

PHOTOGRAPHER AS PARTICIPANT OBSERVER:
LARRY CLARK, NAN GOLDIN, RICHARD BILLINGHAM,
AND NOBUYOSHI ARAKI

by

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
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Abstract

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Advisor: Anna Chave

This dissertation examines the tactics employed by four art photographers—Larry Clark, Nan Goldin, Richard Billingham, and Nobuyoshi Araki—whose approach is analogous to that of the so-called Gonzo journalists who notoriously blurred the line between author and subject. Operating from deeply insider positions, they brought topics of excess to the fore, often shocking viewers with the apparent lack of moral judgment or rationality on offer in their highly personal, autobiographical works.

My study provides, by way of background, a genealogy of participant observation approaches in anthropology and journalism. It then traces how the anthropologists' approach to ethnographic research on exotic others came to be applied to domestic subjects in the West during the 1970s. The 1960s and 70s saw explicitly subjective reporting techniques flourish in journalism; and I argue that participant observer photography was born of this cultural climate. Britain's strong documentary photography tradition saw a shift toward the subjective and the individual during the 1970s and 80s, while more personalized forms of photography quickly arose in Japan in the early 1970s. Thus, the shift toward a subjectivized or autobiographical photography can be seen as a trans-cultural and trans-national phenomenon.

The chapters devoted to the principal artist-subjects of this dissertation examine their respective social and cultural contexts, and identify their particular modes of practice. Larry Clark's initial, insider position gave way to what I term a voyeuristic position, especially in films that depict with gritty realism the darker side of juvenile delinquency. Nan Goldin remained within her intimate circle to make works in what I call an integrated mode, an approach that reflected the culture of 1980s bohemian life in New York City. Following both the subjective documentary tradition in Great Britain and its family photography tradition, Richard Billingham's photobook, *Ray's a Laugh*, and video, *Fishtank*, were created by a detached observer whose approach I regard as a dissociated mode. As for Nobuyoshi Araki, he assumed a reflexive and performative mode, particularly in pornographic images that blurred factual recording with staged elements.

The vaunted authenticity of participant observation photography falls prey to the paradox that once an artist achieves recognition, her or his subjects become more aware that they are exchanging privacy for exposure. Insider participant observation photography has flourished into a second generation of artists who face the challenges of their subjects' awareness of the presence of the camera and the commercialization of the phenomenon, as exemplified by the emergence of so-called heroin chic in 1990's fashion photography.

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Introduction

This dissertation is a study of four visual modes of “quasi-documentary” employed by four major living proponents of this photographic method—Larry Clark (U.S., b.1943), Nan Goldin (U.S., b.1953), Richard Billingham (U.K., b.1970), and Nobuyoshi Araki (Japan, b.1940)—during roughly the last quarter of the twentieth century. What I refer to as these artists’ participant observation techniques are socially immersive photographic reporting methods by which a photographer gains intimate access to his or her subjects through relationships of trust. While this method’s precursors extend over decades, the approach found sudden visibility in the 1960s and has continued to develop to the present day.

This dissertation focuses on four living “insider” photographers, chosen from many possible candidates who have utilized comparable tactics. It should be noted that the terms “insider” and “outsider” prove intermittently problematic, as such boundaries may be fluid or may shift over time, and as there are complex types of artistic involvement that lie between the two poles implied by these terms. While I find these terms indispensable, and I deploy them here in ways that are consistent with their general usage, I must acknowledge that they are at times imperfectly descriptive.

For ethnographers, sociologists, and journalists, whose primary recording method is writing, the final manifestations of their work are created in private and at a distance from their subjects, although note taking in their subjects’ presence may expose those subjects to the process, thereby making them self-conscious. Photographers, however, confront their subjects with cameras, which arguably represent more of an invasion of privacy than the ethnographer’s note taking (which sometimes is replaced by a less intrusive recording device or which may be performed afterwards in private), and that may present an obstacle to capturing the customary

behavior of subjects, who may modify their conduct in response to a device that has the potential to embarrass them by revealing their private habits. To circumvent this obstacle, secret cameras, or so-called detective cameras, came into use in the 1880s disguised as watches, buttons, walking sticks, and so on, although these hidden cameras provoked criticism over concerns about invasion of privacy.

The desire to witness hidden or previously unknown realities of others' lives has shaped various aspects of the practice of photography since the beginning of its history. Documenting human subjects without their knowledge in order to capture unmodified reality has all along been a photographic ambition.¹ One way in which photographers have overcome the practical impossibility of making themselves invisible is by choosing subjects who are not inclined to mind what photographers do and who are evidently indifferent to the ultimate disposition of the images. This approach, however, is not immune to problems of exploitation. Whether the subjects somehow consent to be photographed or are deceived by the photographer into lowering their guard, their relationship potentially provides opportunities for viewers to enter worlds which were previously opaque or obscure. This dissertation is concerned with how some prominent practitioners have developed methods of dealing with such situations and with the kinds of images that result.

While it may be argued that every photographer is a participant observer to some extent, I use the term here to describe a method that involves a peculiarly intense degree of physical and emotional involvement with the photographer's subject. In this dissertation, I survey a range of types of participant observer photography that have emerged in the contemporary era and define

¹ Photography historian Geoffrey Batchen explains that such detective photography and the desire to see without being seen has been a central component of photographic practice since the initial phase of the history of the medium. See Batchen, "Guilty Pleasures," *CTRL [SPACE]: Rhetorics of Surveillance, from Bentham to Big Brother* (Karlsruhe, Germany: ZKM Center for Arts Media, 2002), 446-459. (I will discuss this essay in the section, Review of Literature in this dissertation.)

their characteristics through a series of case studies. Together, however, the four individuals I chose to focus on in my dissertation—Larry Clark, Nan Goldin, Richard Billingham, and Nobuyoshi Araki—might also be said broadly to represent a category within the participant observer photographic method, and I will explain in this introduction how these photographers are arguably distinct from other insider photographers whom I might have discussed instead.

Unlike other insider photographers and other outsider participant observer photographers—a range of whom are surveyed, for purposes of comparison, within this Introduction as well as in Chapter One—the four artists chosen for this project stand out for their lack of any explicit social purpose, for their suspension of moral judgment, and for their tendency to court extremes; and their works can be shocking for these reasons. What can also prove troubling is the subjective nature of their narratives, which tend to blur the boundaries between observer and subject, evincing an intense degree of physical and emotional involvement with their subjects. I argue that it is precisely this blurring that makes these four photographers the most powerful and disturbing of their generation. Additionally, their formal techniques, which frequently included intentionally haphazard shots, entailed tactics designed to convey authenticity and subjectivity.

