention to women's lives: how to work, how to balance the demands of childcare and femininity in general.

JD: What was the mandate of the group from your perspective?

HG: In retrospect, I don't remember a clear mandate; it was strongly and decidedly a socialist-feminist group and it was community-based rather than institutionally-based and its members were not academics, (but they were not anti-academic or anti-intellectual – there was much more connection between academics and communities then).

JD: As I understand, the collective's first project began with the exhibition *Women and Work* (1974) which was produced for the Hackney Trades Council. Can you discuss some of the major political issues that motivated the collective to focus on the neighbourhood of Hackney, London?

HG: The *Women and Work* show happened before I joined the group, so I can't really comment on it. I remember some of the images that had a big impact on me because of the way that the contradictions between production and consumption were so clearly expressed. I'd already participated in TUC rallies for International Women's Year & in Australia I'd been involved with unions before coming to the UK.

JD: As I understand, one of the collective's main inspirations was the photographic montages of John Heartfield due to his ability to draw up political messages out of appropriated imagery. Do you recall other reasons that drove the collective towards the photo-montage aesthetic? Are there any other artists or figures that you would say the group received inspiration from?

HG: Certainly photomontage and its history were key reference points as was the whole tradition of documentary photography and the desire to 'interrogate the image'. Styles of sensationalist photojournalism that was disengaged from communities and in general the Time-Life or Sunday Times style of aestheticization of struggle for the delectation of middle-class Western readers was challenged. The photomontages of the *Women and Work* exhibition specifically drew attention to the ways in which in the colour supplements of the broadsheet 'quality' newspapers (and there were 'quality' newspapers and journalism at the time) you would have juxtapositions of advertisements for luxury consumer goods

alongside stories of destitute people displaced by conflict and violence in, say Africa. These contradictions were a form of photomontage themselves and so this was something that many artists were playing with at the time. Victor Burgin for instance, but also conceptual art in general. I remember an exhibition that had a big impact on me in those years: *Women & Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry* by Margaret Harrison, Kay Hunt and Mary Kelly at the South London Art Gallery in 1975. The mood of the time was reflected in magazines like *Camerawork*, from the Half Moon Photography Workshop and the sheer force of black & white and of documentary photography in general; there was a search for alternatives to 'decisive moment' photography and a challenging of a whole tradition of documentary photography that photo agencies like Magnum circulated. Roland Barthes' critique of *The Family of Man* was very influential and there was a search for alternatives to the Museum of Modern Art's shaping of what photography was and how it could be used.

JD: When did you leave the collective and what was your reason for leaving?

HG: I left in July 1976 because it was necessary for me to return to Australia. I didn't want to go, but there were personal reasons that made it necessary to return and in fact, London was the place where I realized for the first time that I was a colonial subject and that I didn't really belong in the UK and that there was work to be done where I came from that I could do.

JD: If there is any additional information that you would like to include about the history of the Hackney Flashers, I welcome you to include it here.

HG: Actually I think that colonialism was not really examined at the time; it was something that was outside of the UK, but to travel to London for Australians like me was a kind of settler-colonial rite of passage, where we encountered class and our own place in the world. But in fact, Australia was politically more interesting at that time because the election of the Whitlam government in 1972 had totally transformed the place socially and there was really much greater freedom there and more support, as well as the possibility of greater participation and ability to make real change - even if the quality of intellectual argument and the opportunities to participate in global debates is always greater in imperial centres. That is the privilege of empire. But the heaviness of history and tradition in the UK seemed to weigh everything down – and certainly still weighed on us in how we regarded ourselves in colonial contexts. (This was a time when huge numbers of Britons were still immigrating to Australia on assisted passages paid for by the Australian Government – over 1.5 million Britons emigrated in the post-War period, so this was the other side of immigration in the UK. But these are all bigger questions beyond the scope of this).

