Brian Swift

Bill Parker had an enormous influence on me and my photographic images, as well as my thinking, working and eventually teaching processes. I always found him to be, as he first said, very catholic in how he responded to images, whether they were historical or contemporary, student or professional. It's important to note, as he often pointed out, that he was referring to the small "c" catholic, and not to the Catholic religion. I think he made that point in an understated way, but that in fact it was at the heart of how he approached looking at and appreciating all images.

As per Wikipedia:

"In non-ecclesiastical use, it derives its English meaning directly from its root, and is currently used to mean the following:[9]

- *including a wide variety of things, or all-embracing;*
- *universal or of general interest;*
- *having broad interests, or wide sympathies;*
- *inclusive, inviting."*

As others who are showing work in this exhibit might mention, Bill seemed to have a photographic memory and an ability for recall of text and images that was extraordinary. He brought those gifts to bear in a remarkable way whenever he was considering a photographer and their work, whether it was a single image or a body of work. His basic approach was to try and elicit some comments from the photographer about what was being shown. Incorporating whatever was said, if anything, he would then go about finding oftentimes small details in images, linkages between images and the possibilities for an overall take on the work and potentialities for the evolution of the work. During his discussion of the images, he would frequently make historical, contemporary, symbolic, mythical and psychological references and connections that he would then at the end synthesize into some unforeseen whole that was only made possible by what he had just brought to bear. I don't think it would be an overstatement to say that being present for one of his full on engagements with someone's images was a very powerful and humbling experience. Powerful in that he had so much intellectual ability, personal

sensitivity, seemingly instant recall of relevant points, and breadth of capacity for apprehending everything under consideration and synthesizing it into a wholly new way of looking at the work as well as at the photographer who made it. Humbling and immensely appreciative for the photographer whose work Bill was considering, and humbling in another way for those who were witnessing Bill working at the height of his powers in that domain. As many of us will remember at RISD, when Bill was coming to do a review of student work, the studio would be filled to overflowing with students and other faculty who were trying to be present to witness Bill doing his thing. Those were electric and life-giving tour de force experiences as I remember them. A personal biographical note regarding the origins of Bill's gifts was that he made note infrequently that when he was growing up in Florida, that he had strongly considered becoming a preacher. Thankfully for those of us who were fortunate enough to get to know him, he chose to become an artist and teacher.