

BRIAN ARNOLD

## Work Culture and Corporate America

*Understanding the Life and Work of Chauncey Hare*

*Every kid in school a political prisoner*

*Every lawyer in his cubicle a political prisoner*

*Every doctor brainwashed by AMA a political prisoner*

*Every housewife a political prisoner*

*Every teacher lying thru sad teeth a political prisoner*

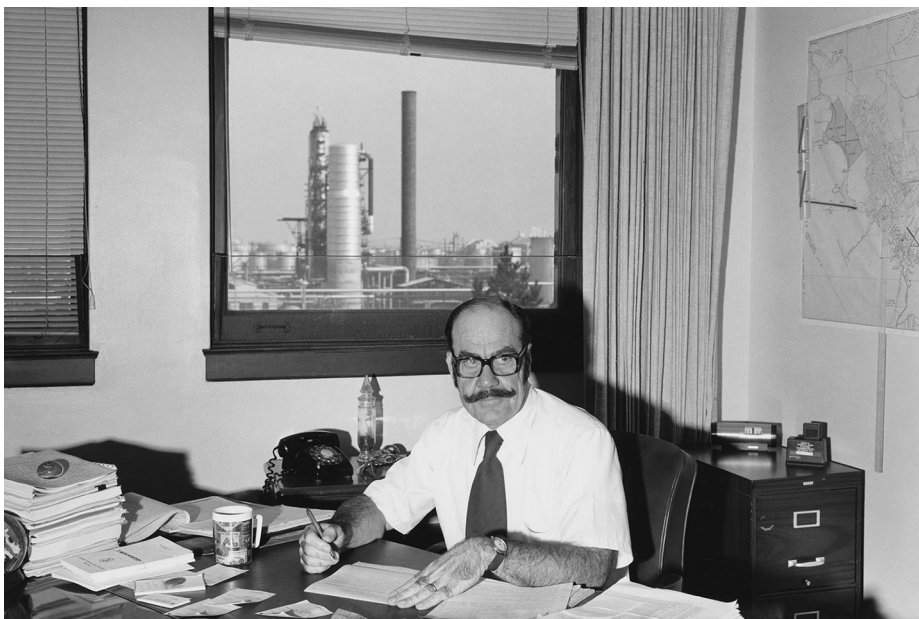
—Diane di Prima, from “Revolutionary Letters #63” (1968–71)

*This book, being about work, is, by its very nature, about violence—to the spirit as well as to the body. It is about ulcers as well as accidents, about shouting matches as well as fistfights, about nervous breakdowns as well as kicking the dog around. It is, above all (or beneath all), about daily humiliations. To survive the day is triumph enough for the walking wounded among the great many of us.*

—Studs Terkel, *Working* (1974)

I got into the arts, at least in part, in an attempt to avoid institutional control of my life. I was very idealistic, and as a young man was heavily influenced by Karl Marx and Guy Debord. I wanted to escape authority and find a way of living that was self-determined, based on self-generated ideas and creative work. Perhaps naively, I thought art and education offered an alternative to a corporate work-a-day world, as I could freely explore myself through photography while helping young people do something similar, both helping to provide meaningful personal sustenance. It was disillusioning, to say the least, as I advanced through the ranks of academia and worked to develop a career in the art world, to see how these too are consumed by institutional mindsets and hierarchies. In these cutthroat environments, I found myself in constant conflict with my peers and colleagues, people always fighting over resources, egos, and opportunities. Many of my colleagues in academia tried to keep me from succeeding rather than helping me to develop a career, which was not a decision regarding my skills as a photographer or educator, but simply because I had different ideas about making a life as an artist. And then of course there were the financial and pedagogical hierarchies between programs and departments, each institution using its resources in an attempt to corner a particular discipline (perhaps better to say “market”). Nothing seemed different to me in the art