Although I was only a member of the Hackney Flashers for a short time, so short that I can hardly be remembered as a member of the collective, nor make real claims about my involvement, it totally changed my life; those few months of dynamic activity and activism and the focus of this group of women completely transformed my way of thinking about the image, about photography, cinema and the world. I encountered a burgeoning of radical thought, in the heyday of Euro-communism, before Marxism and psychoanalysis became somewhat stultified within universities; it was the most valuable period of my life in terms of learning and it shaped everything I've done subsequently.¹³¹ Above all it

¹³¹ My new book for example *Culture, Aesthetics and Affect in Ubiquitous Media: The Prosaic Image* (Routledge, 2014) was shaped in those days in my encounter with the nature of popular photography.

taught me that thought circulates in an organic way and that the best work is often done in contexts where support doesn't exist very much but where commitment does.

end of interview

Sally Greenhill
Oral History on the Hackney Flashers Collective

Interviewed by Julie Dring
February 18th, 2014
Greenhill Residence
London, UK

Sally Greenhill was a founding member of the Hackney Flashers in 1974. She's worked as a professional photographer for the past 40 years, taking photos for publications such as Spare Rib Magazine. She is the co-founder of the Sally and Richard Greenhill Photo Library in London, UK. Greenhill currently resides in Hackney, London.

JD: When did you first join the group and were you a founding member?

SG: Yes, pretty much. I was there at the first meeting, let's put it that way. I didn't call the first meeting but I was there.

JD: And were you working with Jo Spence and Terry Dennett?

SG: That's right.

JD: At Photography Workshop?

SG: No, we were all separate.

JD: Were you working at the Whitechapel Gallery?

SG: Not at all, I'm a photographer. A freelance photographer.

JD: Do you remember what years you were a member of the collective?

SG: Only the first 2 or 3 I think, I don't remember what years they were.

JD: Were you apart of the second exhibition, *Who's Holding the Baby*?

SG: Yes, I was. But I took issue with them putting our exhibitions up at the art gallery at Hayward. A lot of people felt uncomfortable about it in the group, but they wanted to go ahead with it and I didn't so I left.

JD: What made you feel uncomfortable?

SG: I was very political at that time. And it just felt completely wrong to me. The exhibition wasn't intended as an art object. It was intended to help women in their work and with their children. That was its purpose. It was inappropriate for it to appear in an art gallery and that's how I felt. I don't now. I did then.

JD: Would you say that you described yourself more of a photographer/social activist at the time rather than an artist?

SG: Definitely. A social activist or a photographer.

JD: What was your main role in the group? Were people's roles fluid and changing or were you specifically the set photographer for the group?

SG: No, we all did everything. We created the exhibitions by talking around the table. By figuring out which things were important--that were hard for women, and which areas those were in and then how they could be illustrated. One of us would get a commission to go follow such-and-such a person, or such-and-such a nursery or whatever it might be--a demo.

JD: From an aesthetic point of view, you have your own style as a photographer, but were you specifically influenced by John Heartfield or Victor Burgin, or others?

SG: No, my husband taught with Victor Burgin. He's not here today. But no, it was all earlier than that. It was all those early chaps—Dorothea Lange, Cartier-Bresson, Marc Bordin— and I thought Snowdon was pretty good actually. For a while in the early 60s he was a photographer on Sunday Times.

JD: So those were your personal influences?

SG: And also my political influences.

JD: Can you discuss some of the main differences between the first project, *Women and Work*, and the second project, *Who's Holding the Baby?*, how the second one was put together or how things got worked out?

SG: Well I think we came across the nursery in Hackney in the course of doing the first exhibition. They all raised constantly that their main problem was childcare, and the expense of it. That's a joke now, because it's about twenty times as much. But we figured that was the main thing--the main trouble. And that that's what we should focus on, and do another exhibition on that.

JD: I read in the comments book for *Women and Work* that something that was missing, or not focused upon was women's work in nurseries and child care. Was this what led to this?

SG: I don't honestly remember too well. There was a very forceful, nice woman at the nursery and she kind of crystalized our thoughts about it all. I think she agreed to help us, to give us free access to the nursery and to talk to all the people that used it. So I think it went from there.

JD: *Domestic Labour and Visual Representation* - I haven't been able to find a lot of information about this project. Was this an extension of *Who's Holding the Baby?* Or were you not as involved with this one as much as a photographer?

SG: I think most of us were photographers. There was a cartoonist. It was all kind of experimental for us. I think I had more experience with putting on exhibitions because I had done it for my society that I belonged to. So physically, how one could make an exhibition....most people just put up prints on the wall in those days. We all just had our own experience. We took it from there. There were some people who were more theoretical, not all photographers, but a couple of them were serious philosophers. There was a cartoonist. You're not supposed to say cartoonist, are you?

JD: The illustrator?

SG: Yes.

JD: Christine Roche?