I. “Insider” Art Photographers

Rather than searching for subjects outside their immediate realms, many contemporary art photographers have turned their cameras toward their own families. Capitalizing on their inherently inside positions, they could maximize the advantages of their intimate relationships with their own family members. Photographers such as Doug Dubois, Sally Mann, Mary Frey,

and Tina Barney, for example, have used their family members as primary actors for their projects.

Take the illuminating example of art photographer Tina Barney (b. 1945). In the *Sunday New York Times*, 1982 (**fig.0.1**), she presents a casual summer weekend morning with the Barney family. Each member goes about his or her activities while minimally interacting with one another in the same room. This seemingly informal image suggests that reading the newspaper is a typical activity for this cultured family, yet this is a shot staged by Barney and made with a large format camera that must have intruded into their private space. There is a sense of movement and flow, as of bustling traffic within a family dining room. A woman carrying a baby is walking into the room while the man at the head of the table looks stiffly into the lens. Overall, the picture suggests the naturalness of a family at leisure, since other subjects do not directly engage the camera. The photograph offers insight into the customs of the upper class families Barney has been photographing since the early 1970s. The family members rarely exhibit physical contact with one another and emotional levels are subdued, as the subjects appear to be guarding themselves behind their decorum of manners, their stylish clothing, and other trappings of wealth. Viewers benefit from Barney's richly detailed accounts of the social customs of the wealthy in their domestic settings. The banality of everyday affluent family life may have been utterly familiar to Barney, but others might experience her images as social documentary, sensing an almost voyeuristic, vicarious trespass into these privileged lives. Barney's refined images of human dynamics, rich with formal details (owing in part to her large-format camera), appear to offer uncritical ethnographic insights into the domestic spectacles of the upper class family. The photographer's position as a native informant enhances

the perceived authenticity of her vision, despite its blurring of staged elements with more factual documentation.²

Another photographer who dedicated his time to documenting his family was Larry Sultan (1945-2009). He saw his elderly parents in the suburbs of Los Angeles often and published his record of a decade's visits in *Pictures from Home* (1992).³ The book consists of photos of his parents alongside early snapshots from family albums and stills from home movies. Using the artist's retired father as an actor in these reconstructed family stories, Sultan's *Pictures from Home* subverts the factual notion of a family album and becomes a meditative project in which the artist investigated his own roots through the passage of time reflected in the lives of his parents (**fig.0.2**).

Reworking his memories of childhood and family against present-day moments of his parents' lives, Sultan gained their cooperation with his direction for his picture making.⁴ Still shots of ordinary family vacations selected from home movies are juxtaposed against well-composed color photographs of present-day activities. There are no particularly extreme conditions of hardships or wealth, but instead, a quiet, suburban, West Coast milieu where the genteel parents spend the last stage of their lives; no family dramas are seen here, but instead an orderly, contemplative, and peaceful life, at least at the outset.

Facticity and fiction both factor into the works of Tina Barney and Larry Sultan. Both artists, working with the subjects they know best, staged their family actors before their cameras. Both artists assumed a dialectical position between being insiders and outsiders: they are

² Tina Barney often spoke of how she composed scenes by explicitly asking some of her subjects to pose while the rest remained undirected. See, for example, Tina Barney, *Friends and Relations: Photographs*, A Smithsonian Series, Photographers at Work (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 6-7.

³ Larry Sultan, *Pictures from Home* (New York: Abrams, 1992).

⁴ Larry Sultan, "Interview by Catherine Liu," *Speak Art! The Best of BOMB Magazine's Interviews with Artists*, ed. Betsy Sussler (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 1997), 108-117.

insiders because they are part of their families and outsiders because they stand behind the camera as recorders, observers, and directors. And both artists brought subjective and empathetic qualities to the treatment of their intimate subjects. The well-composed color photographs by Barney and Sultan, rich in detail and informative as to the lifestyles of their families, do not reveal deeper secrets of naked emotions, or pain, much less any kind of extreme drama. The emotions and expressions of their subjects are generally guarded, reflecting their codified manners even in the familiar and safe environments of domestic surroundings.

II. Shock as Tactic

The methods of the four photographers whom I have chosen to study in depth—Larry Clark (U.S., b. 1943), Nan Goldin (U.S., b. 1953), Richard Billingham (U.K., b. 1970), and Nobuyoshi Araki (Japan, b. 1940)—overlap to an extent with those of insider photographers such as Barney and Sultan. However, what makes the work of this dissertation’s protagonists distinctive is that all four deal in sensation. They have stripped away cultural politesse, so as to reveal tawdry realities. “Too much information” or TMI, as the vernacular of the contemporary youth culture in the United States terms it, was offered through their works. “Too many” and “too personal” details about private lives transgressed the barriers between the private and the public. They documented the exotic activities of marginalized members of society considered to be their peers or their cohort: friends shooting drugs into each other’s arms; friends having sex with one another; parents drinking, fighting, and vomiting; and clients being serviced by sex workers, for example.

Although works by certain “outsider” participant observer photographers, such as Bill Eppridge, Jim Goldberg, Gillian Wearing, and even the works by the Indian children taught by

Zana Briski (their works will be discussed in Chapter One in some detail), share some aspects of this quality of excess, the four principal photographers in my dissertation are generally able to exhibit more extreme qualities or situations on account of their “insider” positions and their innovative aesthetics. Many social and artistic conventions were broken through what they recorded and how they photographed.

Absent the filters of moral judgment, Clark, Goldin, Billingham, and Araki shocked their audiences into new ways of seeing the world. They gained notoriety, and eventually significant respect and acceptance, by creating unsettling, at times even repellent, images that, nonetheless, engendered in some viewers and critics sympathy for their subjects. Over time, these four artists exerted considerable influence over a subsequent generation of photographers.

When their sensationalistic works first appeared, these four artists provoked widespread and strong reactions from the art world. Their major photobooks—Clark’s *Tulsa* (1971), Goldin’s *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1986), Billingham’s *Ray’s a Laugh* (1996), and Araki’s *Sentimental Journey* (1971)—came to be regarded as iconic works and represented turning points in their respective careers. In the following chapters, one dedicated to each artist, I will discuss in detail the genesis of the publication of these photobooks, the processes of creating them, and the critical responses they engendered.