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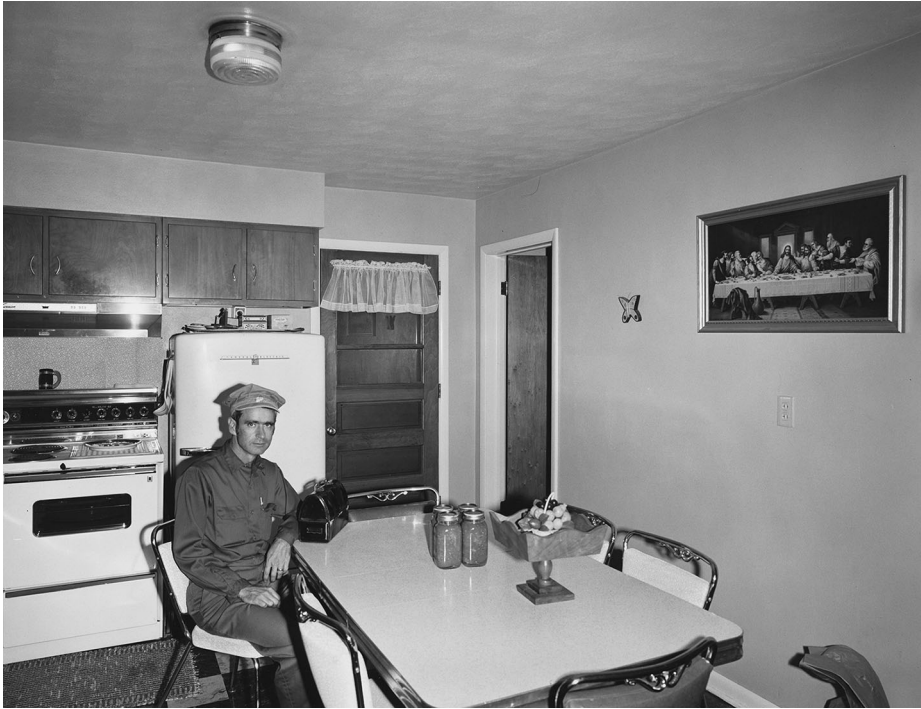


*Office worker seated at a desk, Standard Oil Company of California refinery, Richmond, California (1976–77) by Chauncey Hare. Chauncey Hare Photograph Archive; © The Regents of the University of California, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; courtesy MACK Books. This photograph was made by Hare to protest and warn against the growing domination of working people by multinational corporations and their elite owners and managers.*

world, though perhaps the hierarchies were more rigid, as people jockeyed for position and attempted to claw their way to the top, rarely reaching down to help others attempting to accomplish the same.

As an employee at a major oil company in California, photographer Chauncey Hare had a similar realization when in 1977 he traveled to the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York for an exhibition of his pictures organized by legendary curator John Szarkowski. Hare had begun photographing in the late 1960s as a way to heal from the pains he associated with the dehumanizing attributes of his mind-numbing job, successfully finding refuge and a unique vision focusing on that which caused his pain: the corporatization of America. His photographs addressed the economic and social issues of the American workplace, documenting the alienation and the spiritual and economic poverty of the working class. Initially, he found great validation in Szarkowski's support of his work, but quickly came to other conclusions once he got to the museum. In his introduction to *This Was Corporate America*, Hare's 1984 publication about his life in the oil industry, he reminisces about his first impressions at MoMA, writing, "I was surprised how much the hallways and offices at MoMA looked like those at Standard Oil."<sup>1</sup> He said something similar in preparing the guidebook to his archives:

1. Chauncey Hare, *This Was Corporate America* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1984), 9, qtd. in Robert Slifkin, *Quitting Your Day Job: Chauncey Hare's Photographic Work* (London: Mack Books, 2022), 126.



*Wintersville, Ohio* (1971) by Chauncey Hare. Chauncey Hare Photograph Archive; © The Regents of the University of California, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; courtesy MACK Books. This photograph was made by Hare to protest and warn against the growing domination of working people by multinational corporations and their elite owners and managers.

