

John Brook Interview 1



John Brook, 1973
photograph by David Herwaldt

DH: Ok, before we start the actual interview process, I want to say I called up Steve Trefonides (Tre-FAHN-ah-dees) ... I think that's how you pronounce his name. Is that how you pronounce his name?

JB: In alternate years ... One year it's Tre-fan-EE-dees and one year it's Tre-FAHN-ah-dees — and I don't remember which year this is — but anyway, you can't go wrong. I mean, you can't ...

DH: Well, I gave him a call last week and I talked to him about interviewing him, and he just started talking about some of the things that had gone on. I told him that I was going to interview you this Sunday, and he said that he thought that you were the most terrific eccentric around.

JB: [Great peals of joyous laughter.]

DH: I started worrying for a minute, but then he said that he means it in the best sense of the word, and then he went on to say how you had taken on the world on your own terms and beat it, I guess. (I couldn't write quite as fast as he was talking, so I got behind.) I just wanted to start off with that. Start off with something good.

JB: Well, I'm delighted to have that estimate from a colleague. There's one modification I would like to make in what you said about taking on the world in my own terms and beating it. Is that the way it goes?

DH: That's my interpretation; don't ...

JB: All right.

DH: Don't blame Steve.

JB: All right, but just for the record ... Yeah, on my own terms, yes. I don't really consider it taking on the world. All I consider what I'm doing is fulfilling my function in the world, and it happens that I am supposed to do things on my own terms, as opposed to doing them in some established fashion. But as for taking on the world and beating it ... No, I don't. I have never intended to do that, and I certainly don't consider that I have accomplished that. I'm not trying to beat the world.

DH: Well, probably "succeeding" is what he meant — succeeding at what you wanted to do.

JB: I'm trying to fulfill my designated function in the world, and I hope I am doing that, but I am not trying to overpower

the world. I am not trying to bring the world to its knees. I'm trying to function in the world and do what I conceive to be my function in that world.

DH: Well, ok, that's great. I'm delighted that you told me that.

JB: [More laughter]

DH: I find that very enjoyable. I guess for my first ... well, this is going to sound a little schizophrenic ... I'm saying this for the tape's benefit because we already taped the interview. [But it was ruined by buzzes.]

JB: I hope the tape is grateful for it.

DH: And most of this we already know ... but anyway, towards the end, the questions will begin to get newer, but I guess I'd like to begin where I began before with the history of your beginning in photography, meaning: "How did you get started in photography? Why did you begin photography? What was the impetus? And did you have any early influences (photographically — perhaps the photo-secessionists?) but also anybody who wouldn't be a photographer: painters, musicians, writers, or any kind of artistic influence at all?"

JB: I prefer to answer in reverse order because my memory functions better that way. The photosecessionists ... you mentioned Clarence White [This refers to the first ruined tape] and people of that generation — these people were all unknown to me at the time I started taking pictures, and something I didn't say last time is that they're pretty much unknown to me even now. If you showed me a batch of early Steichen's and Clarence White's and whatever, I'd have a very difficult time identifying them and attributing them, because even now I don't know that much about what has gone on in photography, what went on in photography before I began and what is going on currently in photography.

People are always saying, "Did you see so and so's show?" and I say, "Who's so and so?" because I am just not that well informed about what is going on. At the time I started seriously processing my own pictures (I had been taking pictures since I was 5) ... but at the time I started seriously processing my work and exhibiting it, I was living in Maine and it would have been ... these photographic influences that you specified would have been not only totally inaccessible in those days, which was in the middle 1930s, but I suspect that they're pretty inaccessible now in a small town in Maine. For that matter, there's not that much in Boston. Boston has a Stieglitz collection, which up until

a few years ago was in a state of total chaos, broken glass and frames, and all that kind of thing. So this world of photographic accomplishment was totally inaccessible to me in the middle thirties. I have not gone ... I have not taken very much trouble to acquaint myself with it in the meantime.

As to how I got started, it's ... Photography was one of my father's hobbies and that would appear to be the obvious explanation as to why I began taking pictures, but my father had about a million hobbies: bookbinding, surveying, astronomy, mountain climbing, music, and you name it – cabinet making, model railroad building, large steam models of locomotives, all these kinds of things – and he taught me as much about all of these things as I was capable of absorbing. So the fact that he was a photographer is no more an explanation as to why I am a photographer than it is for why I am not a bookbinder, because, you know, I could have just as easily become a bookbinder on the basis of this.

But the real reason is that I have Neptune conjunct Moon on my Ascendant. This will mean little or nothing to non-astrologers, but it is the real reason why I became a photographer. Of course, what my father showed me was the simple procedures of developing film and taking pictures. He was not an artistic influence. This was something that was already there inside, and the reason that it is there is because that I have Neptune conjunct Moon on my Ascendant.

I did start it as a hobby. I entered a show in New York when I was 13 and won first prize, and the following year the *New York Times* (although I did not win any prizes the following year) the *New York Times* wrote a very long review of the show, and they panned the whole show, but they selected one of my pictures to discuss at great length and cited them as examples of what everyone else ought to be trying to do. I had a great deal of moral support from the start, and I've never been in need of moral support since then. To repeat what Steve said, doing things in my own way has been much easier because people have always liked what I did.

As for influences, it would be musicians, specifically Sibelius, rather than any photographer – and the visual artist who had some influence on me when I was very young was Gordon Craig, a designer of theater sets. Either sketches or photographs of his sets were fairly common in magazines at that time, and they had a very stark and austere quality, which I admired. They were just architectural forms – stairs and uprights and so on, very dramatically lit. That is about the only visual influence that I can specify.

I have always been more interested as a consumer of art. I've always been more interested in music than in any of the visual arts. I don't not go to photographic exhibitions because I think my work is so much better than other people's work, that I don't think other people's work is worth looking at — that's not the reason. I don't go to painting shows and I don't go to etching shows and that kind of thing. I'm just not particularly interested in visual art. But I spend a tremendous amount of time ... I am sure that you've already noticed all the audio equipment around the place ... spend a tremendous amount of time listening to music, and so the time other photographers spend going through books of photographs and going to shows, I spend listening to music.

DH: OK. This is going to be a fairly general question; play with it as you want. What would be the sort of philosophy out of which you photograph? I think it probably has a lot to do with what you talked about — fantasy — in your introduction to your book.

JB: Well I, I just ... Another reason that I don't knock myself out to see what other photographers are doing, what other photographers have done in the past, is that I'm really not terribly interested in photography. You know, photography with a capital P as sort of a compartment of life has no interest — or even as a compartment of art — has no interest for me at all.

