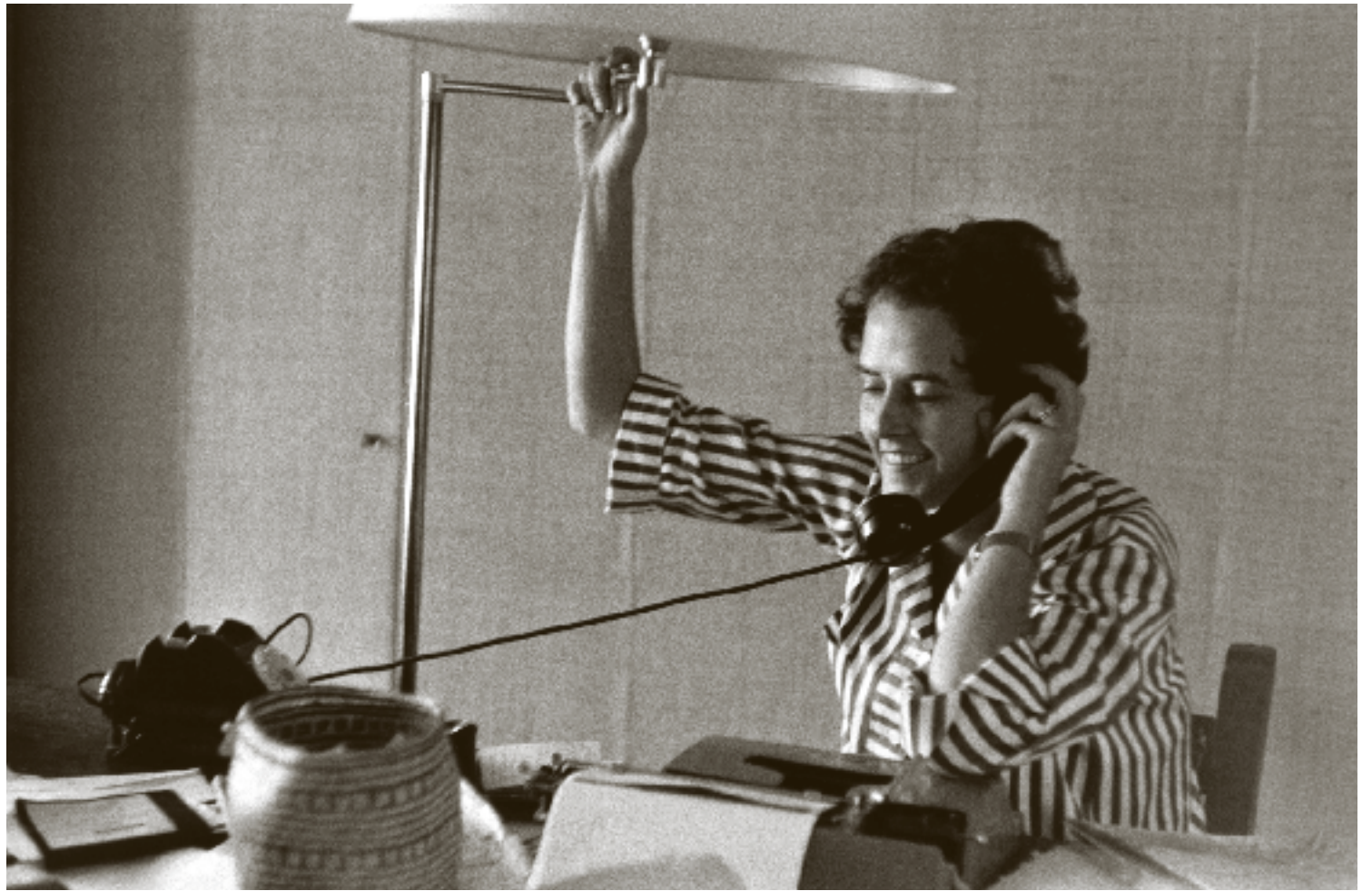




# INGE MORATH

AN ILLUSTRATED BIOGRAPHY / LINDA GORDON









as a “*schlurf*,” “a swing kid with long hair and non-conformist attitude”—a term also applied to “hippies” of 1960s Germany. “The season has started,” she wrote, referring to holiday season 1948, “and you can’t slip out of it if you don’t want to be a stubborn outsider. This is how, in addition to spiritual and alcoholic joys, I can line up a nice dinner for myself.” She asked her mother to send her black evening dress because the “first Viennese balls” were about to start. She frequently recounted partying until the wee hours, then sleeping for an hour before heading off for work.<sup>31</sup>

The happier and the more effervescent she became, the more she attracted others. For five years her energy had paid off in the tender of mere survival; now it produced a sparkling, bohemian social life. Groups of

friends talked art and ideas endlessly, wherever there was a place to do so, in cafés and, often, in the house of a “wonderful woman, a painter, Hilde Polsterer . . . She lived on the fourth floor . . . and someone had to accompany leaving guests to open and close the house door . . . a lot of kissing was going on on those trips down the stairs.” For a time, Inge shared an apartment with her childhood friend Renate, who remembered that “Inge was such a ravishing beauty that she had everyone at her feet. . . . Inge was just amassing marriage proposals.”<sup>32</sup>