SG: Yes, that's right. Let's see now, Maggie was a photographer. I was a photographer. Michel Ann did a bit. Liz didn't do any, really. She was interested in the subject and wrote about it. Christine was an illustrator. She's got an exhibition on.

JD: I talked to her through email a little bit. She's very busy right now, getting her exhibition together.

SG: It's down at Trafalgar square, St. Martin in the Fields, the church.

JD: I'll have to check that out.

SG: I'm trying to think where I have an invite to the opening. It may be that it starts just as you go. I can check it. I can email you. There were a couple of others that were very important. An Dekker - she died last year. She was very good at assembling pages and putting text together. We were all completely ingénues at that sort of thing but we learnt on it. And I don't think we did too bad. It looks a bit amateurish now, but for that time they were quite good.

JD: Did An Dekker work on both exhibitions?

SG: I'm not sure if she worked on the first. She worked on the second, but I think she did.

JD: We talked about how you left the group--

SG: I left at the time of the Hayward show.

JD: There were members coming and going, especially between the first exhibition and the second exhibition - do you think this had positive or negative impact on the group?

SG: It was usually pretty positive I think. I don't think it was a terrible problem. There were some falling outs over the Hayward. That was really the only rough period that I can remember. Before that, it was all fine. I mean, we were all very busy and I had kids and it was all very hard to get things done. But, I remember a couple of people leaving. The problem is that I was in other groups as well, so I have trouble remembering what we were doing.

JD: I was reading in Val Williams' book, that your later photography showed the women's movement in a more positive light--in their activism. Can you describe how your photography changed from how the women were portrayed, I don't want to say in disparity, but how it showed how to help them out of these social situations. Did your photography change in that kind of way in the early 80s? It talked about showing women as activists, and more powerful--

SG: I was already doing that. Quite a nice illustration actually, is that my husband was in photographic school with me, and when we set up our library we called it Richard and Sally Greenhill. And then after a while, I got a bit fed up with that. People always treated me as his assistant and him as the main person. And I said, "Well why don't we change our names and call ourselves 'Sally and Richard Greenhill'?". But actually, that didn't make as much difference as I hoped. So in the end I felt I wanted to put my name on my pictures and his name on his pictures. And that's what we actually did in the end. We were still combined as the photo library. I remember Maggie Murray said to me, "You think that's funny--my husband wasn't even a photographer! He'd come and help me put up the lights and people would turn to him and ask him his opinion". It drove her mad as well. It was more this kind of framework in which photographers were seen. I never had a problem with the work itself.

JD: Did you ever have any association with *Spare Rib Magazine*?

SG: Oh yes, I took pictures for them.

JD: You've recently been getting together with members of the Hackney Flashers to launch the website--

SG: A couple of things have come up, like you. I don't know if they told you about it, but we've discovered that in Madrid at the Reina Sofia Museum had a show with pictures we knew nothing about. So that kind of woke us all up a bit. They went and interviewed Terry. And actually, Jo Spence had very little to do with the Hackney Flashers apart from setting it up. He was crazy about Jo Spence, and he kind of saw Hackney Flashers as something in her own pocket. We didn't want that to be true, because we had been a collective. That made us take notice and get in touch with Reina Sofia and a couple of other people who had come since asking for the history. We have a website now.

JD: A lot of the literature I've read, have said it was an extension of Jo Spence--but the more research you do, she was just one member of the collective.

SG: It was Terry's misunderstanding. He wasn't a member either. He just saw Jo as a huge person, and she was fascinating. But we weren't in her pocket, we were independent.

JD: So before you contacted the Reina Sofia, and a couple of researchers have contacted you lately, did you get anyone approaching you - researchers, curators, galleries, in the last 30 years before that?

SG: Not me. If they contacted anybody it would be Michel Anne. She seems to know more about us than any of the rest of us. Maggie too, but she's very busy.

end of interview

Liz Heron
Oral History on the Hackney Flashers Collective

Interviewed by Julie Dring
February 17th, 2014
Heron Residence
London, UK

Liz Heron was a member of the Hackney Flashers from 1976 until 1980. Born in Glasgow, Heron moved to London as a young adult. She began freelance writing in the late 1970s and continued to work as a freelance journalist for over 15 years. Since Heron has stopped worked as a journalist, she has published several fiction and non-fiction books. She currently resides just outside of Hackney, London.