Photography as I do it is just merely an extension of all the other things that I do. If I go out walking in the woods and see something that I think is beautiful, then I may want to take a picture of it just because it's beautiful — and if I'm dating a woman that I think is beautiful, then I may want to take her picture [laughter] for the same reason. But the things that I want to photograph are things that I ... that are part of my everyday life and that I consider are of sufficient importance to be worth preserving in the form of a photograph. It is not that I don't enjoy memory as a form. I consider memory extremely important, but ... for one thing, in photography, it is possible to take a photograph of an event in which I am participating and have the photograph represent the event from a different perspective than I see it ... than I am able to see it while participating in it.

Photography is not any more special to me than any of a dozen other things: Russian literature, electronics, trees, women. Photography is just one way of participating in these things, and one way of perpetuating one's participation in these things.

And as far as the element of fantasy is concerned, of course I think that fantasy is a terribly important thing in life. I think the nature and quality of one's fantasies determine the nature

and quality of one's ... what most people call one's "real" life. I don't make that black and white distinction between fantasy and reality. I think that the two are very intimately connected. In fact, I think that they are absolutely inseparable. The fantasy aspect of my photography is also an aspect of my life — just as all these other things I've mentioned are aspects of my life — and they are things that I try to perpetuate, record in photography. Does that ...?

DH: Yeah that gets to it. One thing I noticed about your prints at Carl Siembab's show — as opposed to many of your prints that you have here or in your book — is that a lot of the prints at Carl's were round, and I was wondering if this at all reflected your concern with the cyclical nature of life, or if this reflected at all your concern with astrology, or if there was some other reason for it? I don't know ... I was just speculating.



JB: Well, those are good speculations. There's a much more practical reason than any of the ones you mentioned. Do you recall in Carl's gallery there's a long series of about six or seven pictures, and there are several of the nude couple, and there is one in which the man's back goes diagonally across the page and the woman's legs go at an angle to the man's body? Well, this is the first of my pictures that I decided ought to be a circle. I made a print of it as a horizontal. There is one in the book which is vaguely similar. You see the man's back, and that's indisputably a horizontal. I had it up on the mantle there and someone came in and said that he'd like to buy it, but he thought it should be a vertical. So I tried making a vertical print of it. It is true that the texture of the grass down below was very interesting, but somehow it didn't jell either way. And then it suddenly occurred to me that it was a circle and that the man's body is a diameter of the circle and the woman's legs are radii of the circle. So I cut out a circle and it worked.



I had a large body of negatives that I had not printed. This was about January of 1972 that I made the first circular print and I had taken a lot of pictures between the time I had stopped working on the book and that time, but that was the first chance I had to do very much printing, so I started examining these other things that had been taken in that interval and discovered that a lot of them were circles and that there is even one that is not merely a circle, but a sphere. The two bodies seem to converge at the top of the picture and they converge again at the bottom of the picture and they give the sense that one is looking at a sphere rather than merely a circle, and this quality is augmented by the fact that the bedclothes even seem to

contribute to this circle.

So it was essentially an aesthetic — a visual — discovery, but then having made it, I began asking myself the same questions that you have asked now. But I also had to ask something else: “Why had I never thought of it before?” Because all of my life, I have been putting circles into squares. I started a record collection at about the same time that I started seriously taking photographs. This was in the days of 78rpm, and the records came in albums, and the albums had envelopes — brown paper envelopes — and the record was round, and you put the round record into the square envelope. And I used to have maps of the moon tacked up to the wall of my bedroom, and here again is a circle in a square. One day I made a list of all the things dating back from the time that I began taking photographs that involved a circle inside a square, and the astonishing thing really was that it had taken me thirty years or so to get round to putting a circular photograph into a square frame. There is not a conscious connection with astrology. Oh, then currently ... a reel of tape in a square box.

There’s one picture out in the hallway that didn’t go into the show. This is a self-portrait that I did as a ... almost as a joke. Somebody at one of Carl’s openings asked whether I had ever taken a self-portrait, and I said, sure, I had taken thousands of them, but ... Oh, no ... the original thing was that he said some gallery had proposed the idea of an exhibition of photographs made up entirely of self-portraits by photographers, and then incidentally he asked if I had taken a self-portrait — so that was all the excuse I needed to go out and take another one.

But I decided in this case that I would not have it be a portrait merely in the sense of a visual representation of me, but that it would be a portrait in another way in that the thing would include other representations that are relevant to my life. So the circular form is supplied by one flange of a tape reel, and then in the three apertures of the tape reel there are things that I consider reflect in some way some aspect of my life. One is a couple of bars of one of my favorite pieces of music, the Brahms’ String Sextet Opus 18, and then one of the other apertures has a stanza from Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*, and then the other one has a label from a bottle of champagne, which probably is self-explanatory. Now I have an idea of doing a whole series of these, not of myself, but of people that I know or of people who are in some way important to me, and using a photograph in the ... or perhaps using several photographs ... but also using perhaps letters from the person or things in some way. Well, let’s say in the case of Stravinsky, using a page from one of Stravinsky’s



compositions which I happen to be most fond of. I would regard these other things as additional chapters in quotation marks in an autobiography – the series constituting a visual autobiography and each one a chapter.

Ok, next question.

DH: One thing that I noticed looking at your book: there are books that are at least superficially similar to your book. The one that immediately comes to mind is Wingate Paine's *Mirror of Venus*, but there seems to be a big difference: where *Mirror of Venus*, Wingate Paine's book, seems to concern itself more with mere sensuality. I think your book — this is my opinion, my perception — is into more of a love, a spiritual love, as opposed to the sensuality.

JB: Ah, yes, certainly the sensuality is there, but only as a medium for conveying the spirituality. But the real subject of my book, of course, is the cyclic nature of life that is the derivation of the title from Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, which is also about the cyclic nature of life. The phrase which constitutes the title is taken from a sentence which begins at the end of the book and ends at the beginning of the book, and that was a rather mechanical way of, on Joyce's part, of indicating the cyclic nature of his book.



My book is essentially about the repetition of generations, but of course this cycle is viewed in terms of love in, I hope, a spiritual sense as opposed to the cyclic nature of life as seen, let's say, from a social or political or economic point of view in which a government or a very strong leader comes to power and then is destroyed and then after some time another leader comes along. This would constitute another cyclic view of society, but what I'm concerned with here is the very personal, and, I hope, spiritual cycle of love, not merely between a man and woman, but between, as Coleman points out — I think that's an extremely perceptive and very concise review — but one of the things that he does discern is the intergenerational eroticism which is a very important factor in life and which is something

that most people would rather not confront. Most people take it for granted that they love their children – and one is expected to love one’s parents – but love in that sense is usually construed in a rather much more abstract way than it is treated in my book. And the, you might say, love scenes between a parent and a child are extremely erotic – and this is something that Coleman does perceive – but I also hope that they are spiritual. I mean the eroticism without the spirituality would be pointless.