Vienna’s literary/artistic/intellectual sphere became Mörath’s scene. She sat for a portrait by painter Julius Mahainz. She socialized with the members of Gruppe 47, a now legendary literary circle that included Hans Weigel, a major Austrian Jewish critic just returned

8. The Strudlhof Steps, made famous by Heimito von Doderer’s novel, which has its name as its title, Vienna, 1980

9. Ruins of the Philipshof in Albertinaplatz after a wartime bomb raid in which more than one hundred people died in the shelter, Vienna, 1948. Photo by Erich Lessing











25. Riva degli Schiavoni, Venice, 1955

Language was another factor that led her to photography. Now that she lived in Paris and London, she was made to feel that German was the language of the enemy. But her command of English and French, she thought, was limited enough that it thinned out her journalism in those languages.<sup>105</sup> She was proud of her acquisition of French, and especially of Parisian argot,<sup>106</sup> but “although I was able to write stories in English and French it did not touch the roots. So turning to the image felt both like a relief and an inner necessity.”<sup>107</sup>

Back in London she sought training and found the extraordinary Simon Guttman, a fellow Viennese and



Nazi refugee who in addition to being a master photographer was a “merciless” teacher.<sup>108</sup> He had founded a photo agency, Dephot, which represented some of the world’s most innovative photographers and pioneered the creation of photo-essays (fig. 26). In exile in Paris in the 1930s, his agency represented Capa for a time. In England he created another agency, known as Report. Mörath was nervous—“terrified,” she later recalled—when she first approached him and showed him her Venice images. But her bravery paid off, and in becoming



26. Simon Guttman, founder of Dephot agency, outside his London office, 1975. Photo by Romano Cagnoni

his trainee, she had put herself in the hands of a world-renowned artist. He exploited her as an apprentice: she had to write his letters, heat his shaving water, sweep the flat, help him in the darkroom; the tasks multiplied on Saturdays because he was an observant Jew who would not do work on the Sabbath.<sup>109</sup> She complied, always willing to work hard at humble tasks, but she was also restless and ambitious. She bought herself a used Leica and became impatient to try it out. Guttman’s curriculum involved learning how to select subjects, to understand them, to approach them from the right angle and with the right timing, to see how objects and images are related. His approach helped her assimilate her new medium to the older forms of art she was familiar with (figs. 27, 28). He had her practice with a few small photographic assignments, even sending her to Paris to do a photo story. She later reflected that the intensity of working with him helped her to leave her marriage.<sup>110</sup>

She sent out some of her work under a pseudonym—her name reversed, Egni Tharom—so that no one from Magnum would know what she was doing. “I was cutting straight into the territory of the male-dominated.”<sup>111</sup> Perhaps she also felt the need to disguise her Germanic name. She sold some photos, and played along when publishers asked how to reach the man who had taken the photos.<sup>112</sup>

In 1953 she made a photo that became widely known under her own name—a portrait of a “fantastic old lady in Mayfair, you would need to see the pictures to believe that something like this still exists.”<sup>113</sup> Mrs. Eveleigh Nash was a rich eccentric. Seated in a car, her chauffeur standing just outside the door, she wears a wide-brim hat with a veil over her face, a fur coat and a large fur robe across her lap. From under her veil she





27. Street corner at World's End, London, 1954

28. London, 1953





BY APPOINTMENT  
TO THE LATE  
KING GEORGE V.

BY  
THE  
LATE

GENTLE

COURT H





29. Publisher Eveleigh Nash at Buckingham Palace Mall, London, 1953

30. Contact sheet with portrait of Eveleigh Nash, London, 1953

looks directly at the camera with utter confidence and a hint of a sneer.<sup>114</sup> Behind in two converging lines are the arcades of Carlton House Terrace and a path bordered by leafless wintertime trees. The black border of the car's door and window, and the curved top of the window itself, frame both lady and chauffeur, juxtaposing upper-class and working-class Londoners. An elegant picture, and one that communicates some of the British class structure—reminiscent, perhaps, of Lisette Model and Esther Bubley (figs. 29, 30). Mörath later made

another portrait of Nash, holding a picture of herself as a “ravishing debutante.”<sup>115</sup>

After a year, Guttman graduated her. She returned to Paris determined to prove herself as a photographer, knowing that she would have to do this with little if any support from Magnum's fraternity. “Being one of the then rather rare women photographers . . . was often difficult for the simple reason that nobody felt that one was serious (what does a pretty girl like you want in this profession). Much male condescension. . . . I certainly do not think that I got the same forceful male brotherhood support the men got.” She pointed out that on news assignments, being a woman



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31. Memorial Sunday, London, 1953

