

Seeking the Bond Between Social Concern and Everyday Life

*Call miracle self-healing:
The utter, self-revealing
Double-take of feeling.*

The passage is from a Seamus Heaney poem "The Cure at Troy." Doubletake magazine features the poem on the first page of each issue because Robert Coles, the magazine's creator, believes it captures something of the publication's mission.

"Wedding together moral passion and lyrical beauty, the esthetic and the moral," he said. "That's what we're trying to do in the magazine — bring them together in a way that works for the community."

Taking its inspiration from the Depression-era work of James Agee, Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange, Doubletake has spent the last three years of its existence attempting a kind of documentary journalism: narrative pieces about ordinary people and pressing social issues, photography that stands on its own rather than as illustration or decoration, fiction and poetry that offer literary windows into everyday worlds.

"We're interested in the way people live their lives," said the writer Sue Halpern, who is the magazine's editor at large. "And we're interested in looking at that honestly and straight on. We have this idea that documentary perspective is the way to get at a certain kind of truth."

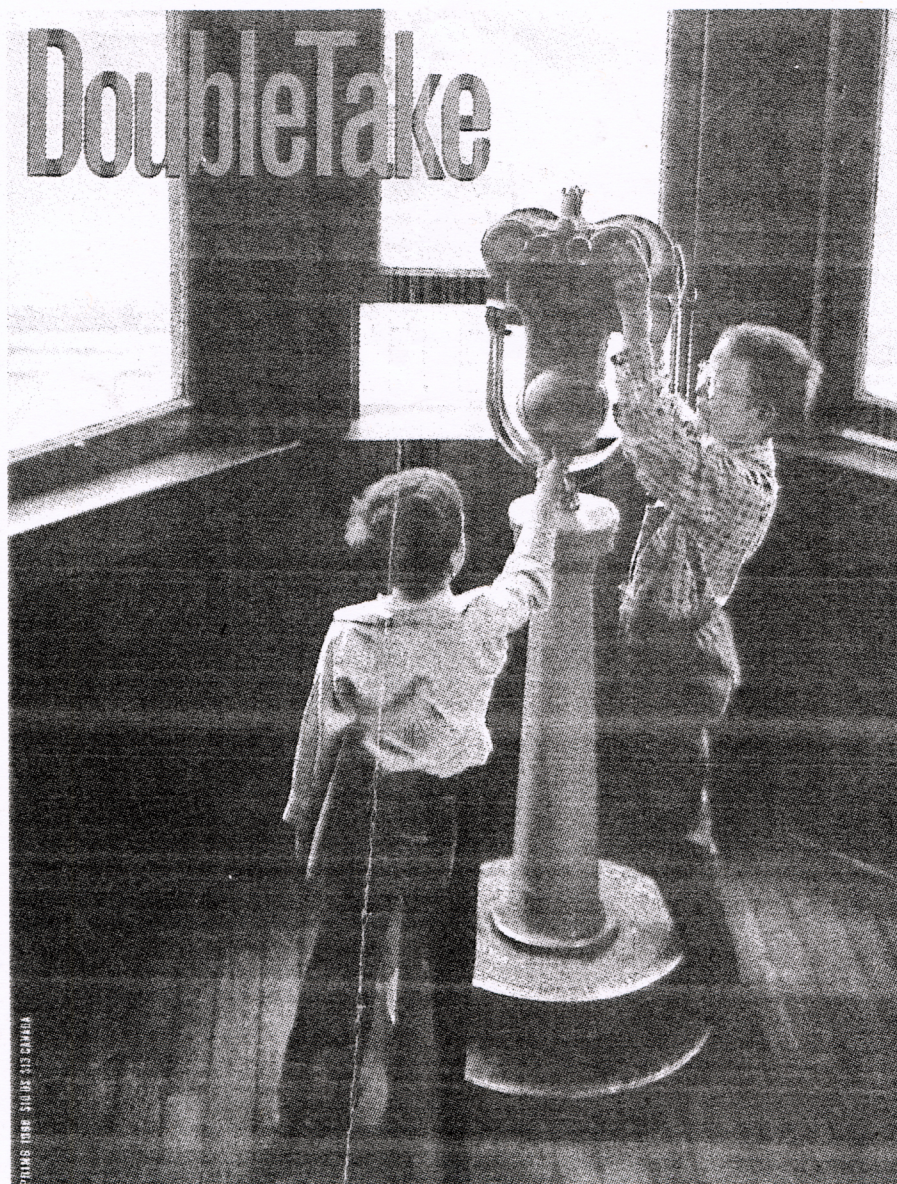
In his book "Doing Documentary Work," published last year by Oxford University Press, Dr. Coles, a prominent child psychiatrist and professor of social ethics at Harvard University, wrestles with the idea of documentary.