Such books as the one you mentioned – and there have been several others – strike me as being a kind of miscellany. There is this picture and that picture and then another picture, but I have not discerned in any of these other books any sort of progression or sequence – and my book is intended to be read from the front, the second page follows the first page, and so on. There not only are not terribly many books on the subject of love which are organized in that way, but I don’t think there are very many photographic books at all that are put together on that basis.

DH: Ok. Would you say that your — this is getting back to the fantasy question that I asked about before — would you say that your photographs function as fantasies recorded or as stimulants to fantasy? Or would you say that they function as both?

JB: Well, for me they are fantasies recorded, but I intend them to serve as ... I wouldn’t exactly use the word “stimulant” — I would use the word “example” as applied to other people. This is to get back to my astrological chart again. This is the real purpose and this relates also to what Steve [Trefonides] said and to my comment on what Steve said — that it is not so important what I do — that is, whether I’m a musician or a photographer or a psychiatrist or an astrologer or whatever. That in itself is not so important — and even how significant I become in any of these fields. What is important is the example that my performance gives to other people. So the photographs are intended as ... they are my fantasies preserved and they will hopefully upgrade the fantasies of other people.



I can’t resist saying something a girl said to me at the opening. She was looking at the picture, a copy of which is in the bedroom, of a man holding a girl — and they’re seen from the back and you just see the silhouette of the two figures, and then out in front of them you see a landscape there extending from the porch. And so this girl was enumerating ... she had chosen three pictures that she thought were particular favorites of hers and this one was among them. And she said, “The only reason I didn’t make this my number one choice is that I know that, with my luck, if some guy tried that with me, he would have weak knees and he would

drop me” [laughter] – which is an example of her fantasies getting in the way of her acceptance of my fantasy, my recorded fantasy.

But hopefully from some man seeing this picture, it might never have occurred to him that being alone with his wife in this sort of isolation might have the quality that I hope is expressed by this photograph, and some man who does not have weak knees [laughter] and his wife is not overweight [more laughter] might be conceivably induced to do this. The real function of these pictures is to provide an example for other people to improve the quality of their fantasies and thereby improve the quality of their reality.

DH: I know you do commercial portraiture. I suppose that’s the way you support yourself, and I was wondering how this relates to your personal work. Almost everyone I’ve talked to so far, if they have to do commercial work as well as their personal work, is almost schizophrenic about it, trying to separate the two. In the phonebook by your name it’s got “unposed, unretouched portraits,” which is somewhat unusual. In fact, it is very unusual. I wonder how this affects your work or the clientele that have work done?

JB: Well, the reason the line is in the phonebook is not to draw people, but to repel people who do not want the kind of thing that I do. It’s known as negative selling, I think, or something of that sort. I am not trying to attract people by putting that line in the phone book; I’m trying to keep away the people who really want to go to Bachrach and would otherwise just call up the first half-dozen photographers in the book and get price quotations, and that’s really all they’re concerned about. They think of portrait photographs as being nine-tenths retouching, and they may want an oil painting done on top of the photograph along with it. So part of the thing is purely a negative thing intended to save some of my time trying to explain over the telephone that I don’t make paintings on top of photographs.

But as for schizophrenia, the bipolarity, let’s use that phrase – about taking head and shoulder portraits of people as opposed to the things that I regard as my own work – no, I am definitely not either schizophrenic or bipolar about it. I enjoy both of them, and they are not as separate as many photographers seem to consider is the case with their work. I don’t feel oppressed or degraded by anything done for money – quite the reverse. Many of the things that start out as portrait commissions end up as the things you saw up on the wall over at Carl’s. A very high percentage of those things were commissions. If I were not

doing portrait commissions, if I did not make myself available to take head and shoulder pictures of people or family groups, if I were not available to do this kind of thing – which I happen to enjoy and think I do it well, and I don't think there's anybody else around doing it in quite the same way – then I would not encounter people, who after seeing the other things on the wall, commission me to do things that I choose to put into my exhibits.



You may recall that there is one head and shoulder portrait in the show of a girl whose age people estimate at between 10 and 20. She's actually 4, but if I were not in the business of making head and shoulder portraits, I would never have met this girl – and I consider that a marvelous photograph, at least in the context of my other photographs. There is a round version up here of a picture which is in the show in a rectangular version. I'm afraid that in this case the practical considerations were paramount. I had enough rectangular frames after they finally arrived at quarter past seven the night before the hanging of the show, but I did not have any surplus of square frames. But anyway, this started out as a portrait commission – a head and shoulders proposition.



That girl is two years old. After I had done one roll of pictures, I said to the mother, "You know, this child is so active and so beautiful that it seems a shame to be concentrating entirely on her face. How would you feel about taking off her clothes, and instead of my trying to make her sit in one place so I can take her picture, let her just run all over the place and I'll take whatever I can." So that's what we did. This almost looks to anybody who doesn't know very many two-year-old girls as if it might have been posed, but this was something that she did entirely spontaneously. She was standing in the window ledge here, and then an instance later, you know, she was out in the hallway racing up and down the stairs. Even if I had been able to think of that kind of position, which frankly I couldn't, I couldn't have persuaded her to do it, and in any case, she was just such a hyperactive child that she wouldn't do anything.



There are several other pictures of her in the show. There's one in particular where she appears to be sitting on a stone wall contemplating a sort of dark void, and then on the other side of the circle there is some foliage getting very strange kind of light, and it looks as though she's just been sitting there all afternoon, serenely contemplating this, but what she was doing was vaulting over this stone wall, and she was in that position for about a hundredth of a second – and a hundredth of a second later she was on the other side of the stone wall. These are all pictures that are only possible because as a part of my life I take head and

shoulder portraits.

You may have noticed that there are two blank spaces out on the wall in the hallway, and the last time you were here one of your questions was, “What role does the sale of prints play in my troubled way of life?” I tried to answer, but the reason for those two blank spaces out in the hallway is that since you were here previously, I have sold ... let’s see, one, two, three ... I have sold four prints. I’m not talking about Carl’s gallery; I’m talking about my customers and people who knew me and would not ordinarily go into a photographic gallery, but people who come here and have bought prints of mine. When plans were made to do the video thing, I thought, “Gee, I’d better put something up in those empty spaces on the wall,” and then I thought, “No, I won’t put something up in those empty spaces on the wall because that is the most convincing possible answer to this whole issue.”