The four artists treated here made intimate disclosures about their private lives to public audiences through artwork with strongly autobiographical elements. I will discuss that artwork’s sensationalistic content as well as its autobiographical element in what follows. Clark’s book, *Tulsa*—filled with details of drug abuse, violence, and sexual activities—was even successfully used as evidence against the artist in a criminal case.⁵ When Clark’s film *Kids* depicted crude

⁵ See Chapter Two, Voyeuristic Mode: Larry Clark, II. Clark’s *Tulsa* (1971), page 129.

and reckless teenage lives in 1995, parents were outraged and there was a virtual moral panic around the film in the adult world. While his works have been praised in some quarters of the art world (which led, for instance, to his receiving grants from nationally recognized institutions), the same art world has, at times, also evinced signs of moral panic over his practices and has evidenced double standards. During his 2012 retrospective exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, museum and city officials decided to exclude visitors under eighteen, citing child protection laws (specifically, a 2007 law enacted under current mayor Bertrand Delanoë prohibiting pornographic photographs being shown to minors), stating that they wished to maintain the show's integrity.⁶ Critics have described the decision as an instance of self-censorship on the part of museum officials, and a French human rights league condemned the decision to ban minors from the Paris show as "backward and reactionary." Rallying behind the cause, the leftwing newspaper *Libération* printed on its front page one of the show's most explicit images, a black-and-white picture of a teenage couple heavy petting.⁷ The outraged artist, meantime, insisted that the show was intended for teenagers to be able to, in effect, see themselves.⁸ In contrast, Co Berlin's solo exhibition of Larry Clark's photographs

⁶ Nicolai Hartvig, "Paris Slaps Racy Larry Clark Show With an X Rating," *Artinfo.com*, September 24, 2010, <http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/35856/paris-slaps-racy-larry-clark-show-with-an-x-rating/> (accessed June 23, 2012)

⁷ "Expo Larry Clark: les Verts accusent la ville de Paris d'«autocensure»," *Libération*, September 23, 2010, <http://next.liberation.fr/cinema/01012291970-expo-larry-clark-les-verts-accuse-la-ville-de-paris-d-autocensure> (accessed July 31, 2012)

"Expo Clark: l'interdiction aux mineurs, «un fait très rare»," *Libération*, October 5, 2010, <http://next.liberation.fr/cinema/01012294435-l-expo-larry-clark-interdit-aux-mineurs-un-fait-tres-rare> (accessed July 31, 2012)

⁸ Larry Clark told *Libération*, "I see this as an attack on youth, on adolescents. These photos are for them. ... Forbidding people of 16 or 17 years old to come here and to see themselves is stupid. What are we suggesting they do instead of going to see themselves in a museum? Staying at home where, on the Internet, they will see pornography, things from the gutter." ("Exposition Larry Clark: Delanoë répond aux Verts," *Libération*, September 29, 2010, <http://next.liberation.fr/cinema/01012293173-exposition-larry-clark-delanoe-repond-aux-verts> (accessed July 29, 12).

Part of the Larry Clark interview was translated by Lizzy Davies, "Outcry as Paris bans under 18s from Larry Clark

and films (May 26–August 12, 2012) greeted visitors with a large poster (**fig.0.3**) at the entrance that, in the spirit of Courbet’s famous pornographic painting (**fig.0.4**), displayed a frontal view of a young female’s genitalia complete with pubic hair.

The Berlin show’s website includes this warning, however: “*Advice*: Individual art works in this exhibition might offend your moral sensibilities. Young persons under 18 must be accompanied by an adult.”⁹ Rather than restricting youths’ admission, the Berlin show officials devised what seems a more sensible solution.

A photograph from *Tulsa* (**fig.0.5**) depicts a bare-chested man injecting drugs into the arm of a woman clad only in underpants, perhaps just before sex. The woman, whose head is out of frame, straddles the man, as the couple engages in what seems to be for them an ordinary leisure activity. But such an activity was rarely depicted at the time this publication appeared. In fact, the book is rife with disclosure, with “too much information,” concerning the illicit, closed-door activities of teenagers who numbered among Clark’s friends in Tulsa. Bill Eppridge’s photographs of the drug addicts Karen and John had appeared in a 1965 issue of *Life* magazine (see pages 82-83, and **fig.1.27**), exposing a U.S. audience to images of drug shooting, but those photographs did not depict sexual activities, nor violence involving a gun—which likewise figured in *Tulsa*.

Goldin’s intensely personal, diaristic photographs of her family, friends, and lovers, begun in the early 1970s, gained exposure gradually. Her slide shows, collectively titled *The Ballad of*

exhibition,” under the section, Art and Design, *The Guardian*, October 7, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2010/oct/07/larry-clark-under-18s-exhibition-ban> (accessed July 29, 2012).

⁹ *Hinweis* Der Zutritt für Kinder und Jugendliche unter 18 Jahren ist nur in Begleitung eines Erwachsenen möglich, da Teile dieser Ausstellung gegen moralisches Empfinden verstoßen könnten, <http://www.co-berlin.info/programm/exhibitions/2012/larry-clark.html?Itemid=2151> (accessed June 23 2012)

Sexual Dependency, comprised a continually evolving exhibition that first appeared in clubs in New York City before entering gallery spaces, and, eventually, the museum realm. Curators and critics instantly perceived the sensational qualities of her work, with its frank depictions of a bohemian lifestyle that included the artist's bisexual activities, at times abusive relationships, and drug abuse, realized through an electrifyingly colorful snapshot aesthetic. In time, Goldin's photographs of her friends who were victims of the AIDS epidemic helped to personalize the disease for a larger audience.

Billingham did not set out to shock the world, yet found himself the subject of sensational stardom overnight after the publication of *Ray's a Laugh* (1996), a collection of photographs of his working class family in England, including mainly his drunken father, Ray, and his obese and sometimes abusive mother, Liz. His works were exhibited alongside those of the YBAs (Young British Artists), a loosely organized group known for its shock tactics. The exhibition *Sensation*, which showed the Charles Saatchi collection in the mid-1990s, brought huge media coverage for the sensationalism of the works shown, including those by Billingham.

Araki, the oldest of the four artists considered here, began practicing a form of photographic avant-gardism in the 1960s through an unusual set of exhibitions and new methods such as publishing photocopied books in Japan. Each project created a degree of public sensation, but it was his self-published photobook *Sentimental Journey* (1971), a frank depiction of his honeymoon, that caused real scandal and name recognition. During the 1980s, Araki's notorious reputation increased quickly when he began producing pornographic photography for commercial magazines. Through his crude and provocative images of sexual activity and women, Araki saw his reputation as a notorious artist steadily grow. He interspersed his commercial work, characterized by highly sexualized images, with personal projects that blurred

the boundary between fact and fiction. Araki's depictions of Tokyo's red light district's sexual customs included frank displays of genitalia, which have continued to provoke controversy to the present day, and which brought attention from the general public as well as the art world, not only in Japan but also, beginning in the 1990's, in the West.