LH: We got together again as a group, which we did a year and a half ago. We started to build up some kind of chronology to relation to the various conflicting chronologies there seems to be --from different articles to different posts on the internet. It took some time to do that. We had to look at old diaries and confer with each other about who was at each meeting and then look at the minute--our minute book which had some detail but not all or total information about a meeting. We then discovered that there had been some errors perpetuated. I wrote this piece in *Photography/Politics: II* that you may have read. I had something in there that was erroneous because I had been given the information by another member of the group who had been in the group since the beginning and I wasn't. So we ironed out a few of these discrepancies. It's a lesson. It's a good lesson on how even oral history, within living memory, can go all over the place.

JD: Who has the minutes book now?

LH: The minutes book--we have it. I can't remember who has got it. We've used some pages from the minutes book on the website. It hasn't yet launched but will be soon. You'll find an awful lot on the website that will be more detailed.

JD: So you decided to launch a website?

LH: Yes, because we found out that there was lots of discrepancies in our story and also that there was material that had gone to different sources. We wanted to sort those things out so we started meeting again in August. This all came about because someone else who was doing a thesis got in touch with us about where this material was. So it's thanks to your generation, roughly your generation or researchers that we have discovered what's happening with our work--with our story. And we got together again. We decided that the best way to deal with it all was to set up a website to tell the official story.

JD: Do you remember what years you were a member?

LH: I joined in 1976, which is when the *Women and Work* show had already been done and people began to talk about what the next project would be. 'Childcare' was suggested. Although I was in touch with people from Flashers before, but the first meeting that I went to was in 1976.

JD: Were you involved with the Photography Workshop or *Spare Rib Magazine*?

LH: Both, in fact. Quite a lot of us were. Photography Workshop - I was on the editorial board of *Camerawork*. Jo Spence worked at the Half Moon Gallery where *Camerawork* was based, and she and Terry constituted Photography Workshop. I was involved with Photography Workshop simply in the sense that there were no other members of it, but I was working with Jo at the Half Moon, and on *Camerawork*. I did some work on I think it was a 'day workshop' for teachers and people involved in education. So they were all kind of meshed in some extent--but Photography Workshop was separate from the Flashers.

JD: And Spare Rib Magazine?

LH: Yes, I started taking pictures and writing for *Spare Rib* in, I think, 1977.

JD: So, a little bit after. You mentioned that you weren't a member from the start. I read that there were 9 women that started the group, and 2 men--who I am assuming are Neil Martinson and Terry Dennett?

LH: Yes, but they didn't start the group. They came to a couple of meetings. I think you have to look on the website really to confirm. We've worked out the chronology, and the details of who was there in the beginning and how it came about. So that's on the website. And that's based on our own records--our own memories. We consulted one another to confirm those things. So, they were involved, yes. I think Neil Martinson because of his involvement with Hackney Trades Council--that was how the *Women and Work* exhibition came about. And Terry because he was Jo's partner, I suppose, came along to one of the meetings--one or two. Again, this should be verified through the website.

JD: When are you launching the website?

LH: It's more or less ready to go, but we're having a meeting on the 26th to finalize--and then it should be launched. I think it's something in the air that there are so many young women of your generation who are interested in ours.

JD: What was your main role within the group?

LH: We didn't have distinct roles. We just pooled our resources and our skills, and also learned from one another. I did a bit of photography. I had been taking some pictures and learning some dark room skills from a friend, a male friend. Well there were a couple of them, one of whom knew Jo, which is how I came to be introduced to Jo, and then other people. Jo had been a professional photographer, as had Sally. Well Sally still is. Sally has had a very long career--the longest of all of us as a professional photographer. Maggie too, had been a professional photographer too for a number of years. And then there was Christine, who was an illustrator. We did all sorts of little workshops, both for ourselves, and for other people. There was one evening where we tried to learn how to draw. We wanted to experience what other people were doing. Mine were pretty basic skills when it came to photography but I started writing. That was something that I could contribute more of, than the photography. So much of what we did was based on our discussions--our ideas. That was really the basis for so much of the work. It was very much a collective. That's very important aspect of what we did. And that we worked in a particular way. It was a part of that period--that there were many, many collectives. I think it's quite hard for younger people now to understand how that worked, because they just don't have the experience of it. And that's why we were anonymous. Which of course is one source of the problems that later ensued. We didn't want to name ourselves; we wanted to be a collective.

JD: *Women and Work* - I've read that it started at the Hackney Trades Council and ended at the Social Feminist International Conference in Paris.

