

ence paper, whilst others have received considerably more work than in their embryonic oral form. Likewise, a diverse collection can usefully be pulled together by a strong introduction that offers a synthesising overview of the issues at stake. Again, this is not altogether the case with the introduction to *Photography and Literature in the Twentieth Century*, which, particularly in its opening paragraphs alluded to debates that shaped the field, but failed to reference them in the bibliography. This, it has to be said, is a missed opportunity to frame and ground the volume and indeed set the agenda for future research. Rather, in the introduction, the editors set great store by the fact that the essays in the volume showcase current interdisciplinary research. To be sure, the contributors to *Photography and Literature in the Twentieth Century* are based in a range of disciplinary contexts – from art history and theory, through philosophy to departments of English and American literature. (Given the preponderance of contributors from English and American Studies, it is worth noting, parenthetically, that it was refreshing to see that the essays on Proust, the Situationists and Sebald referred to their texts in the source language.) Similarly, the essays in the volume deploy a broad range of theoretical and methodological approaches, albeit, and as we have come to expect, certain names – notably those of Barthes and Benjamin – crop up consistently, revealing the critical orthodoxies that have come to govern the fields of literary and photography studies. At the same time, however, given the particular cultural focus of the essays, perhaps a more accurate title for the volume might have been *Photography and Literature in Euro-America in the Twentieth Century*.

Andrea Noble

**KNOCK THREE TIMES: WORKING MEN, SOCIAL CLUBS AND OTHER STORIES**

Chris Coekin  
Dewi Lewis Publishing  
ISBN: 1-904587-28-3  
Price: £16.99

Although it is not referred to anywhere in the book itself, *Knock Three Times*, the title of Chris Coekin's ten-year project documenting life at Acomb Working Men's Club, surely comes from the 1971 number one single of the same name by the pop group Dawn. The song, its title, and changing attitudes in British culture towards the style of entertainment that it represents make the name Coekin chosen for his book trebly significant.

The original version of the song *Knock Three Times* was sung by Dawn's lead vocalist Tony Orlando from the perspective of a resident in a New York tenement building who has fallen in love with the woman he hears dancing in the apartment below. To the accompaniment of appropriate sound effects, Orlando asks her to 'Knock three times on the ceiling if you want me / Twice on the pipe if the answer is no'. As well as his own pictures from Acomb Working Men's Club, Coekin reproduces in the book publicity photographs of club circuit performers who have played at the venue, including Rock Bottom, Smile and Shanghai. It isn't hard to imagine that the song *Knock Three Times* gets a regular airing from these acts onstage at Acomb; complete with audience participation. Photographs are silent, but some pictures seem to come with a soundtrack. As I look at Coekin's images of club members seated at drink-laden tables I can hear the crowd singing along and the collective knock-knock-knocks (and knock-knocks) on the tabletops at the apt moments as Rock Bottom perform the tune. The solidarity that the song encourages is also suggested by Coekin's photographs throughout most of the book as similar body language and

gestures are echoed from one image to the next in double page spreads.

Contrasting with this collectivity is the idea of access to the club. Coekin includes a picture of a surly man next to a tattered list of rules headed 'Introduction of Guests. Instructions to Doorman' as well as a snapshot from 1899 of a Mr Rankeillor 'the first member to be barred from Acomb wmc'. Working men's clubs are not open to everyone and certain age-old rules must be followed. In the context of Coekin's book the phrase 'knock three times' seems to imply the restricted and codified entry to such venues, as if you need a special knock on the door for it to be opened to you. Most working men's clubs are affiliated, so if you are a member of one you have access to almost all of them. Chris Coekin's family have been members for generations and the photographer spent most of his childhood in one club or another. This background in working men's clubs and intimacy with the material is vital to the project. As David Company notes in his interview with Coekin at the start of the book, 'Whenever photography is autobiographical, there seem to be two histories in play – the photographer's history and the history of their subject matter...'. But there is a third history in play too: that of the viewer. Many people looking at the book will not be members of a working men's club and so Coekin is effectively signing the reader in as a guest and introducing them to the unfamiliar environment. But the viewer will of course bring with them their own history which informs how they understand what they see.

In the mid-nineties, as Coekin was beginning his project at Acomb, irony was becoming a central stance in Britain. Seemingly as a response to the overwhelmingly uptight politicised 1980s many areas of British culture, from pop music to the mass media to art galleries, were adopting a so-bad-it's-good attitude to the popular culture of the past, leading to revivals of ABBA, the re-emergence of



dodgy soft-porn in the shape of *Loaded*, and YBA's such as Georgina Starr drawing heavily on so-called kitsch in their work. Perhaps inevitably the early seventies, the era of Dawn and *Knock Three Times*, was the period most plundered, represented perfectly by Jarvis Cocker, the Stylophone soloing singer of bri-nyloned Pulp (indeed the lyrics of Pulp's 1995 single *Disco 2000* even quoted the title of *What Are You Doing Sunday*, Dawn's follow-up to *Knock Three Times*). Although this wave of tongue-in-cheek nostalgia has somewhat subsided,

its effects have changed attitudes to the kind of popular entertainment that Coekin's book shows us. Some of the performers might well seem quaint and unintentionally comedic to a lot of viewers; Rock Bottom, Smile and Shanghai for example look like they have come straight out of *Phoenix Nights*. This emphasises an interpretation of the whole book as showing a way of life that may appear to some an amusing remnant of the past.

As such Coekin's book says a lot about the continuing changes in British culture since he

began to photograph at Acomb Working Men's Club a decade ago. Company argues in his introduction that, compared to other institutions, those relating to leisure are the ones least studied. *Knock Three Times* demonstrates that such institutions should not be overlooked; for it is play, as much as work, that reveals our lives.

Stephen Bull

**MAGNUM IRELAND**  
Brigitte Lardinois, Val Williams (eds)

Thames and Hudson  
ISBN 0500543038  
Price: £29.95

image: Erich Lessing, Belfast. *Building an Ocean-liner for the Pacific and Orient Lines at the Harland and Wolff Wharf*. 1958

'When you picture an iconic image, but can't think who took it or where it can be found – it probably came from Magnum'. This is Magnum's explanation of its own importance, and it is rightly protective of the individuality of its photographers. *Magnum Ireland*, following on from an exhibition of the photographs, is testimony to the collective power of Magnum's documentary photography.

*Magnum Ireland* collects Magnum photography in Ireland since the 1950s, and divides the book into successfully discrete decades. Each decade is introduced with an essay by an Irish writer (Fintan O'Toole, Colm Tóibín and others), though with little enough discussion of the photographs which follow. However the book perhaps also reveals that Magnum's belief in the iconic image can overload the social and historical significance of a photograph or series of images. *Magnum Ireland* contains some extraordinary work, ranging from the sublimely beautiful to wittily framed moments. But