The sensational impact made by the four major photographers discussed in this dissertation helped color and shape their significance within their respective areas of photography and the art world. Of course, historically, shocking and sensational tactics frequently have been used by avant-garde artists. In 1969, Roland Barthes offered a meditation on what he called "shock-impact photographs," exhibited at la galerie d'Orsay.¹⁰ For Barthes, the term "shock photos" referred mostly to horrifying pictures dealing with war, genocide, and other calamities. He argued that "the photographer must do more than signify the horrible, if we are to feel horror."¹¹ Offering his judgment on what determines good shock-impact photographs and what does not, he concluded, "straight photography leads you to the scandal of horror, not to horror itself."¹²

The four photographers who are the principal focus of this dissertation may not meet the criteria for this "scandal of horror," inasmuch as they do not depict war or political calamity, but rather they record the everyday lives of their respective subcultures. In Barthes's last book, *Camera Lucida*, he elaborated on his explanation of "shock": photographic "shock" is said to be "what was so well hidden that the actor himself was unaware or unconscious of it."¹³ He goes on, "Hence a whole gamut of 'surprises' (as they are for me, the *Spectator*; but for the

¹⁰ Roland Barthes, "The Scandal of Horror Photography," in David Brittain, ed., *Creative Camera: Thirty Years of Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 32-34. This essay is an English translation of "Photos-Chocs," in Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1957), 106-107 and first appeared in *Creative Camera* in the U.K. in July 1969.

¹¹ Barthes, "The Scandal of Horror Photography," 32.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 32.

Photographer, these are so many ‘performances’).¹⁴ He also noted that “shock” is distinct from *punctum*, which he compared to something that “shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces,”¹⁵ and he associated shock with an experience of trauma. Barthes explained that this experience of trauma has to do with the recognition of time in photographs. Every photograph is said to be an indication of the passage of time—e.g., “*he is going to die*”, “*This will be and this has been*”—and therefore of death.¹⁶

Barthes categorized five different kinds of surprise. First, “rarity,” such as a “man with two heads, a woman with three breasts.” Second, “something the normal eye cannot arrest,” which Barthes terms *numen* (e.g., Bonaparte’s touching plague victims in Jaffa).¹⁷ Third, “prowess” (e.g., Harold D. Edgerton’s photograph of the explosion of a drop of milk), which interested Barthes the least. Fourth, “contortions of technique,” involving superimpositions, anamorphoses, and the deliberate exploitation of certain defects (blurring, deceptive perspectives, trick framing); and he named Germaine Krull, André Kertész, and William Klein as exemplars. Fifth, the natural finding, “the *trouvaille* or lucky find,” an accidental composition existing in nature, which the photographer could arrange, though it is said to be more “natural” when a good reporter has the knack simply to catch it.¹⁸ While I do not propose to treat works by the photographers in my dissertation explicitly through Barthes’ concept of surprise, the core element of “shock” that he described provides an avenue for thinking about the commonalities and differences among the four participant observer photographers whose relatively shocking work is the focus of this dissertation.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 26.

¹⁶ Ibid., 96.

¹⁷ “This motionless enhancement of the unseizable quality.” Barthes, “The Scandal of Horror Photography,” 34.

¹⁸ Ibid., 32-33.

Epbridge's 1965 *Life* assignment, mentioned above, told the story of a couple who loved each other and tried to escape drug addiction. Their motivation for allowing the *Life* journalists to photograph them was to perform a good deed, i.e., to educate the public. Clark's junkies in *Tulsa*, by contrast, were depicted as being possessed of no such aspirations. *Tulsa* is a portrayal of a hedonistic life and its devastating results. Its protagonists' activities often resulted in death, as underscored by the use of the short word "dead" as a caption to a photo (twice in the book) or the straightforward depiction of a dead baby.

As for Goldin, she depicted near-death quite literally in her images of AIDS victims who numbered among her close friends. Such images always have the possibility to shock an audience.

The social arenas canvassed by the four photographers treated here might be termed sites of emotional athleticism, and Goldin especially invoked a naked emotionalism through her intimate depictions of her friends. The term "emotional athleticism" is a variation upon Antonin Artaud's concept of "affective athleticism."¹⁹ Whereas the term "affect" is typically used in psychology, Artaud's description of "affective athleticism" contains much that falls outside the parameters of technical psychological theory. He writes of "*sentiments*" (feelings, emotions) as determining the comportment of the actor or actress, as well as that actor or actress conveying a sense of himself or herself in a similar fashion. The crucial thought, however, is that the body both transmits feelings, emotions, or affect, and receives these emotions: a body affects and is

¹⁹ Antonin Artaud, "An Affective Athleticism," in *Le Théâtre et son Double*, originally published in 1938 by Gallimard in *Collection Métamorphoses* as No. IV. Antonin Artaud, *The Theater And Its Double* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 133-141.

Gilles Deleuze explored this idea of "athleticism" in an interpretation of Francis Bacon's paintings, where the canvases of the painter's distorted figures become a physical and psychological stage for hysteria, spasm, horror, abjection, and emotion. The original publication appeared in 1981, at the height of Bacon's and Deleuze's powers. See Deleuze, "Athleticism," *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 13-18.

affected emotionally; the toll this takes is tantamount to an athleticism of *sentiment*. I argue that the four artists in this dissertation, to varying degrees, affectively communicate sensation and emotion through the bodies they portray.

Artaud said, “the actor is an athlete of the heart.” The subjects of the works of the four artists in this dissertation replace “the actor.” Instead of a stage or theatre, the subjects in question live in the reality of everyday dramas, turning their domestic spaces into something akin to the theatre where their emotions are displayed through the lens of the photographer.

As an example, certain difficulties in Goldin’s relationships were portrayed in the *Ballad of Sexual Dependency*. Most notoriously, her self-portrait (**fig.0.6**), taken after she was beaten by her boyfriend, makes a rare statement concerning a sad or even tragic moment in everyday life. That statement is enhanced by her saturated color palette, with the electrifyingly artificial hues that result from her use of a flash device—in itself a surprise factor. This emotional element is something audiences could relate to in Goldin’s work. Other participant observer photographers largely played down the emotional content of their material (though Jim Goldberg and Gillian Wearing could be counted as exceptions) [see pages 81-96].

Along with shock tactics, an exploration of abjection has also often been a tactic for artists. Julia Kristeva, in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, argued that abjection is “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules.”²⁰ Some participant observer photographers who have concerned themselves with abjection are: Bill Eppridge, Jim Goldberg, the Indian children taught by Briski, and Gillian Wearing [see section VI in chapter One]. Seeing images of abjection may mean experiencing horror and an insult to

²⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4. Originally published as *Pouvoirs de l’horreur: essai sur l’abjection* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1980).

our moral sensibilities. From portrayals of drug overdoses to abject poverty, the effect of seeing these horrors may bring to the viewer a sense of perversion. As an example, the draw of the abject quality of the artist's family life in a claustrophobic West Midlands British council flat—in Billingham's photographs from *Ray's a Laugh* (1996)—was frequently a topic among British critics, including Julian Stallabrass, who traced a shift in middle-class escape fantasies, from imagining rural folk enjoying rustic pleasures to ogling characters from the inner city.²¹ Billingham's book (among other instances of the contemporary British urban "pastoral") is said to serve a mildly perverse need on the part of the contemporary British middle-class for "joys of politically incorrect humour, the circulation of obscenities, the joys of violence, crime and vandalism, carefree sexual encounters and drug-taking."²² Billingham depicted his family members amidst their squalor, using crude formal devices that break the rules of conventional photography, an approach that accentuated the shockingly abject character of the household.