During the month of February, I have done one portrait sitting and I have sold four prints — and each one of the four prints that I sold brought me more money than any portrait sitting that I’ve done. Now I won’t pretend that that is customary. I won’t pretend every month of the year I sell four prints for every portrait sitting that I do. You know, in October I’m racing around like mad doing portrait sittings because people are planning ahead for Christmas, and I probably don’t sell any prints off the wall at all — but in this particular situation here’s a ratio of four prints sold as works of art to one portrait sitting. I don’t feel as though it’s a ... I don’t regard this as a chore, as a burden.

The only places it assumes that quality are, you know, two years after I’ve taken somebody’s picture, they call up and say, “I’m going to Europe. Could you make me a couple of passport prints from that negative from that sitting we did a couple of years ago?” I just mail the negative to them and say, “Take them to the corner drugstore and get the passport prints.” I consider that these two activities are not antithetical, but that they are simply opposite ends of a continuous spectrum — and that all the various wavelengths along that spectrum are important and useful. A spectrum has to have two ends, but I don’t consider that this is an antithesis. While we are reloading the video, why don’t we reload the glasses?

DH: I know that you’ve shown at Carl’s quite a bit, and you mentioned last time that you’ve shown at a few other places. I wonder if you could talk about that for a little while?

JB: Well, the main point as far as my showing at Carl’s is concerned is that I was in business before Carl went into business.

He originally started a framing business and then, since there were walls in the frame shop, he figured he might as well hang some paintings on the walls. So he sort of had a painting gallery as an auxiliary to his frame shop. Then the painting gallery got to be important enough so that he gave up the framing.

But in the meantime, I had had something like three shows in Newbury Street galleries. It was my third show that prompted him to ... As a matter of fact, now that we're using proper names, Steve [Trefonides] was one of the painters that Carl showed, and Steve had recently begun taking photographs. When I had my third show in a Newbury Street gallery, Steve thought it would be a terribly good idea for him to have a show at the same time, so Carl gave him a show of his photographs. I continued to show. I had two subsequent shows at the same gallery — the Kanegis Gallery, which used to be in the block between Clarendon and Dartmouth and is now down around Fairfield somewhere. So it was as a result of this that Carl began showing photographs in a small part of his gallery. Then, when he had to move to his present location from — well I don't know, it must have been about his fourth gallery, up in the next block — he decided to give up the painting aspect of his gallery and concentrate on the photographs, which I think was a very wise decision. So I've had ... think this is my ninth one-man show in a Newbury Street gallery, and I don't believe there are any other photographers ... even any other painters who have had that many shows on Newbury Street.

But as for showing in other places — that is, in other parts of the world — I have had shows that most people would regard as being important. I had a one-man show at the George Eastman House, and I had a one-man show at what I refer to as the Fiends of Photography (they call it the Friends of Photography) in a town that I call Caramel (everybody else calls it Carmel), but ...

DH: Take the world on in your own terms.

JB: [Laughter] but anyway, I had a show in Milano in 1952, and then about ten years later in a large invitational show that included people from all over the world. A group of Italians voted to give me a gold medal in Milano, so I have to say Milano has been pretty nice to me. I've never been there. I've never been anywhere outside New England. But I've had shows in New York and San Francisco and Chicago and you name it.

But I don't ... These are no big deal to me. I rather consider them a nuisance because I like to have all of my shows framed. F/64 photographers have such a fetish about white mats. You know, you have a white mat this big and an 8x10 contact print

in the middle of it. It almost doesn't matter what picture, what order you hang the pictures in, because any arrangement of white mats is going to look as good — or as bad, depending on your view of it — as any other arrangement of white mats. But in my case, I consider the pictures to be the important things rather than the white mats. And so in order to achieve that, I try to have the mats be inconspicuous, except in the rare case in that there are a couple in the current show and one up there on the mantel where I consider that the actual limits of the composition are the 11x14 rectangle, and the contrast between the dark shades of the circle and the white are an actual element of the composition, but this is not usually considered to be the case when people use white mats. So some other photographer gets an invitation to have a show, and so he ships off 40 white mats with 8x10 prints in the middle, and it really doesn't matter what they do with them.

I don't know how frequently you go to Carl's shows, but he has show after show of what Barbara Marshall, a photographer who was at the opening — I don't know whether you happened to meet her or not — but she refers to this approach as “sensitive rock photography”, and you get 40 photographs of sensitive rocks, and they're all about the same tonality, and they're all at the same distance from camera to subject. In other words, the scale is the same, and it doesn't really matter how you mount them. You know, you can mix them up any old way. But in my show, it's very critical if you have a picture where there are human figures this size and you've got another picture right next to it where there's just a part of a torso that fills up a picture this size — it's going to look absurd. And then the violent contrasts in tonality; some of the pictures in this show were the proverbial polar bear eating a marshmallow at the North Pole and just the opposite kind of tonality. So either you don't hang these pictures side by side or if you do, you have a special reason for doing it, I mean there is something else about the pictures besides the contrast in tonality that makes them go together. So those seven pictures on one wall were very carefully chosen, and it would not be possible to take a picture from somewhere else in the show and substitute it for one of those seven pictures in that row, because those are all ... the figures are all of a comparable scale, the tonality of the pictures is comparable. If you took a picture from some other part of the show and substituted it for one of those seven pictures, it would destroy the whole thing. I mean it would look insane. So I'm not really crazy about having shows in other cities.

Another reason is that up until very recently— and for all I know he still does it — Ansel Adams ... he has been very kind to

me ... I don't... I've never met him, but he has gone out of his way to say very nice things about me in one of his books. He makes his money from teaching and the sale of prints is, from his standpoint, almost like distributing business cards. He pays somebody else a weekly wage to churn out thousands of prints, and he sells them for \$25 apiece — or he was until quite recently. I persuaded Carl that this is not a good thing. My prints... Well, you saw the prices on my prints but when I have a show in San Francisco and people are used to paying \$25 for an Ansel Adams' print they say, "Who is this guy who's asking \$175 for his prints?" So people who would buy an Ansel Adams' print for \$25 are very reluctant to buy one of mine for \$175, but people will come in here to my place and buy prints. So I don't regard it as any big deal to have a show in some other part of the world and not sell pictures, when if those same pictures were sitting in my studio, I'd be selling them. So, you know, sure, I've had shows all over the place, but I chiefly regard them as a damn nuisance.

DH: One thing that I noticed at Carl's show is that they were all limited edition prints. I was wondering for what reason you sell limited editions instead of leaving it open ended?

