

PLAYING FOR BLOOD. The family is widely represented as a source of refuge, of freedom and independence from the alienating experiences of the outside world. But what is the family for? Does it offer the individual a degree of autonomy in his/her relationship with the world, or is it merely a product of its environment, a receptacle for wider social ideas and conventions?

The project *Playing for Blood* was conducted in a former coal mining community on the outskirts of Doncaster, West Yorkshire. The work stands as a critical response to the traditions of documentary photography, enabling those photographed to have a stake in the images they provide rather than merely serving the photographer's beliefs. The connection made in this project between the documentary and the personal portrait image grew out of the personal links I developed with families living in this area during a series of weekend visits, where this work was discussed and researched.

Initially, each child was encouraged to act-out games where they took centre stage over the other members of their family, and where they directed their parents within the role-play games that evolved. These children started visiting costume stores as their games became more sophisticated to help them visualise themselves and their parents as characters. Then, with their chosen costumes and props they acted-out their own domestic dramas for the camera.

The scenes photographed became the starting point for the images presented in *Playing for Blood*. On later visits, the same scenes were re-played in more depth, but this time absent of any costumes and props.

Lighting brings quite an important element to the pictures. The parents partially present in the photographs hold a flash light at eye-level directed onto the faces of their child; so the children looking into the eyes of their parents are at the same time looking

into the light their parents are holding. Although these parents are either outside of the photograph's frame or are obscured by the contents of their home, they are very practically involved in the making of these photographs since they are the light source entering the photograph, at the same time as referring us to a private domestic space we are not witness to.

By drawing on the formal characteristics of portrait and documentary photography, this project explores the intimate play of identification that occurs between parent and child; thus enabling the depiction of childhood memories and fantasies that are often disguised, displaced and repressed within the day-to-day habits and rituals of family life. The scenes depicted in these photographs incorporate the various images and events that influence a child's mental life. The poses and gestures, modelled on the props used and the costumes worn, hint at the origins of these influences – a blending and condensing together of experiences both inside and outside the home, experiences that occur through the private and intimate relationships of family life and through the various forms of popular culture.

By expressing its self-image through the physical and spatial properties of the home, the family creates a set of symbolic and psychological distinctions between internal (private) and external (public) experiences. The value of a private domestic sphere could not be given form and meaning, without a sense of a certain unfamiliar, un-homely public space located beyond the margins or boundaries of the family community.

Although we often have an image of the home as a private refuge from the world outside, this project offers a picture of the home as a space where public and private influences and ideologies intersect.