In an untitled photograph (**fig.0.7**) from *Ray's a Laugh*, Liz, Billingham's mother, yells at his father, Ray, with her fist clenched. Her verbal and emotional abuse is evident. Elsewhere in the photobook, viewers are exposed to family dramas among characters who embrace and fight amidst food, debris, and assorted household objects that are chaotically crammed into a confined apartment. Jim Lewis recounted how "looking at the work again and again, I've found myself feeling an almost physical pain."²³ Such a sensorial response is among the factors that unite Billingham's work to that of the other photographers featured here, who share this intensification of moral and sensory unease, this propensity to revolt or embarrass their

²¹ Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* (London: Verso, 1999).

²² Stallabrass, *High Art Lite*, 246.

²³ Jim Lewis, "No Place Like Home," *Artforum International* (January 1997): 65.

audiences. In Billingham's case, as Kieran Cashell argued, he approached his family and home "with the repulsive attitude of the cultural tourist."²⁴

Araki's scandalous tactics originate from the beginning of his career. His intense interest in vulgarity and sex has provoked both shock and admiration. His candid depiction of sex with his wife (**fig.0.8**), published in *Sentimental Journey* (1971), was especially notable. While the title suggests the sentimentality of a romantic time, the book is nothing like an ordinary wedding album. Such frank expressions of intimate activity in photography were unusual at the time in Japan.

I argue, in short, that the four insider photographers chosen for my dissertation differ from other participant observer photographers in the intensity with which they engage their subjects, and, in turn, their viewers. Furthermore, initially their work was not generally, made from a voyeuristic outsiders' point of view. By operating from deeply insider positions, they imposed authority over their subjects—family members, intimate friends, and lovers—and sometimes over the events they depicted. What makes the work of the photographers treated here shocking, to reiterate, is that even though they are dealing with what seems to be, for them, "ordinary" life activities, the events depicted include such extreme matters as death, brought about by drug overdoses, AIDS, cancer, and so forth. All four photographers also conveyed the transient lifestyles of their subjects. Clark looked at drug abuse, sex, and violence; Goldin observed the bohemian urban milieu of the *No Wave* scene of the 1970s and 80s; Billingham looked at the ravages of alcoholism; and Araki surveyed especially the excesses of commercial sexual conduct. All four photographers were concerned with activities that brought momentary pleasure at great cost, in other words. The present-orientated, uninhibited, often dangerous

²⁴ Kieran Cashell, "Everybody Hates a Tourist," *Aftershock: The Ethics of Contemporary Transgressive Art* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 27.

lifestyles they depicted were generally colorful, inasmuch as they entailed a high degree of personal expression, but because stimulants can provide a mask for the self, the element of truth remains in question.

Because of the element of everydayness in these four photographers' work, audiences could relate to some of what they saw, but at the same time viewers were inevitably disturbed by the shock factor that the images entail. That experience of shock could serve to prompt viewers to look at their own worlds with renewed eyes.

Photographs carry something other art media do not: information of the world through direct imprinting. With such a thought as a basis, we might ask why some photographs are more affecting than others. Further, or more specifically, what do sensational photos or "shocking" photos do to our mind and bodies?

Sensation is neither rational nor cerebral. In *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*,²⁵ a book analyzing the oeuvre of the British painter notorious for his shocking paintings, Gilles Deleuze quotes Paul Valéry: "Sensation is that which is transmitted directly and avoids the detour and boredom of conveying a story."²⁶ Deleuze goes on to say, "sensation is the master of deformations, the agent of bodily deformations."²⁷ It is inseparable from its direct action on the nervous system. Bodily deformation is an important element of sensory experience. The orderly worlds of, for instance, Barney and Sultan do not bring sensational experiences as such, but deliver an awareness of more subtle occurrences in the world. Conversely, the four photographers featured in this dissertation bring a wide spectrum of exaggerated physical

²⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004). Originally published as *Francis Bacon: Logique de la sensation* (Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1981).

²⁶ Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 32.

²⁷ Ibid.

expressions, of activities deformed and distorted by drinking alcohol, abusing drugs, patronizing sexual establishments, and so on. Their own emotional nakedness is expressed through the conditions of the situations and events that they depict.

I argue that the four artists discussed in this dissertation effectively draw out the viewers' own experience of the sensorial through their photographic images. I also argue that (as is generally acknowledged) sensation or shock loses its effect over time. A once shocking photograph may lose its impact if one is repeatedly exposed to it. (I must confess that, over time, this has happened to me: these shocking images no longer seem so profoundly sensational to me.) Barthes noted in *Camera Lucida*, "Photography, in order to surprise, photographs the notable; but soon, by a familiar reversal, it decrees notable whatever it photographs. The 'anything whatever' then becomes the sophisticated acme of value."²⁸

III. Review of Literature

This section outlines the literature on a kind of photography that I term participant observation, but that other critics variously have called quasi-documentary (James Crump), new documentary (Felicia Feaster), and insider photography (Abigail Solomon-Godeau).

Peter Galassi's notable exhibition *Pleasures and Terrors of Domestic Comfort*, at MoMA in 1991, surveyed works by postmodern photographers who adapted the candid vocabulary of snapshot aesthetics to their art photography, revealing intimate moments of family life.²⁹ In the accompanying publication,³⁰ Galassi observed the scarcity of photographic records of life at

²⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 34.

²⁹ *Pleasures and Terrors of Domestic Comfort* was held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, September 26 – December 31, 1991.

³⁰ Peter Galassi, "Introduction," *Pleasures and Terrors of Domestic Comfort* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1991), 6-23.

home—prior to the emergence of the work highlighted in the show, which hailed principally from the 1980s—as contrasted with the abundance of photographs of street life. Within the extant records of domestic life prior to the decade of the show’s focus, he noted, the images tended to fall into two broad categories: the first, casual snapshot records of everyday life; the second, domestic images subordinated to the aesthetic programs of art photographers. By his account, beginning in 1980, U.S. photographers increasingly shifted their interests toward the home, at times with a view to revisiting the tropes of amateur family photography. There were forerunners to this development, such as William Eggleston, whose 1971 photographs were published by MoMA in 1976. Galassi noted the “aura of intimacy” that lends emotional weight to the mundane objects in Eggleston’s *Guide* (1976).³¹ Galassi’s aim was to survey this development of domestic scenes in photography as “a coherent artistic phenomenon.”³² According to Galassi, photographers who made pictures of domestic scenes during this era (1980 to 1991), rather than forming a school, operated independently and were largely unaware of each other’s work. In addition to Eggleston, the book and exhibition include works by other forerunners such as Lee Friedlander.³³

Galassi warned against reading the works he exhibited as “a sociological report” on home life and acknowledged that the MoMA show was largely devoid of images of, say, domestic turmoil such as drug abuse, child abuse, and violence. Instead, he chose works for the show that “might be classified as unusually interesting snapshots.”³⁴ As for why the practice of creating images of domestic experiences had been flourishing, Galassi speculated broadly that

³¹ Galassi, “Introduction,” 11.