JB: Well, one reason is to try to dispel the theory that most people who don't know anything about photography have is that once you've taken a negative, like a cassette tape recorder, you just feed the negative into a slot and push a button — and as many times as you push the button, that many prints come out. For me, making a print is an extremely time consuming and exhausting process. I don't mean by that that I do a lot of fudging in the darkroom, because I do almost none of that. What I do mean is that getting the right contrast and the right density of a print is for me a very difficult thing, and if I spend two or three days with one negative in the enlarger and I go through, let's say, maybe 25 or 30 sheets of paper, and I end up with about four prints which I'm willing to keep — one of which I designate as a reject, but something that I send to other cities when I get one of these requests to have a show somewhere else. The pictures may get destroyed just by shipping it around. I designate one of these four prints as in fact inferior to the others, and consider it a reject, so I send it to a few shows and then burn it.

So that means I've spent maybe three days in the darkroom and come up with three prints that I'm happy with. Well, you know, one's life span and available time are limited. The f/64 boys have it terribly easy because making a contact print is virtually a mechanical process. You have a little printing box set up with about 100 little 7-watt lamps in it, and if the negative

requires any, what in enlarging would be called “burning in”, or something like that, you turn out the lamps in the place where you don’t want so much light to come through. You can set this up another time; you can keep a record of it so that two years later when somebody else — some other klutz whom you’re paying \$75 a week — comes in, they can reproduce exactly this pattern, unscrew the bulbs. It’s no sweat to make a contact print and by an almost mathematical formula get the same results time after time.

But even though I don’t do anything to basically alter the character of the image in the darkroom, it is still terribly difficult for me to get the right density and contrast. I do it all in the developing. I don’t use so-called variable contrast paper, but I discovered when I was a child that there are papers that can be made to work as variable contrast papers. I use them in this way, and it’s all done in the relationship between the exposure time and the development time and the concentration of the developer. Do you want to do that again?

DH: Do what again?

JB: Pull your hair back.

DH: Ok.

JB: For a minute I thought you had a Sagittarius hairline, but Ok.

DH: What’s a Sagittarius hairline?

JB: A very distinct dip in what’s known as the widow’s peak. Well, let’s see, where were we? There are a lot of... Well, in the book, for example, the cover picture on the book ... Sold the last print I made of that ... oh, I don’t know ... five or six years ago, and I’ve just never had time to go back and make prints of it. But if I had one on the wall, I’d sell it — but I don’t have time to go print one, you know. So the limited edition is, as I say, partly an effort to educate, to attempt to educate the public that there is more to making a print than just snapping your fingers. But in my case it is also a very practical thing. The maximum number of prints I’ve ever made of anything is, you know, something like 12 or 15. And when it says on the sign over there, “Edition of 25”, that doesn’t mean that I’ve got 24 more prints sitting here. It means that in my lifetime I won’t make more than 25. The greatest number I’ve ever made of anything doesn’t exceed ... I’m sure 15 is the limit, but I think 12 is more realistic.

DH: How did the book come about? Did you photograph specifically for the book or is it a selection of some of the best prints that you’ve made over a period of time and that you

sequenced and arranged? How do you see the book in the dichotomy — or the spectrum, as you called it— between professional and personal work?

JB: Well, to answer the middle part of the question first, “Is it a selection of my best photographs over a period of years?” The answer is definitely “No.” Yes, I hope that they are some of my best photographs, but, no, I did not arrive at the book by just reviewing 20 years of work and saying, “That’s a pretty good picture and that’s a pretty good picture, and we’ll string them all together.” It started out with no intent that it would be a book. It was just something that I wanted to do, and on some occasions got paid to do, and then about halfway through — if the book took 20 years to do, then we can assume that that means after about 10 years — I realized that there was potentially here material for a book. But there were important gaps, so I made an effort to fill those gaps. I made an effort to take pictures which would cover phases of this cycle of generation after generation that I felt were missing in the material I already had. I did not originally intend that it was going to be a book, and it was only about halfway through that I saw that it might be a book.

As for the last part of your question, “How does it stand in relation to what I do to earn a living, theoretically — and what I do theoretically because it pleases me, but does not bring in income?” I can only reiterate what I said about selling prints — that a majority of the pictures in the book are commissions, and that even among the ones that are not commissions, I could only have taken them by putting myself in a position to do commissions. So that I consider that the book is very definitely, you might say, documentary evidence that supports my statement that there is no demarcation between what I get paid to do and what I want to do, that the area of overlap between these two things is very, very large — and if you conceive of two circles, and you put them together, one on top of the other, they won’t exactly coincide — there will be some slight margin where they don’t coincide — but the area of overlap is enormously greater than the fringes that do not overlap. If I, in quotation marks, retired and let it be known that I was no longer available to take pictures on commission, than I would automatically cut myself off from the most important source of material that I have for the things that I want to do and that I also get paid to do, and that eventually wind up in my exhibitions and in that book, and, hopefully, in a future book.

DH: Ok. This is now switching to the second part of the interview. I’ll probably just ask you one question and give you a lot of

time and a lot a tape to play around with it. The first part of the interview, which is what I've already done, is basically what I asked last time with a few additions and a few deletions, according to what I thought was important. When I talked to Steve Trefonides, he told me a few things about you that I didn't know before — other than that you were an eccentric, which I did know before ...

JB: [Laughter]

DH: He told me about some other things which we've touched on just a little when you were talking about showing at Carl's place, which I'd like to go into in a little more depth, to get you talking about the history of Boston photography as you've been involved, as you've been in it. I guess it mainly concerns about three other people other than yourself: Steve Trefonides, Carl Siembab, and then there are two people that I know Steve was concerned with, but I don't know whether you had any active relationship going on with them at all: Marie Cosindas and Chester Michalik. On the phone, Steve said — these are not exact quotations, my note taking is very bad — that you started him off as a photographer, and that you saw his first pictures, and that you and he initiated Siembab, and that also he described you as the father of all the Boston photographers.

JB: Well, this was very generous of Steve to make these comments, and I'm very appreciative and very grateful. It's perhaps a little bit overstated as far as the metaphorical paternity is concerned. But it is true from a purely chronological point of view that I was ... I started here in 1946, and at that time ... Well, to put it in another way, now that there are ... How many schools are there around here devoted entirely to photography? There must be a half dozen schools of just photography alone, but then there are places like Harvard University, which has an umpteen-million dollar Carpenter Center designed by Corbusier which teaches photography. BU has a large photography department. MIT went to the expense of hiring Minor White to come here; MIT has a huge photographic establishment. The Museum School, entirely through the efforts of one person, Lee Broman, has such an important photographic department that it almost overshadows the painting and the other aspects of visual art. So with all this activity going on now it's very difficult even for me to reconstruct in my own mind what the situation was when I first came to Newbury St. So it is very difficult with the almost universal interest in photography and the universal acceptance of photography as a legitimate activity — a legitimate way of viewing life — today it's very difficult to imagine what things were

like shortly after ... well, just about at the close of WWII when photography at Harvard University was a dirty word. Photography either meant something that was in the daily newspaper or it meant making photographic paintings for purely scientific or recording purposes. The very idea that a photograph had any aesthetic merit in its own right was absolute heresy. I've been told that someone that I've always thought of as Agnes Mongoose — her real name is Agnes Mongan; I have nothing at all against her; it's just an irresistible pun — she's old and very important in the print department at Harvard, and I've been told that even she now accords a grudging acceptance to the status of photography. But 30 years ago — I'm not exaggerating when I say that — in that context, photography was a dirty word.