I broke with photography at that time because I saw it as a repeat of Chevron. When I visited the offices at MOMA I couldn't tell the difference between the offices and hallway at MOMA from the offices and hallway at Chevron. I couldn't tell any difference between Szarkowski and some person at Chevron who is about three levels above me. The same kind of authoritarian outlook.<sup>2</sup>

Such observations guided Hare to make some of the most original photographs of the 1970s, and to follow a career path through the arts like no other.

I first learned about Hare's photographs when in 2009 I purchased a copy of *Chauncey Hare: Protest Photographs*, newly published by Steidl and edited by Jack Steven. *Protest Photographs* is a survey of Hare's early work, highlighting his pictures from the late 1960s through the early '70s, made with the help of two Guggenheim Fellowships he received while still working as an engineer at Standard Oil California (or SOCAL, later renamed Chevron). He started by photographing his colleagues and immediate work environment, true to classic documentarian traditions represented by predecessors like Walker Evans, Lewis Hine, and Russell Lee. In the years he developed his work, Hare

2. Hare interview with Debbie Berne, October 25, 1999, *Bancroft Guide* 9, qtd. in Slifkin, *Quitting Your Day Job*, 126–27.



*Richmond, California* (1968) by Chauncey Hare. Chauncey Hare Photograph Archive; © The Regents of the University of California, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; courtesy MACK Books. This photograph was made by Hare to protest and warn against the growing domination of working people by multinational corporations and their elite owners and managers.

attempted to create a scathing social documentary about the abuses of human dignity required of capitalism, but also offered something much more subjective, depicting an alienation or personal conflict similar to the obscure and confessional photographs of Diane Arbus. Now Hare's legacy and accomplishments are further substantiated by a new biography published by MACK Books, *Quitting Your Day Job: Chauncey Hare's Photographic Work* (2022). Written by Robert Slifkin, a faculty member at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University, *Quitting Your Day Job* offers an interesting and thoughtful perspective on Hare, an original and renegade photographer who sought to undermine the status quo and the limitations placed on all of us by corporate culture and institutional hierarchies.

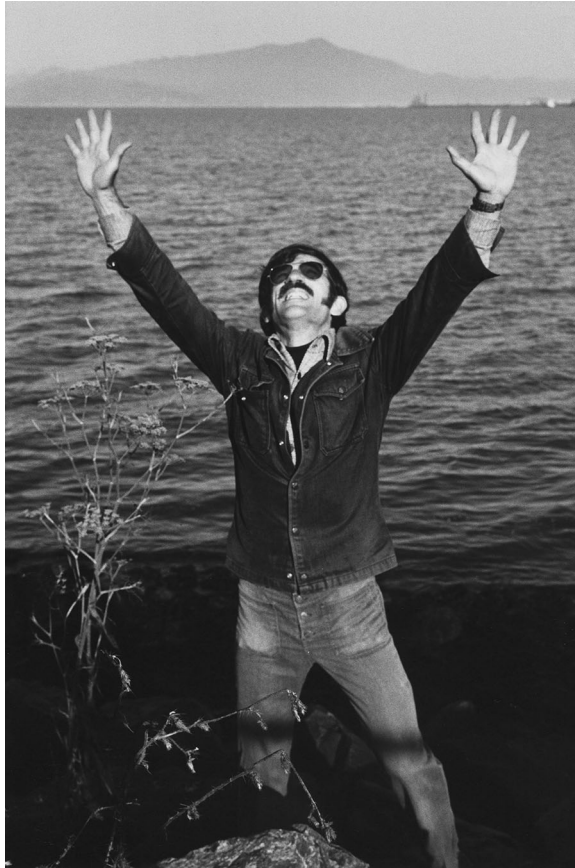
Hare's trajectory as a photographer and artist was as unique as his vision. Trained as an engineer at Columbia University in the 1950s, he moved to California to begin a career in the oil industry. Quickly he came to realize that the culture of corporate America was at odds with his needs for personal and spiritual development, and thus he took up photography as a form of therapy. Like many of his generation, his earliest work emulated that of photographers like Ansel Adams, Hare making pristine pictures of California landscapes. All of that changed, however, when in 1968 he took his 5x7 camera to the home of a colleague at the oil plant, Orville England. Hare made a striking portrait of his friend and launched a new vision for himself; from that point forward Hare sought to make photographs about working-class people and the abuses of American work culture