³² Ibid.

³³ A roster of photographers included in the exhibition lists Lee Friedlander, Nan Goldin, Sally Mann, Lore Novak, Doug DuBois, William Eggleston, Gregory Crewdson, Philip-Lorca DiCorcia, Tina Barney, Larry Sultan, Joel Sternfeld, Laurie Simmons, Cindy Sherman, Adrienne Salinger, and Carrie Mae Weems, among many other.

³⁴ Galassi, “Introduction,” 12.

artists “began to photograph at home not because it was important, in the sense that political issues are important, but because it was there—the one place that is easier to get to than the street.”³⁵ Galassi’s book included some art photographers who brought domestic scenes to visibility: Mary Frey, who shot a series of black-and-white photographs of home life, “Domestic Rituals” (1979-1983), and a series of color photographs, “Real Life Dramas” (1984-1987); Doug DuBois, who made a photographic story of his own family since 1985; Philip-Lorca diCorcia, who did a series, originating in 1979, of stylistically sophisticated photographs in domestic settings; and Cindy Sherman, with her highly fictionalized catalog of female roles performed by the artist.

At times, the easy access to one’s own domestic setting, on the part of both amateurs and professionals, could blur the lines between snapshots and art. Galassi’s text provided sources on the relationship between contemporary photography and popular culture, albeit confined to U.S. photographers.

A wide range of works by art photographers who explored themes of domesticity revealed an interest in childhood, which Galassi interpreted as a sign of the baby boomers’ nostalgia for postwar domestic mores. For those photographers who were parents themselves, the revisiting and re-invention of childhood could, in a way, bring back the past, if with overtones of irony and sentimentality.³⁶

Galassi also discussed a group of photographers whose practices combined the documentary idiom with the fictions of popular culture, starting with Frey and diCorcia, and continued by Gregory Crewdson, Carrie Mae Weems, and Nic Nicosia. Galassi noted that

³⁵ Ibid., 14.

³⁶ Photographers who revisit the past include Anne Turyn, Larry Sultan, Neil Winokur, Lorie Novak, Ken Botto, and James Casebere.

negotiating the delicate balance between documentary and fiction is not easy. Photographers such as Sage Sohler, Tina Barney, Joel Sternfeld, and Joan Albert have remained loyal to the documentary tradition while tuning their fictional realities.

Among the many themes that might be found in domestic scene photography, Galassi included something of the dark side of domestic life. He cited Nan Goldin's *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* as a prime example of the case for the explicit documentation of sex and violence, implying that her photographs were shocking, although notably he selected images for exhibition by Goldin that would avoid shocking viewers. Galassi observed that:

Photographers rarely have attempted the voyeuristic shock of [Eric] Fischl and [David] Lynch, perhaps because in the frozen immediacy of still photography, shock too easily displaces deeper emotions.³⁷

By largely shying away from images of shock and extreme sensation, Galassi kept his exhibition on safe grounds, catering to middle-class viewers who could identify with the everydayness portrayed, whether it was more documentary or more fictional in character. Also striking by its absence was the everydayness of marginalized subcultures imaged by U.S. photographers who worked within that realm, such as Mark Morrisroe, Jack Pierson, and Larry Clark.

Galassi's curatorial effort confirmed the emergence of the domestic scene as a focus of art photographs, the majority of which employed documentary tactics, often with the photographer assuming an insider position. My dissertation seeks to compensate for this rather safe view by including discussion of some photographers excluded by Galassi, perhaps because they could make viewers uncomfortable. Also, the curator's exclusive focus on the United States will be countered here by the inclusion of British and Japanese examples.

³⁷ Galassi, "Introduction," 20.

James Crump's 1996 essay "Quasi Documentary"³⁸ demarcated a new genre of photography, said to be pioneered by Larry Clark and developed by Nan Goldin, Mark Morrisroe (1959-1989), and Jack Pierson (b.1960). While Crump did not offer details on other artists beyond those four, his essay provided language and terms that photography writers could use to define a burgeoning new genre, one that emerged especially during the 1980s after Clark paved the way. Describing Clark's position as one of "club membership in a society of drifters, pushers, pimps, and hookers," Crump said "subject and object dissolved within the photographer's act of assimilation."³⁹ Crump traced the lineage of a quasi-documentary approach to Walker Evans' 1938 *American Photographs*, which, Crump asserted, "allow[ed]... the 'reader' to produce meaning from the ironic and rhetorical sequencing of images."⁴⁰ Unlike more typical 1930s documentary photography—which, fostered by conditions of the Great Depression, sought higher social aims—quasi-documentary claimed no such lofty goals. According to Crump, Clark's works offered instead "personal catharsis" via "emblems of self-obsession that offer ... a safe fantasy of decadence" to the viewer.⁴¹ Nonetheless, Crump suggested that Clark's works were closer in spirit to the work of such "outsider" photographers as Robert Frank and Danny Lyon, who "pushed the fragmented, displaced, and interminably morose viewpoint."⁴² Crump credited Frank's landmark book *The Americans* with having a great impact on Clark's generation and on the budding quasi-documentarians who emerged in the 1980s. According to Crump, Frank's alien, external viewpoint deconstructed the

³⁸ James Crump, "Quasi Documentary: Evolution of a Photographic Style," *The New Art Examiner* (March 1996): 22-28.

³⁹ Crump, "Quasi Documentary," 23.

⁴⁰ Crump, 25.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 24.

overwrought American myths of freedom, equality, and opportunity, while evincing a freewheeling desire to document the American fray, including the various subcultural milieus that the photographer penetrated.⁴³

Crump delineated differences between images representing *genuine* insider positions and those entailing pretentious or *disingenuous* insider positions, either of which might appear in different works by the same insider photographer. If Nan Goldin's *Ballad of Sexual Dependency* may be counted a confessional work, in which the artist eradicated the perceived distance created by the presence of the camera, effectively dissolving the boundaries between artist and subject, then Goldin's second book, *The Other Side* (1993), and subsequent projects displayed "something disturbingly gratuitous," in Crump's estimation.⁴⁴ Crump discerned "the air of an editorial assignment"—described as a sense of the "slick, [or] calculated, and with little of the spontaneity of the earlier transvestite photographs"⁴⁵—in the second book's propensity for being "scripted and contrived"—as too was Clark's film *Kids*, by this account.⁴⁶

I was somewhat dissatisfied by Crump's explanation of the contrived aspects of these quasi-documentarians' later works, as he did not consider their changed status as artists among the possible reasons for the increasingly calculated character of their insider photography. I will explore the impact of the development of their status as artists in later chapters of my dissertation.