LH: Yes, I think it was. This is just from what I've read and what people have told me. It travelled a lot. It started as part of a trade union initiative, so it went to trade union conferences and meetings.

JD: Were you a member of the Hackney Community back then?

LH: I actually lived in Islington at the time, but just down the road. They are adjacent boroughs.

JD: *Who's Holding the Baby?* - I see that there is an emphasis on documentary photography.

LH: That was a development from *Women and Work*- which was a documentary exhibition with captions. Whereas *Who's Holding the Baby?*, it was clear that there was a lot that you couldn't say. At the time we were all talking about the limits of documentary. We were all looking back to the thirties, to the documentarists but also the way John Heartfield used photomontage, and Hannah Hoch--who's quite connected to what we were doing. We were looking at the way the Avant-Garde in the thirties were using photomontage and other techniques that went beyond the supposed veracity of the documentary image. That was very playful - we experimented with all sorts of things. It was a playful process as well as being education and useful. We used panels, and juxtaposed images.

JD: Were you involved with the construction of the Market Nursery?

LH: No, none of us were involved with the construction of the Market Nursery. None of us had children there or any direct involvement in it but we all were involved in documenting the Market Nursery as part of making that part of the exhibition--and it was over quite a long period of time. I think particularly Maggie, Sally and Jo had particular families, or family groupings, where they followed them over a certain time and took pictures. I, less so--but we all still took pictures of people--besides maybe Christine, who wasn't using photography, but using her skills--but we took pictures, and we interviewed people - a lot! And we went to the nursery a lot, to see how things worked.

JD: I read that there was a controversy at the Hayward Gallery in terms of the *Three Perspectives* Exhibition in 1979.

LH: When we were asked to participate, we had to have quite a lengthy discussion about it. We weren't sure whether we wanted to be involved in the art establishment--to have our work shown in such a place. We saw our work as agitprop, so it didn't seem immediately appropriate to put it in a gallery like the Hayward, so we talked about that. But then it seemed like a good idea, to focus attention. It was part of one of three groupings in the Hayward show, and we were in the Socialist section--not the feminist.

JD: The third project that you worked on, *Domestic Labour and Visual Representation*, I have found very little information about this. I read today at the MAKE archives at Goldsmiths that this was an extension of *Who's Holding the Baby?*

LH: Yes, it was. It was designed as a teaching pack with transparencies and a booklet with text talking about the image, childcare, and all the issues to do with class and women's role.

JD: And it contained some discussion questions, or was it a teaching thing?

LH: It was something to be used by teachers. I don't think it had discussion questions. There might have been. It focused both on social and political issues and on the questions of representation--how you represent these questions and experiences.

JD: When did you stop working at the collective and what was your reason?

LH: I think by 1980, having done *Who's Holding the Baby?*, and the Hayward, I think that there wasn't then the impetus to embark on another project. We met quite a number of times after that. There was a number of mentions of disagreements, I don't know if they're disagreements about our different emphasis as individuals on class or feminism or variety of politics, there were differences between us--as there usually are in groups of collectives. Which is something that is good to recognize and it also may make a group more dynamic when you add these differences. You have to think about your own opinion and your own experience. I think it was also probably more than that. It was a kind of natural ending, after we worked on those two big projects. People were doing other things and perusing other political projects as well as their own work. Some of us did go on meeting for some time after because there was the pack, and then we did a couple of open workshops for people to come along. Some of us went on meeting in kind of political-cultural discussion group. We would go and see an exhibition and then we would meet and talk about the exhibition--we'd go see a film--or we'd read something. There was about five of us that went on doing that for some time.

JD: There's been some recent interest by students my age roughly, but has this been going on since the Hackney Flashers?

LH: We haven't made a record of who has been in touch. I know that some people have been interviewed by people I haven't met. We've met with various different researchers, but probably only the last year and a half. I had someone interview me, she was in an American University--she was Israeli. That was about a year and a half ago. I think before that other people had contact requests of that time. So maybe over the last two years.

JD: I saw the exhibition *Transmitter/ Receiver* showed the work of the Hackney Flashers, and I've noticed more of these shows coming up featuring works since 2011 but not very much in between 1979 and then.