[DH changes tape.]

JB: So when I rented a studio and put out my sign, I was ... I represented the only alternative to Bachrach and the various imitations of Bachrach. There are thousands of photographers who do high school yearbook classes, and classes of graduating nurses — and all that kind of things — and they're still going. They'll go on forever; there's no end — there will be no end to that kind of market and people to supply that kind of market. There was Bachrach and all of his imitators, and there was me — and there was nobody else in between, there was no other alternative.

It is true, to paraphrase Steve's comment, that I was presenting what I wanted to do: I was not making any concession to Bachrach or Bachrach's clientele. I was presenting the things that I felt that I should be doing, and I just had the intuitive faith that sooner or later there would be enough people who wanted this kind of thing — although there was no visible evidence to support this intuition. I just assumed without any rational justification that sooner or later enough people would turn up who wanted what I had to offer — and as it turned out, that has been true.

So Steve appeared in the early fifties — I think it was about 1952 or something like that. He was a painter, and he saw ... I mean it was obvious to anybody who had the perceptions that a painter has, that what I was doing was very different from what all the other people who were themselves photographers were doing. My second show was in a place which had not been there for a very long time, but he was very familiar with the proprietors, and so he saw my second show on Newbury St. —

which, as it happened, consisted entirely of photograms. There was nothing representational in the show at all. They were all abstractions and they were all unique. A photogram is by definition unique because you do it directly on the paper. This was reviewed in the *Christian Science Monitor* ... It was up at the top of the page and got a very laudatory review from the woman who was then the art critic for the *Monitor* and very widely respected. Steve saw this show, and he came up to see me, and we got acquainted.

It would be exaggerating to say that he was a pupil of mine in any formal sense because I've never done any formal teaching, but he observed what I was doing and how I was doing it, and then he began doing things in his way with, I suppose, some slight influence from me — if only in the sense that I represented the opposite alternative to Bachrach.

Then Marie Cosindas was designer of ... I really don't know exactly what she did; she designed dolls and clothing and she did ... suppose you could loosely describe her as a commercial artist, and I also think it is fair to describe her as an eccentric. [Laughter] She rented a room in what is still Steve's studio on the corner of Dartmouth and Newbury, and after she had been there a couple of years, she rented a space in a building. I think it's number 172, a couple of doors down from here. She had a studio there, so while she was there, she began taking photographs in black and white. They were all pictures of dead things. They were arrangements of flowers — I mean dried flowers — or arrangements of fabrics or that kind of thing. I found them extremely unattractive and I ... they had a certain baroque richness of variety and detail and pattern, but they ultimately were pictures of things that were dead. She benefited photographically from her contact with Steve. Then she began branching out. I forget who the first f/64 photographer was that she sort of became an apprentice to, but anyway, she got into the f/64 approach as opposed to Steve's approach, which is much more spontaneous, and, of course, depends entirely on a small camera, a small film size. Then she made the connection with Polaroid, and those arranged and contrived things in rather morbid — there's a word that eludes me at the moment ... necrotic — colors were admirably suited to the kind of color that Polaroid color then was capable of. So she and Polaroid hit it off extremely well, and the rest is, as they say, history.

I have a very warm, personal regard for Marie. She and I were judges in a color competition out at the museum in Lincoln a couple of years ago. I like her very much as a person, but I disliked her first photograph and I think I've disliked every

photograph she's taken since. I don't in the least resent her monetary success. I think she deserves it — and this doesn't make me envious at all — but I can very truthfully say that I was repelled by her very first photograph when she was completely unknown as a photographer and monetary success was not a factor there at all.

We run into each other very frequently. She lives over at the Prudential, and we see each other very often and are very good friends. I once described my pictures to someone who was a relative newcomer — an observer to the world of photography — and he had come across her pictures and he asked me what I thought of the whole situation. I said, "Well, my pictures are of living things and her pictures are of dead things." And this man said, "It's even simpler than that. Your [my] pictures— meaning John Brook pictures — are alive, and Marie Cosindas's pictures are dead." Well, that is his opinion; it is one that I happen to share. I would rather not be held responsible for having been an influence, even a second generation influence, in Marie Cosindas's photographic career.

DH: She's done a lot of portraits too. That's what I've seen.

JB: Yes, but the portraits all are ... the people are arranged, there is nothing spontaneous, and there is no vital spark in the people. They are simply components in an arrangement of fabrics or dried flowers or whatever. Usually the people are sort of purple and down in one corner or something. The word "necrotic" is extremely descriptive. I don't intend it as a pejorative term, but I think it is simply a description of what she does.

Chester Michalik, who now teaches at Rhode Island School of Design, was, I believe, originally a painting pupil of Steve's. He can be more enlightening about that. Then he got into photography, and I guess his next influence after that was Harry Callahan. Again I like him very much. I think he's a very nice person and I feel great fondness for him as a person, and I think that occasionally he has come up with some extraordinarily fine photographs. As a matter of fact, I wrote a review, something I almost showed you when I was thumbing through the file there. For about a year there was something called the Boston Review of Photography that had very excellent reproductions of photographs by people who were active around here. The editor asked me to write a review of a show — Chester's — down at ... when Carl's gallery was down in the next block. I guess the guy didn't like the review, because he didn't publish it, although he published a thing saying that due to limitations of space and so on, we can't run ... Anyway, he acknowledged that I had written a

review and thanked me for it in print. But, anyway, I do like a lot of his work.

I don't ... I'm not terribly sympathetic to that general direction which Harry Callahan has taken, but there again, as I say, I'm really not all that involved with the photographic world. What other people do in photography is not terribly significant to me one way or another. But this whole thing revolves around what I said originally in response to your first comment that Steve made — that whether or not I am a good photographer or good astrologer or a comparative philologist or whatever ...

DH: Or eccentric ...

