

Embracing Feminism: *TEN.8 Photographic Magazine* and the Greenham Women's Peace Protest

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The tenth edition of the now defunct magazine *TEN.8* offers reflection on one intersection of the recent histories of feminism and documentary photography in Britain. Published in 1983, four years after the first edition appeared, the issue's content was framed under the thematic title of 'Photography, Peace and Protest'. The cover image of a female protester set solemnly against the Houses of Parliament opens onto a series of advertisements from which the broader cultural scene into which *TEN.8* made this intervention can be readily deduced. Here, alongside a subscription form for *Sanity*, the CND's monthly periodical, is information about a competition co-ordinated by Pavilion, the feminist photo-centre operated by the Leeds Women's Art Programme, as well as details for an exhibition at the independent gallery Watershed in Bristol of photographs of the peace movement taken by Ed Barber. In fact, it was Barber who was both responsible for the cover image and for acting as researcher for this edition of the magazine. His name is credited alongside the larger editorial group—comprised at that time of Derek Bishton, Nick Hedges, Brian Homer, Paul Lewis, John Reardon, John Taylor and Belinda Whiting—on a contents page. On this is also introduced a selection of articles and portfolios that figure, among other things, the insidious relationship that photography has historically borne to technologies of war as well as the role assigned to the medium in Left resistance to nuclear arms in the Cold War period. It is a central photo essay titled 'Greenham Common—A Photographic Response' that is of interest here, foregrounding as it does the proximity of one episode of British feminism to the debates surrounding the political efficacy of the documentary image that the Birmingham-based magazine is, perhaps, best remembered for.

The aims of the article, to 'both tell the "story" of the Embrace the Base weekend held at Greenham in December 1982 as well as examine some of the photographic issues raised', are stated from the outset. The weekend marked one early and significant event in the history of a 20-year occupation of RAF Greenham Common, a proposed site for the contested cruise missiles, by a women's separatist protest camp

established around the parameter fence of the site. Embrace the Base happened over two days, and was the focus of major media attention, covered as it was by both the British mainstream and alternative press. The article in *TEN.8* sought to represent these events through a series of short texts that elaborated the work of various female photographers, including Anita Corbin, Margaret Murray and Jenny Matthews, all of whom were involved in Format, the women's photography agency, which was founded the same year. Images by John Reardon, Mike Goldwater, John Sturrock and Alan Hughes were also published. The complex relationship that photography had to the Embrace the Base action is legible throughout the piece. An image by Hughes details one of many family snaps that had been tied with ribbon to the fence, revealing the symbolic nature of this action that also included mirrors being placed to reflect an image of the base back onto its anonymous military architecture and intricate webs of wool being woven across the land.

Yet these symbolic gestures figured alongside non-representational strategies too. Women cut down fences, blockaded roads and intruded upon land requisitioned for military purposes; a 14-mile human chain that these protestors formed around Greenham over the weekend paralleled the vast organisational networks through which they assembled. Throughout the article, captions are used to reflect upon the difficulties of representing what is described as an entirely 'new' kind of protest. 'One of the reasons put forward for the apparent lack of really successful representations of the fence,' reads one description 'was that perhaps here was an instance of a new form of protest failing to elicit a fresh means of representation from the photographers.' Later on, a single image by the late Raissa Page (1932–2011), showing women dancing on the Greenham silos on New Year's Day—an action that would lead to 44 women being tried before a local magistrate three days later—is placed alongside the printed subtitle 'This is not the end of the story'. Writing on Greenham, the academic and activist Sasha Roseneil once suggested that the protest was grounded in values rather than truth claims. This emphasis, characteristic of a moment in feminist politics and the rich critiques it produced of representation, are paralleled in the article by an attempt to reveal the limitations of the documentary image whilst simultaneously reinvesting in its form. In this way, the intrusion of Greenham into the pages of *TEN.8* demonstrates one of many unacknowledged interactions between feminism and the discursive frame of British photography in this period.

NOTES

A longer paper relating to this research was given at 'Hags Unlimited, Damsels Undistressed: Taking Photographs and Liberties in 1970s and '80s Britain', a research symposium convened by Noni Stacey and the Photography and the Archive Research Centre on 15 May 2015.