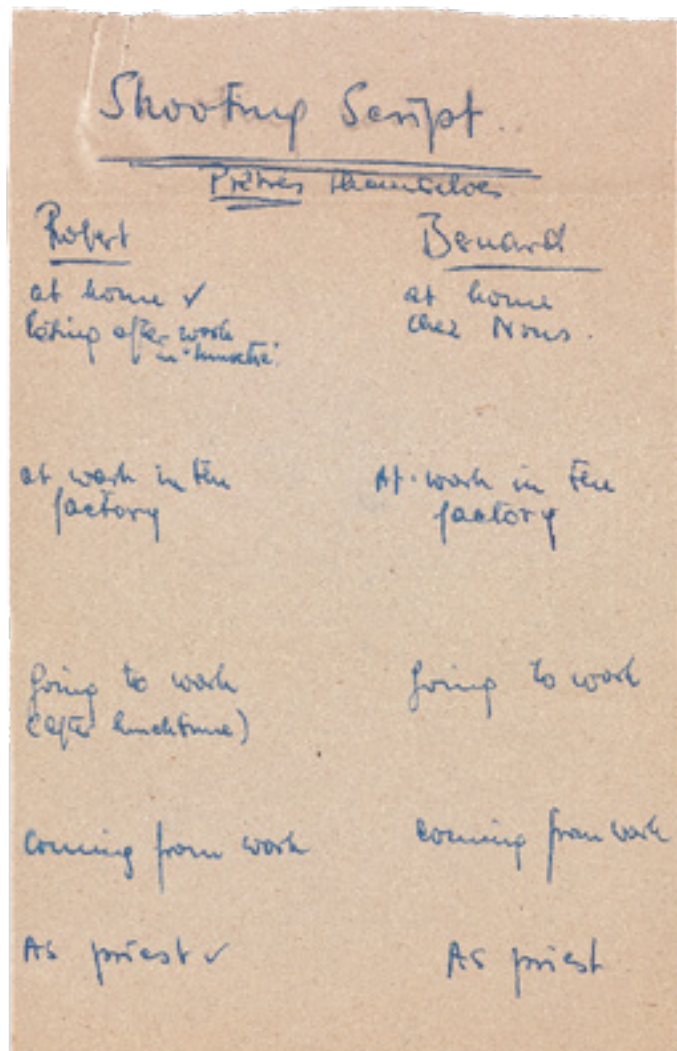
32. Henry Moore, Much Hadham, Hertfordshire, Great Britain, 1954

was a “terrific drawback . . . I was mercilessly hit by Speed Graphics and blocked by bigger bodies working together.”<sup>116</sup> Once years later, while she was photographing Adlai Stevenson, she got down on the floor to get a better angle and the male photojournalists literally stepped on her in order to get closer to the man. But Mörath toughed it out. “I consciously lived alone for a long time in order to be completely independent. . . . More women should have the courage to plunge alone into what they want to do.”<sup>117</sup> These comments, made

twenty years later, reflect both the influence of 1970s feminism and her awareness of female inequality well before that. They also convey a perspective common among ambitious women in the 1950s—acknowledging prejudice while concluding that women should simply try harder, or “lean in” in twenty-first-century language. Though well aware of male domination—and she would always be a strong supporter of women photographers—she never identified with feminism as a political cause, nor with any other political cause; she did not see the necessity.

She chose as her Magnum “audition” project a photo-essay about the *Prêtres Ouvriers*, worker priests





33. Shooting script for worker priests story (*Prêtres Ouvriers*), 1953

34. From worker priests story, Paris, 1953

35. Contact sheet from worker priests story, Paris, 1953

(fig. 33).<sup>118</sup> Derived from the 1920s *Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne* movement, they preached an urban version of liberation theology. Participants sought to bring workmen back into the church, at a time when French working-class radicalism and anticlericalism were strong, and at the same time to move the church back toward what they considered its true calling, serving the poor. “They were going around trying to re-evangelize—it was called *la mission intérieure*,” like early Christians, Mörath thought (fig. 34).<sup>119</sup> Between 1941 and 1954, a small group of about one hundred young radical priests took working-class jobs and began to live in conditions like those of their coworkers, with the important difference that they were to be celibate. Some hid their clerical identity, some came out to their coworkers as priests. Sharing working-class poverty, industrial injuries, and the threat of being fired at the first sign of protest, they joined campaigns for improved pay and conditions. Some even became strike leaders and supported the Communist labor union, the CGT. Many supported the Algerian anti-colonial struggle.<sup>120</sup>

Mörath connected with a group of worker priests who were willing to let her photograph them. Located in Boulogne-Billancourt, a working-class suburb near the Renault works, the priests kept a bookshop, made offerings to the aged and the poor, and took in strays, including unwed mothers (fig. 35). She moved in, sharing a room with two of their “girl helpers” (apparently even these self-denying priests needed women to do the housework). Ethnographers would call her a participant-observer. She prepared a shooting script featuring two particular priests, identifying them by pseudonyms. She photographed “Bernard” reading the morning Mass in the kitchen.<sup>121</sup> She produced an entire