on personal identity. He garnered substantial success early on, connecting with Szarkowski (Hare's work fit neatly into the vision Szarkowski was developing, with clear similarities to photographers like Walker Evans and the photographers working in the new documentary mode that emerged in the 1960s). MoMA purchased four of Hare's prints (the only prints he ever sold), and Hare received two Guggenheim Fellowships, in 1969 and 1971. With these two fellowships, Hare photographed working-class people in their homes, going door-to-door like a salesman, searching for people willing to share something of their lives.<sup>3</sup> The work from his early Guggenheim years (he received a third Guggenheim Fellowship in 1976, placing him in elite company with Adams, Evans, and Lee Friedlander as the only photographers to receive this award so many times) was largely made in Ohio and Pennsylvania, states with substantial manufacturing industries, and close ties to his childhood home in Niagara Falls, New York. A collection of these photographs was exhibited at MoMA in 1977 and published in an Aperture monograph called *Interior America* the same year.

Hare was idealistic and uncompromising, and his resistance to corporate culture began to manifest as a much broader vendetta against institutions of cultural power. He had a huge falling out with Szarkowski, whom he accused of lacking the sensitivity to understand the political motivations of his work and of being an elitist. Hare's assault on Szarkowski's vision resulted in his defacing a copy of the curator's famous 1978 book *Windows and Mirrors*, ripping it apart and scribbling notes and pasting pictures over the illustrations before mailing it back to Szarkowski (this work is now preserved in the MoMA collection). When the exhibition *Windows and Mirrors* traveled to San Francisco in 1979, Hare self-published a pamphlet he titled *Awareness Guide*, which he passed out to museumgoers. The pamphlet offered overt criticism of the corporate interests and social hierarchies the museum represented, noting that corrupt tobacco mogul Philip Morris was helping to fund the exhibition (I find this visionary, actually, given that it was forty years before the 2019 protest Nan Goldin staged against the Sackler Family at the Guggenheim Museum). It was around this time that Hare tried to get his prints back from MoMA, thinking an elitist institution blind to his social and political motivations was not an appropriate home for his pictures, even offering to buy them back for more than the museum had paid. This kind of criticism of authority had strong repercussions for Hare, who quickly developed a terrible reputation among museum curators and trustees; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art cancelled a show Hare was developing for them, an exhibition focused on workers, institutional power, and personal identity that included photographers Bill Owens and Joanne Leonard.

Curiously enough, Hare entered an MFA program at the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) in 1977, after his early Guggenheim Fellowships, MoMA show, and Aperture publication—the kinds of achievements most students hope to achieve *after* attending art

3. Hare must have had a gift with words, because not only was he quite good at securing major grants, but, as Slifkin notes, he also received letters of introduction from California Governor Ronald Reagan, Ohio Governor John Gilligan, and Alabama Governor George Wallace, all of which he used to convince people to allow him into their homes with all his camera equipment. Two of these letters are reproduced in Slifkin's book.



*Releasing my father* (1979) by Chauncey Hare. Chauncey Hare Photograph Archive; © The Regents of the University of California, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; courtesy MACK Books. This photograph was made by Hare to protest and warn against the growing domination of working people by multinational corporations and their elite owners and managers.

school. Hare's intentions were clear: he wasn't in graduate school for the education but just for the teaching credentials. He was more accomplished and older than all of the other students and many of the faculty, which included photographers Ellen Brooks, Reagan Louie, Martha Rosler, Allan Sekula, Larry Sultan, and Henry Wessel. Some of these photographers were just out of grad school themselves, and all of them still in their twenties or thirties (Hare was born in 1934, so was in his early forties when he entered the program at SFAI). Hare craved more independence in school than the program allowed, and thus Slifkin repeatedly notes that the faculty saw him as "a pain in the neck."<sup>4</sup>