JB: Right, yeah ... that is more or less beside the point. What my astrological configurations indicate is that I should be a positive and a conspicuous example, and my own accomplishment is less important than my existence, and therefore example to other people. This does, as Steve has related, certainly appear to have been true within the circle of people that he has mentioned.

Now, there is a totally different influence that has to be taken into account, and which is much more ... whose effect has been much greater from a fairly quantitative standpoint — and that is Edward Weston and the imitators of Edward Weston and the imitators of the imitators of Edward Weston, and so on — and what this boils down to in terms of specific people is Minor White and Paul Caponigro — whom I regard as a very great photographer. I think Paul Caponigro is really a greater photographer than Edward Weston. This other influence began to appear, I don't know, I suppose about 1960 or somewhere in there. Paul Caponigro is no longer in Boston, but for a time he was. He was born in Boston and for a time he was active around here. This f/64 Edward Weston influence has been a great deal more voluminous than my influence. I don't pretend that my influence has been an aesthetic one; it has not. I don't think that I have influenced anybody's style as Edward Weston has done. Edward Weston's influence has been stylistic, and technological people have imitated his aesthetic and his technique. I don't think that that has happened in my case, and I would much prefer that it didn't.

But I've tried to say, in astrological terms, my influence has been a purely personal one — that just the mere fact that I am here, that other people see, "Well, if he can do it, I can do it" — and they do it in their way. They don't become students or disciples of me, they don't imitate my work in any direct sense, but just merely the example of my existence is what is important — and that much I will acknowledge.

But in an aesthetic sense, I don't think that I have any followers in the sense that Edward Weston does. Edward Weston has, I say, second, third, fourth, fifth generations of imitators, and that has not happened in my case — and I would much prefer that it didn't. But I am pleased that Steve considers that my personal influence has been significant, because that is what is indicated in my astrological chart as my real function, and that's my ... that's the way I responded to your initial comment about Steve's comment.

DH: Have you been involved in any of the more formal groups? I know that ... I've heard sort of vaguely about a lot of photographers getting together at Steve's place or over at Nick Dean's place, when he was around, and then there was a group called Heliographers. Have you been involved in any of those at all?

JB: I'm not a groupie, I'm an eccentric. [Laughter] This is something else which is indicated in my chart — that I'm strictly on my own, and this has always been true. I mean it was true by the mere fact of my having opened a studio and put out a sign. I didn't have a studio then any more than I do now. If I can't provide enough lights for somebody to take pictures by, what kind of studio is it? But I let it be known that I was available to take photographs on my own terms, without lights, and this is something that I did strictly on my own. In retrospect, it seems like an extremely foolhardy thing to do, but people usually have some intuitive sense about what their planets are directing them to do, and apparently I had this also. I didn't know it at the time, of course, because it's only in the last five years that I became an astrologer, but now that I am an astrologer, I see that it's all there.

But no, I have conspicuously refrained from joining anything. I'm a member of the American Automobile Association [laughter] because they will come and start your car if the battery fails, and that is the only organization that I have ever joined. Otherwise, I like to say that I'm a member of the Universe, and this is true. I feel very strongly about my very, very small, but nevertheless significant, part in the functioning of the Universe. But my chart indicates that anything I do, I am supposed to do entirely on my own — not in collaboration with other people, not as a part of a group — but as a single individual. This is what Steve means by calling me an eccentric. He is probably not really able to articulate all of the things that I have just attempted to articulate, but what he sees is a manifestation. These are the outward manifestations of what I have been trying to describe —

that my planets indicate that I am a single individual operating entirely on his own.

I have not joined any of these groups. I have not ... In fact, when Skrowegami, which is what Imageworks spells backwards ... When a bunch of photographers got together and founded Skrowegami, they very tactfully explained that they had not included me in this group because they felt sure that, temperamentally, I would not want to be part of this group. After they got organized, they were very eager to hire me to teach at the school, but they were quite sure that I did not want to be a part of the initial organization. Well, they were absolutely right. I didn't want any part of it, and I still don't want any part of it.

The Heliographers was a group of f/64 oriented photographers. Paul Caponigro and Marie Cosindas were two of them – forget who the others were – they rented some gallery space in midtown New York, and then when it became obvious that their concept was going to be a financial failure, they went around urging photographers to join them. It was perfectly obvious to me that they merely wanted me to contribute to the rent, so I said, “If I am so important now, then why wasn't I so important at the beginning?” The obvious reason was that they were collectively an ideological unit: they did things in the same way and had more or less the same approach, and who needs an eccentric in a group like that?

So I have never joined any of these groups either in photography or in astrology or in audio engineering or anything else. As I said, the only thing that I belong to is an organization that will start your car when the battery fail— and that's a very, very mundane and practical consideration that has nothing to do with aesthetics or ideology in photography or astrology or anything else.

DH: Okay. I guess to end up... Last time you read the section from the Ansel Adam's book, and I'd like for you to read that again.

JB: Alright. I'm not only not a member of any photographic organization, but I have never even read a book about photography, and I've never taken a course in photography, and I never, quote, “studied” with any other photographer – so it was necessary for Carl Siembab to point out to me that in this 1970 edition of *Camera and Lens*, which is Ansel Adams' most basic of the ... it was necessary for Carl to point out to me that on page 19 there is a paragraph about me. He only mentions about six or eight photographers by name in the whole book, and most of them are safely dead; most of them are figures from the past. The paragraph is entitled *Purist vs. Pictorialist*:

Edward Weston once said, “I don’t care if you make a print on a bath mat as long as it is a good print.” [JB: My own paraphrase of that expression is: “I don’t care if you make a print on a bath mat so long as it is a good bath mat.” But only an eccentric would be so irreverent.] The so-called pictorialist has been falsely accused of being what he is because he uses fuzzy techniques to try to communicate qualities of other art media. It should be clearly understood that the surface effects are secondary to the deep realizations. John Brook employs soft-focus techniques, anathema to the so-called purist, and yet his photographs have persuasive power and great aesthetic quality. If this is what he visualizes and expresses with the full power of conviction and realization, he stands the equal of all the glossy 8x10 practitioners. Unfortunately, the glossy print often reveals a dull mind and spirit.

The pun in that last line I think is just marvelous, and I think that this is an extremely generous thing for Ansel Adams to include in what is called *Basic Photo I*, because what he is essentially saying is that all the slobs who are taking the course and paying money to go out to Yosemite and have Ansel Adams tell them where to set up the camera and “Okay, now click the shutter”... that this is all pointless unless one has some essential creativity – and anybody who has an intrinsic creativity – even though he does everything wrong according to Ansel Adams, to the techniques and standards that Ansel Adams teaches and upholds – if he has this basic creativity, then he’s an artist, and if he doesn’t have it, then however accurately he imitates Ansel Adams’ techniques, it won’t do him any good.