Crump's acknowledgement of the significant contribution of the loosely linked, so-called Boston School of artists (see pages 148-151 on the Boston School), such as Mark Morrisroe and

⁴³ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 26, 27.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 27.

Jack Pierson (along with Nan Goldin) is noteworthy, as the work of the photographers in this group typified the new visibility of varied or non-normative sexual identities that marked these artists and their micro-cultures during the 1980s. I will describe the cultural backgrounds of each of my dissertation's four principal artists in order to explain how their participant observer photography conveyed the realities of the previously misunderstood or unnoticed subcultures they inhabited.

My dissertation builds in some ways upon Crump's idea of quasi-documentary. Following chronologically the techniques pioneered by two U.S. artists, Larry Clark and Nan Goldin, my dissertation generally accepts Crump's notion of the insider position, including the limitations of truth-telling from that position and the tendency to blur factuality with the fictional, hence Crump's use of the modifier "quasi." I go further in my discussion of this genre, however, by including two additional artists, one from Great Britain and the other from Japan, with a view to expanding Crump's sole focus on the United States. While I am not arguing that this genre was or is pervasive throughout the world, there is a degree of globalism in the development of the new documentarian impulse that deserves attention. Also, my dissertation necessarily provides a more detailed account of the social and cultural backgrounds of the outsider subcultures from which each artist emerged. Close examination of the specific cultural features revealed by their cameras enhances understanding of why audiences were shocked by the images to which they were exposed. Additionally, my research on British and Japanese participant observation photography is meant to fill some large gaps left by scholars who have devoted all their attention to pioneers of this genre in the United States.

Felicia Feaster, in her 1998 essay “Chasing Reality: the New Documentary Aesthetic,”⁴⁷ addressed the notion of truth as depicted in “new documentary” photography and film by distinguishing it from the historical tradition of “straight” or “vérité” documentary’s clinical evisceration of raw fact. Her essay delineates the scope of photography within this genre, including in filmmaking. In Feaster’s discussion of works by a cadre of filmmakers of the 1980s and 1990s who took a highly personal tone—Terry Zwigoff, Michael Moore, Errol Morris, Ross McElwee, Ruth Leitman, Nick Broomfield, Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky, Martin Bell, Steve James, and Jennie Livingston—she argued that these new documentary filmmakers “valorize subjectivity, both their own and their films, in a democratic refusal to assume the usual filmic approach of detached, journalistic appraisal.”⁴⁸ These filmmakers invite “our own immersion and a shared emotional investment in their material.” Further, Feaster says these filmmakers “challenge the ostensibly neutral perspective of film, admitting their own collusion in reality’s manufacture.”⁴⁹

Feaster links her roster of new filmmakers to Crump’s four photographers, and to the latter’s list adds: Mary Ellen Mark, Richard Billingham, Jim Goldberg, Paul Graham, Gillian Wearing, Sally Mann, Adrienne Salinger, Larry Sultan, Rineke Dijkstra, Wendy Ewald, and Philip Lorca-diCorcia. She says that “this new mode of documentary utilizes an emotional

⁴⁷ Felicia Feaster, “Chasing Reality: the New Documentary Aesthetic Source,” *Art Papers* 22, no.5 (S/O 1998): 28-33. Feaster neglected to address the historic connotations of the term “New Documentary” in her essay. Curated by John Szarkowski at Museum of Modern Art, from February 28 through May 7, 1967, the photography exhibition “New Documents” presented ninety photographs by three U.S. photographers from a new generation, Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand. According to Szarkowski, this new generation of photographers redirected “the technique and aesthetic of documentary photography to more personal ends.” Szarkowski said that their aim was “not to reform life but to know it, not to persuade but to understand.” (Curatorial Exhibition Files, Exh. #821. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.) Feaster’s essay, which included discussion of works by Arbus, but not Friedlander and Winogrand, discussed the nature of personal documentary photography in Arbus’s work as well as the work of many other photographers she included in the camp of “New Documentary” photography.

⁴⁸ Feaster, “Chasing Reality,” 28.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

investment in [the photographers'] subjects to move beyond mere recording of the truth, for a participation in its making which gives these works an aura of emotional integrity."⁵⁰

Feaster's achievement was to recognize a tendency in film and photography to utilize emotional nakedness as a key element in the revelation of ordinary life. What Feaster called "the little stuff" is said to matter. Feaster's claim gave validity to the emotional engagement of new documentary photographers, but combining the different modalities of new documentary photography into a single article proves to be a shortcoming. The last section of my Chapter One will attempt to compensate for this lack of differentiation amongst the varied modes of new documentary photography by distinguishing among and categorizing a range of methods.

According to Feaster, the new documentarians shared a belief in "the body, the grotesque, sex and death as the hidden repositories of such emotional truth and the extremities of response they inspire."⁵¹ Feaster recognized that the new documentarians did not parcel their material into truth versus fiction in the way traditional documentarians generally did. Distinguished by the ambiguity of their approaches, they addressed reality with ever watchful, would-be truthful eyes, yet their goal was not mere objective reportage.

Neither Crump nor Feaster clearly articulated how the fictitious aspects of "quasi-documentary" or "new documentary" photography and film operate. Both writers question whether the photography of this genre depicts whole truths, but why and how the pictures in question may not tell whole truths remains unanswered.

The potential complexity and ambiguity of different photographers' positions and the question of whose work contains more truth content is discussed in Abigail Solomon-Godeau's

⁵⁰ Ibid., 29.

⁵¹ Ibid., 32.

essay “Inside/Out,”⁵² which challenges the conventional view of the insider position as preferable. Solomon-Godeau saw outsider photography—as typified by Ed Ruscha’s photo book, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966), and Dan Graham’s *Homes for America* (1965-70)—as representing “the degree zero of photographic exteriority,”⁵³ because it evacuates subjectivity and refuses personalized style. “Depthlessness, anonymity, banality, and . . . mechanical reproducibility” are said to be the qualities of this “outside” pole of photographic practice. Solomon-Godeau posits examples by Nan Goldin and Larry Clark as signifying the opposite pole, namely “inside” photography. What she terms the “confessional mode – *le cœur mis à nu* (the heart laid bare –Baudelaire),”⁵⁴ assumes that the photographer is in a position of intimate proximity with her or his subjects. She argued, however, that many of the subjects in Goldin’s early black-and-white photographs, such as drag queens and transvestites, performed for Goldin in the manner of glamorous fashion models. Goldin’s later color photographs of these performers and transvestites, in the book *The Other Side*, are also marked by exteriority due to the use of masquerade and the act of transforming appearance, and thus are described as superficial, failing to penetrate to the truth behind appearances.