4. Slifkin, *Quitting Your Day Job*, 137.

Hare never landed the teaching position he sought; in fact, he never worked professionally as a photographer. After completing his MFA, he took a job working with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and did his best to continue with his photography. In the late 1970s he focused his camera on SOCAL and his office in the EPA (he made an interesting self-portrait in his own cubicle, used on the cover of Slifkin's book). He continued to score grants to help with his photography, including from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Hare used these resources to complete a second book, *This Was Corporate America*, a somewhat crudely produced volume (he made it on the cheap and worked with a printer with no experience with this kind of book-making). *This Was Corporate America* is a curious book. The pictures focus primarily on the business administrators, unlike the earlier photographs that emphasized the workers, and yet the book also appears more autobiographical than social documentary. It includes a Christ-like self-portrait on the cover, and an essay that details Hare's life in the corporate world and his attitudes toward MoMA and the art world. The pictures are largely of employees from the oil industry, the culture and environment that shaped his early life, but also includes a simple drawing of an employee jumping to his death from his office window (a real event in the Bay Area at that time, but Hare wasn't granted permission to use the photograph of the event he saw in the newspaper).

*This Was Corporate America* was financed by an NEA grant; Hare, however, also used some of the money he received to pursue another graduate degree, this time obtaining



*Self-portrait at EPA* (1980) by Chauncey Hare. Chauncey Hare Photograph Archive; © The Regents of the University of California, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; courtesy MACK Books. This photograph was made by Hare to protest and warn against the growing domination of working people by multinational corporations and their elite owners and managers.

a Master's in psychology. With this degree, Hare left his life in photography and went on to work as a counselor, making it his mission to help others negotiate a work-life balance. In the late 1980s, Hare married again (Slifkin mentions that Hare married early, but we learn nothing of that relationship), to Judith Wyatt, who was also a therapist. Together Hare and Wyatt co-authored *Work Abuse: How to Recognize and Survive It* (1997), a self-help book conceived to assist the kinds of people Hare spent two decades photographing. Like *This Was Corporate America*, this new book was more autobiographical than appeared; Hare frequently used his own experiences as case studies, renaming himself to retain "anonymity." Slifkin starts his biography of Hare by looking at this last book, specifically at the author bio printed with the text, noting that it neglects to say anything about his previous career in photography and other publications, a very curious omission indeed.

Today many critics regard Hare's earlier works as his strongest, particularly the photographs comprising *Protest Photographs*, which are the only pictures Szarkowski included in the 1977 exhibition at MoMA. The visual style of these pictures is deceptively simple. Working primarily with a 5x7 view camera and a strobe, he photographed his subjects in their homes, clearly using their surroundings and circumstances to depict the social crisis he identified among the American working class. Using a wide-angle lens, he was able to open the tight interior spaces, deliberately including seemingly small details to further describe the circumstances of his subjects (clocks, newspapers, and coffee cans were deliberate parts of his compositions, with Hare often taking the extra initiative to insert these items into the pictures to help illustrate and contextualize his photographs). The distortions caused by the lens and flash, however, often render the pictures a bit more abstract, and his relentless depiction of embattled subjects—those occupying the lower socioeconomic conditions of his day—reveals a great deal about the photographer himself, perhaps each of them representing as much about Hare's personal conflicts as they do their own. I've never seen Hare's photographs in person, but by all accounts, he was an exceptional printmaker, and his photographs demonstrate an acute sensitivity to the subtleties of the process.