"When does fact veer toward fiction," Dr. Coles asks in his introduction, "and how are those two words to be understood with respect to one another: as polarities, as contraries, or as kin, working a parallel, often contiguous territory, and borrowing from another now and then?"

Doubletake's focus on the documentary power of both fact and fiction comes at a time when the two are frequently blurred elsewhere: so-called nonfiction books that bend the truth, television programs that dramatize real-life tales, magazines that adopt the narrative storytelling techniques of novels.

Dr. Coles, who was co-editor of Doubletake through the current issue with the photographer Alex Harris, said fiction could also offer important cultural information. (Mr. Harris has now returned to photography full time.)

"I don't think of Raymond Carver's fiction as anything other than good, strong,



The cover of the Spring issue of Doubletake magazine: "Monongahela incline station, Mount Washington, 1955. Photograph by W. Eugene Smith."

powerful fiction," Dr. Coles said. "But I also think reading those stories tells me a lot about the troubled working-class life in America."

Published quarterly by the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University with a \$10 million grant from the Lyndhurst Foundation, the award-winning Doubletake — circulation 55,000 — has attempted to straddle the two very different worlds of literary journals and consumer

magazines. It is glossy and elegant, features prominent writers and photographers, occasionally profiles big names like Bruce Springsteen and carries advertisers like Absolut vodka.

But along with well-known writers like Susan Faludi, John McPhee and Bill McKibben, it features raw new voices, like a 7-year-old Texan writing about her mother's death in a car accident, a newspaper delivery man writing about his pre-

dawn ritual in Topeka, Kan., a 69-year-old woman from eastern Kentucky who recently learned to read sharing the songs she can now put down on paper:

*Now I may live in an old run-down shack,
I may carry my groceries home in an old coffee sack,
But in them hills, where the Lord has set me free,
That's why in the night time, them hills is calling me.*

"Our magazine can sometimes make people feel a little uncomfortable because it is so close," Ms. Halpern said. "But that's O.K."

Even the magazine's established writers are encouraged to explore unorthodox subjects. Last fall Mr. McKibben wrote a piece on whether wildlife photography is a useful art form anymore. In the current spring issue, Ms. Faludi wrote a 20,000-word article on Marine Corps recruiters in southern California.

"What I want to write for other magazines and so often am not encouraged to write is exactly what I can write about for Doubletake," Ms. Faludi said, "which means issues of social justice, stories that don't involve celebrities, a sort of W.P.A. federal writers' project mode of approaching journalism that doesn't seem to exist anywhere else."

The magazine publishes photographic features like Mike Smith's series on the remote regions of east Tennessee or Nancianne Vizzine's photographs of high school athletes in New Jersey.

Thomas Roma, a Brooklyn-based photographer who is one of Doubletake's regular contributors and does not do commercial work, described the magazine as a "beachhead" and "safe haven."

The magazine publishes books with W.W. Norton and is to be the host of a documentary film festival in Durham, N.C., early next month. It is widely read by librarians and teachers, Dr. Coles said, a group he had hoped to reach.

"I think of them in the spirit of the end of Walker Percy's novel 'The Moviegoer,' where he talks about our responsibility to 'hand one another on,'" he said. "We regard the magazine as an educational institution and the teachers and librarians of the country are, for us, colleagues."