There is something that I should add to this because ... not so much because it reflects favorably on me, but because it amplifies Ansel Adams’ generosity towards other photographers and towards photographers whose approach is antithetical to his own. As I may have mentioned somewhere along the line, I have never met Ansel Adams. I only vaguely know what he looks like from having seen some famous picture of him. I don’t remember who took it, but one sees it reproduced everywhere. Carl knows him quite well, and he has frequently visited Carl and had supper and spent the evening in Carl’s home. The woman who is largely responsible for having publicized Ansel Adams’ photographs and having created the reputation that he now enjoys is Nancy Newhall. Beaumont Newhall, who is Mr. Nancy Newhall, was

originally the curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, and then ... I don't know whether Steichen usurped this place and Newhall then went to Rochester or whether Newhall was offered the Rochester job and Steichen filled the vacancy – but however it was, Mr. and Mrs. Nancy Newhall ended up at Rochester. Nancy Newhall has been a really rabid proponent of Ansel Adams' work and has written commentaries to all of his books and has been influential in getting the books published, so naturally the Newhalls find my work absolutely repelling. One evening – this was all related to me, of course, because I wasn't there – but one evening, the Newhalls and Ansel Adams were at Carl's. I have made a great many photographs of deer, which I happen to think are extremely beautiful creatures, and gave Carl and his present wife (his first wife died of cancer) as a wedding present. I gave them a 16x20 print of what you might call a portrait of a deer. It's in soft-focus. So one evening the Newhalls were looking around and they saw this soft-focus portrait of a deer and they immediately started into a tirade against me and my work.



After they finished, Ansel Adams said, "Well, you can say anything you want to about that picture, but I would like to be able to say that I had taken that picture." Now I think this is an extremely generous thing for a man in Ansel Adams' position to say in the presence of somebody who has been so instrumental in creating his career about another photographer whose approach is totally antithetical to his own. Although I am not a great enthusiast of Ansel Adams' work aesthetically, I have to admire him as a human being, which I think is much more important, you know? I mean, I'm much less interested in how good a photographer somebody is than how good a human being. For him to make that comment on that occasion in this company and then for him to print this paragraph – which, in effect, negates all of his teaching – well, not all of it, but 98% of it – you know, in effect, he's saying to his pupils, "You're all a bunch of slobs if all you do is imitate the things, just follow the directions that I give you – and that you've got to have some intrinsic artistic ability. And if you do, it doesn't matter what means you use, even if you use means that are totally in variance with the things that I'm teaching." I have enormous admiration for a man who is willing to give that kind of recognition to somebody else whose work is so totally different than his own.

DH: Okay. I guess that's really my last question here, so unless you have something that you just want to say for some reason...

JB: Well, I'll say, or try to recapitulate what I said before, that I

found both your questions and your comments about my work extremely perceptive and ...

DH: [Laughter] Now I'm in league with A. D. Coleman.

JB: [Laughter too]

DH: Well, that makes me feel good.

JB: Well, it was intended to, and you deserve it.

[Later]

JB: Is the tape running?

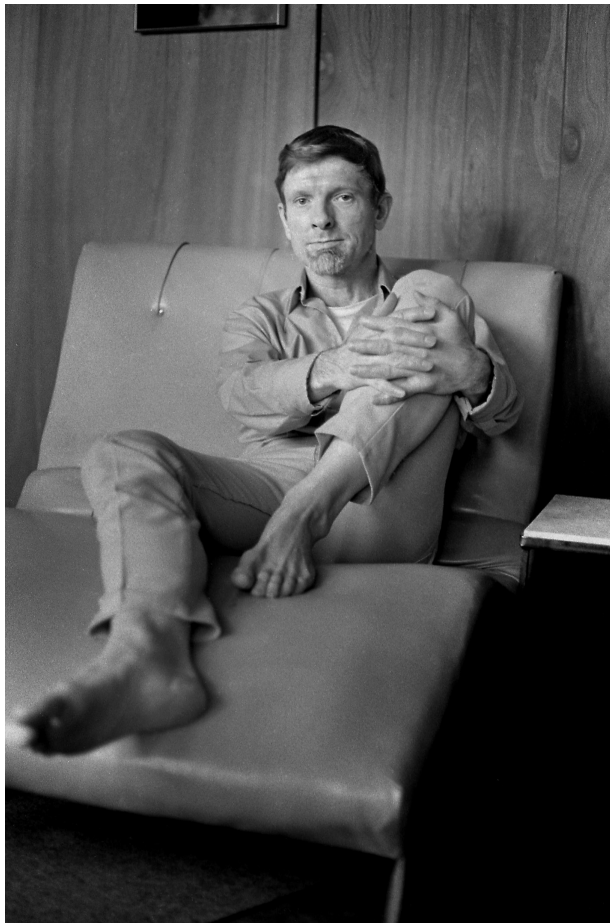
DH: Yeah.

JB: Well, in that case, I want to say that on one occasion I was talking to a group of students and one of them asked me if ... Oh no, one of them said that he had noticed that successful photographers were usually failed musicians, and was this also true of me? And I said yes, it was pretty close, but that he had empirically hit upon an astrologer truth because the same planet relates to both photography and music. What he didn't ... what he was perhaps too polite to say was that successful photographers are usually successful alcoholics. I find myself [laughter] drinking indecently when other people are covering up their glasses. But the reason that I bring this up is that, again, it is Neptune that relates photography, music, painting, alcoholism, drug addiction, religious fanaticism — and most photographers are very, very heavy drinkers — and Ansel Adams is a case in point — and there are so many other cases that I won't bother to enumerate them.

[Later still]

JB: I now regard it [astrology] as a much more important activity than photography or comparative philology or electronics or any of the other things that have previously engaged my attention. It has made a very significant change in my ... well, what the Germans call *weltanschauung* — there is no English word for it— but *one's way of approaching life*. I consider it much more important than any of the things that have happened to me in photography and any of the, you might say, rewards in my photographic career. It is much more important to me than

any of that, and it is in the light of this that I understand my involvement in photography, but more specifically, in what I've said several times in answer to your questions — my example as a human being, my mere existence as a human being is vastly more important than my accomplishment in any of the various fields that interest me. It is my being an eccentric [laughter] that really matters. The fact that Steve described me in this way is really much more important than his saying that I'm a swell photographer or any of the other things. That is really a much more relevant thing in terms of what my planets dictate than my achievement in any of the possible areas. I don't think of myself primarily as a photographer, and I think that concept has colored answers to most of the questions.



John Brook, 1973
photograph by David Herwaldt