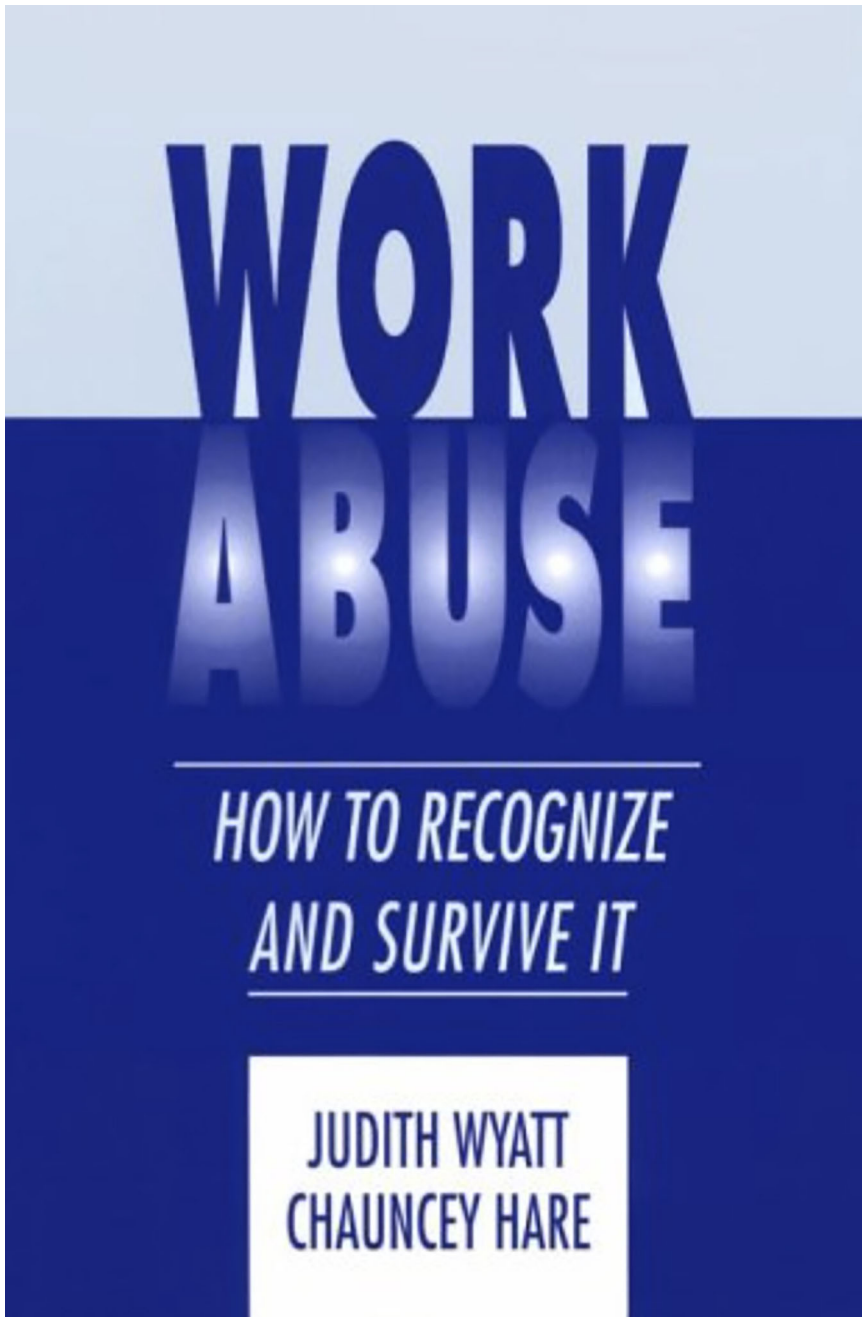
There are a few things Slifkin could clarify in his book, specifically by including information about Hare's emotional and intimate self, attributes that undoubtedly fueled his creative work. We learn that Hare married early and had a child, but it is hard to tell if he was at all involved in the lives of his wife and child (I think not). Slifkin also notes that Hare had an ongoing relationship with a prostitute in the early 1970s, the photographer even using this as a credential for his understanding of the working class. Hare's second marriage, coming somewhat late in life, was to a woman quite a bit younger. While finishing *This Was Corporate America*, Hare conducted a sort of performance ritual in which he relinquished his father's soul just before his death, ultimately resulting in the Christ-like portrait used on the cover of the book. Little is revealed about Hare's relationship to his father, but we do learn his father was a big drinker (Hare made a striking picture of him passed out by the family Christmas tree). Putting all these things together might not mean a thing, but it does make me want to ask some targeted questions. Perhaps we can assume that Hare felt a more primordial alienation than just



