



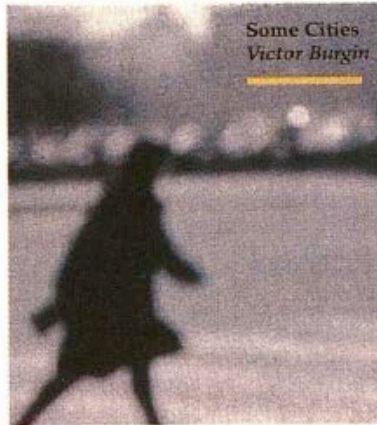
BOOKS

Some Cities

by Victor Burgin. Reaktion, 1996.
224pp. £12.95

Victor Burgin, born in Sheffield, now teaches at the University of California, Santa Cruz, with the portentous title of Professor in the Board of Studies in History of Consciousness, writes *Andrew Mead*. Every so often his video and photographic works turn up in exhibitions here. *Some Cities* is an elliptical record of certain stops on Burgin's journey from Sheffield to Santa Cruz – 'my aim is to recall some traces some cities have left in me', he says.

So the book presents Burgin's black-and-white photographs and, interspersed among them, some relatively short texts (anecdotes, observations). Together they portray, fragmentarily, such places



as Berlin, Warsaw, Malmö, Tokyo, Stromboli and Tobago – some 20 or so locations. Yet the book proves less satisfying than its format promises. Burgin's art practices are rooted in politics, gender, class, capital, representation and so forth – but his pronouncements are often pat. 'Sheffield no longer has a steel industry. Bankers have accomplished what bombers failed to achieve . . . Making nothing of

steel, Sheffield makes no sense,' he writes – hardly an adequate response either to the decline of traditional industries or to the evolution of cities. A few pages later comes a reference to 'the poverty of style characteristic of wealth in protestant countries' – an arguable generalisation at best.

More of a problem than Burgin's ideological fixity is that his photographs and anecdotes or observations are simply not telling enough. There are exceptions: a rusting iron water wheel in a tangle of creepers on Tobago; a passage on how the 'real city' is never experienced as separate from the 'paper city' (ie, the city in novels, films, comic strips), in which Blois, on the Loire, becomes 'the city in the eyes of someone who has just seen a film by Chabrol'. But while the book is full of evocative 'traces' for Burgin, they seldom leave the mark that makes them traces for us.