LH: I think it is that time scale--the last three years. I think that it's all very interesting. It's encouraging that there's interest in our work. How what began as a very serious agitprop project, where we did not think about what we were doing as art, has then ended up in Hayward, and then subsequently in the Reina Sofia. Categories have changed from our intentions to what became of the work--but this is often true with photography, it crosses different categories. It's worth bearing that in mind--The CRAD collective, which was a women's collective, were around the same time as ours. I think a couple of people of the Flashers went to the founding meeting of CRAD collective--but didn't stay, so there was some kind of cross connection. They made posters, silk screen posters, which were both agitprop and art. They had a show at the Institute of Contemporary Art a year or so ago. It's worth contextualizing the Flashers in terms of all the other things that were happening women's activist, art, and photography. We weren't the only ones.

end of interview

Christine Roche
Oral History on the Hackney Flashers Collective

Interviewed by Julie Dring
January 19th, 2014
Email correspondence

Christine Roche was a founding member of the Hackney Flashers. She was the only member of the group that was an illustrator by trade. Since her time with the Hackney Flashers, Roche has illustrated several children's books and television cartoon series. She also works as a filmmaker and painter. Roche currently lives and works out of London.

JD: When did you first join the Hackney Flashers? Were you a founding member or had you heard about the existing group?

CR: I was a founding member of the H.F. and part of the collective till the end.

JD: What was your main role within the group? Did you have a key focus area or were the roles more fluid and changing?

CR: I was then an editorial freelance illustrator/cartoonist working for various mags/newspapers/books. My involvement with the Flashers consisted in producing images that Photography alone could not visualize. Also the group felt there was a need for humor since what we were dealing with was pretty grim. At the time I was also part of the Kids Books Group, a feminist/left gathering of teachers/journalists concerned with the lack of feminist and class/race conscious picture books for children. We produced 4 of these published by Penguin.

JD: Do you recall how the group came about developing their mandate? Was this something that was developed over a period of several years or was there a clear focus for the group from the beginning?

CR: The focus of the group was clear from the beginning and needless to say sharpened up as time went on.

JD: As I understand, the collective's first project began with the exhibition *Women and Work*, 1974 which was produced for the Hackney Trades Council. Do you recall other reasons why the collective was formulated and focused on specifically the neighbourhood of Hackney, London?

CR: We chose Hackney because of our involvement with the Hackney Trades Council and a resulting exhibition. Hackney is a large multicultural deprived area of East London with numerous Council blocks, factories and sweatshops with needless to say no child care facilities.

JD: As I understand, one of the collective's main inspirations was the photographic montages of John Heartfield due to his ability to draw up political messages out of appropriated imagery. Do you recall other reasons that drove the collective towards the photo-montage aesthetic? Are there any other artists or figures that you would say the group received inspiration from?

CR: The photomontages and collages were an offshoot of the agitprop culture of the time. Nothing to do with aesthetics: a concept, a bunch of magazines a pair of scissors, done. And glue. And the occasional Graffiti produced in the dead of night--the beauty was that anyone could produce these images. In our

case the material was easy to find since women represented in advertising were mostly tits and bums with the occasional glass of champagne and chocolates. And usually wrapped up over the inevitable. Since the women we portrayed juggled children and badly paid work with no childcare facilities all we needed was to contrast images and words. Economics & Ideology.

One influence was that of Victor Burgin, political photographer and academic who combined text and image to produce highly inflammatory images. Also Peter Kennard, another photographer whose photomontages were highly political in the Heartfield tradition.

JD: I have read that over the period that the collective was together many members had come and gone. Do you think that it was a positive or negative to have an ever changing number of group members? Would you say that there were a core number of people who consistently remained with the group throughout their duration? If so, would you be able to list these members?

CR: People came and went, some were more productive than others. But it was clear that individuals had different needs. For example, some were hoping for a consciousness-raising group. Ours wasn't. Although [we were] supportive of each other, the aim was to produce a solid body of political work. Others joined wanting to learn photographic skills. Of course skills were exchanged but we had deadlines to meet therefore limited time to 'teach'. We also had jobs to go to!

JD: If applicable, when did you leave the collective and what was your reason for leaving?

CR: I have no clear memory of how it all ended. But I'm sure it was amicable. I carried on with my work as a freelancer.

end of interview

Appendix B
Membership List of the Hackney Flashers

An Dekker
Helen Grace
Sally Greenhill
Liz Heron
Gerda Jager
Maggie Millman
Michael Ann Mullen
Maggie Murray
Jini Rawlings
Ruth Barrenbaum
Christine Roche
Annette Soloman
Jo Spence
Arlene Strasberg
Sue Treweek
Julia Vellacott

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