what was reflected in his indictments of corporate America? That it was hard for him to learn how to have healthy relationships at home, let alone at work? Slifkin suggests Hare was an angry and vindictive man; perhaps today we'd see those as symptoms of mental health disorders. Slifkin does propose that Hare's life work was really a journey, in a Jungian sense, toward self-actualization and self-ownership (Hare probably would have approved of this interpretation, as he was very influenced by New Age philosophy and psychology that emerged in the 1980s). Slifkin's final conclusion, though never made explicit in his text, is that Hare was a tragic hero, perhaps not unlike Peter Hujar. I once heard Hujar described as an undeniably great artist, someone who really wanted *to be* an artist, but who had no idea how to conduct a career as one. Slifkin, I think, says the same about Hare.

Chauncey Hare died in 2019 at the age of eighty-five. Before his death, he donated his archives to the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley. It is worth noting a couple of details about this, because his choice of Bancroft suggests some important things about his work and intentions (and perhaps something about a very stubborn personality). There are a couple of stipulations Hare required of his materials, reflecting the many contradictions he embodied with his work. He felt adamant about not leaving his work to a museum and felt a research library was a better choice. Although he wanted to be understood as an artist, he maintained a very earnest understanding of his photographs, feeling the primary intention was to record the lives of workers in America during the 1970s and '80s. Therefore, the photographs are not allowed to be exhibited, but instead should be treated like research documents. Also, if published, the photographs all require the same caption: "This photograph was made by Chauncey Hare to protest and warn against the growing domination of working people by multi-national corporations and their elite owners and managers."

Revisiting Hare's work today seems timely. I am sure many with careers in the arts can relate to my personal experiences, but I think we can also recognize this much more broadly given our shared political, social, and environmental crises. Increasingly we are all forced to recognize how much large institutions manage our lives, how the impacts of global corporations and the government policies they finance dictate our daily experiences, and yet we remain impotent in stopping them. In recent months, soaring temperatures in London resulted in more fires across the city than since its bombardment during World War II; sections of Alaska larger than the state of Connecticut have burned to the ground; Russia wages a war on Ukraine that is largely about the distribution of energy resources; and Americans have listened to investigations into a United States President who actively tried to end democracy. Daniel Defense, the manufacturer of the guns used in the recent massacre in Uvalde, Texas, was exposed for deliberately implementing advertising policies that prioritized profits over safety. The Sackler Family and Purdue Pharma made billions while imposing untold levels of pain and addiction on communities across the United States, and no one received jail time. According to the Global Policy Forum, fifty-one of the world's largest economies are corporations not countries, and the combined sales of the top 200 global corporations account for over 25 percent of the world's economic activity. Almost daily, each of us experiences social



Cover of *Work Abuse: How to Recognize and Survive It* (1997) by Judith Wyatt and Chauncey Hare.

and environmental trauma as increasingly we lurch from one catastrophe to another. The source for all of this, in my mind, is the predatory capitalism that emanates from the US, a country that has prioritized constant expansion and the exploitation of people and resources for decades, always profits over social development. Chauncey Hare



*West Chester, Pennsylvania* (1972) by Chauncey Hare. Chauncey Hare Photograph Archive; © The Regents of the University of California, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; courtesy MACK Books. This photograph was made by Hare to protest and warn against the growing domination of working people by multinational corporations and their elite owners and managers.

demonstrated prescience, creating an entirely unique vision and body of work that advocated for individuals, calling for true and equal dignity for all by emphasizing a work culture that actively promotes individual growth and spiritual development. ■

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