Solomon-Godeau says Clark’s work emphasizes “masculinity, specifically adolescent masculine sexuality.”⁵⁵ She questions Clark’s changed position in the photobooks that succeeded *Tulsa*, such as *Teenage Lust* and *The Perfect Childhood*, in which he included himself in the teenagers’ surreptitious activities (*Teenage Lust*) and where boy hustlers from New York’s 42nd Street performed sexual acts in front of his camera (*The Perfect Childhood*).

⁵² Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “Inside/Out,” in *Public Information: Desire, Disaster, Document*, ed. Gary Garrels (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of modern Art, 1995), 49-61.

⁵³ Solomon-Godeau, “Inside/Out,” 51.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

Clark's images from these projects, unlike his first book, *Tulsa*, in which he was an insider, cannot escape the charge of voyeurism. The limitation of insider photography, according to Solomon-Godeau, is the presence of the camera. It is "simply, stupidly *there*" and "it is, in every sense, a part of the action, acknowledged or not."⁵⁶

As for the sexual activities portrayed by Goldin and Clark, Solomon-Godeau argues that it may well be the case that "all photography that deals with sexuality, of whatever stripe, can be located within the workings of the inside."⁵⁷ She also asserts that photographs and film images taken by outsiders such as Robert Frank and Chantal Akerman could tell a certain kind of truth; *The Americans* (1955) by Frank and *D'Est (From the East)* by Akerman (1991), for example, are said to possess the "truth of appearance."⁵⁸

Solomon-Godeau's claim is premised on what she identified as an essential limitation of photography. Neither an inside nor an outside position can be considered preferable, in Solomon-Godeau's scheme, because, despite the participation of the photographer in the event being recorded, the camera cannot deliver a truth beyond the truth of the exterior world of reality. After all, photography is an abstraction that yields only an idea of reality.

Solomon-Godeau argues that it is impossible to make genuinely surreptitious photographs, even as an insider, because of the physical presence of the camera. It is "simply, stupidly *there*." The performativity of subjects before a camera diminishes any benefit that the insider position might bring to conveying truthfulness, she would argue, thereby rendering moot any meaningful distinction between insider and outsider photographers.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 55, 57.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 58.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 60.

Geoffrey Batchen has examined related issues within the history of photography. His essay, “Guilty Pleasures,” takes up “a panoptic principle,” which is said to have developed concurrently with the camera. Batchen argues that “the desire to see without being seen,” which has been equated with sexual voyeurism (and therefore with “perversion”), has always been a central principle of the practice of photography, not, as has often been assumed, a peripheral cultural phenomenon. The tradition of surreptitious street photography was initiated by pioneers such as William Henry Fox Talbot, Louis Daguerre, and Hippolyte Bayard, who employed hidden cameras and long exposure times.⁵⁹ Another longtime practice is to observe others “as if we are seeing them from the vantage point of a modern surveillance camera,”⁶⁰ a practice typified by Talbot’s early *tableaux vivant* and by the work of two Scotsmen, David Hill and Robert Adamson. In the latter’s works, the sitters never directly engage with the camera, pretending that no camera is present. The result is a “candid camera” aesthetic of naturalness in poses and settings. In contrast to more formulaic studio portraits, these natural looking images were made to create an illusion of truth and objectivity.

Batchen goes on to explain that one solution to the problem of representing the “life” of reality was to replace the human eye with a mechanical substitute (photography). A genre of naturalism absent any conventional artistic qualities was invented through the “detective” camera, which came into use in 1881. Not only did the concealed apparatus record scenes of ordinary people going about their lives, it also demonstrated a new kind of erotic relationship to photographic practice by virtue of its invasive nature, which quickly became a concern.

⁵⁹ The cameras of all these photographers were actually quite large. Daguerre and Talbot photographed from high windows and so their cameras were hidden from view. (Geoffrey Batchen, e-mail message to author, August 5, 2012.)

⁶⁰ Batchen, “Guilty Pleasures,” 448.

The first Kodak camera, introduced by George Eastman of Rochester in 1888, fostered popular photography through standardization and mass manufacture. Snapshot photography by amateurs developed, characterized by the prevalence of centralized compositions and expressions of “the momentary, the everyday, the banal, the purely personal”⁶¹ (in regard to Goldin, see my discussion of Batchen’s concept of the Snapshot in Chapter Three). Batchen, however, brings attention to the efforts of serious practitioners who distinguished their photographic methods from the banality of snapshots. He notes that the subjects in the photographs of Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine almost always look directly into the camera, indicating overt acknowledgement of the intrusion of the photographer and the presence of the camera. Batchen argues that the subjects’ direct gazes help “combat the sense . . . that the hand-held cameras are synonymous with an unwarranted surveillance.”⁶² In Hine’s photographs, no one was tricked or exploited. While retaining naturalism, his photographs avoid the “bad habits” of concealed detective photography. Hine’s more “ethical” photographs show people facing the camera, but they do not “pose.”⁶³ Such directness also appears in works by photographers for the New Deal welfare projects of the 1930s, such as Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans. The appearance of photographic honesty was essential to the effective propagation of New Deal policies.⁶⁴

The desire of the photographer to see without being seen was evinced by Walker Evans in a personal project when he made images of New York subway riders in 1938 and 1941 with a hidden Leica camera. Evans sought to capture the special state of passengers during moments of

⁶¹ Batchen, “Guilty Pleasures,” 451.

⁶² Ibid..

⁶³ Ibid..

⁶⁴ Ibid., 452.

unguardedness, but, to the contrary, his images show them to be quite guarded. Batchen's characterization of the blank expressions of the passengers as "impenetrable and opaque"⁶⁵ indicates the limits of access in a confined public space where the practice of looking follows social cues and codes. In other words, the exterior reality is practically impenetrable and that impenetrability constitutes "the truth of appearance," to borrow Solomon-Godeau's phrase. Batchen provides another example of spy-like photography by Evans, with images taken in Michigan in 1946 using a preset Rolleiflex camera held low against his body so that passersby would remain unaware of his activity.

Batchen links these spy-like photographs of Evans to those produced for the Mass Observation movement,⁶⁶ operating in Britain from 1937 onward. A pioneer in European photojournalism, the German, Erich Salomon, developed the practice of secret snapshot photography executed without the knowledge or consent of his subjects. Beginning in 1928, Salomon secretly took snapshots of court cases and political conferences, his camera concealed in a briefcase with a hole cut out for the lens. The resulting images were astonishing for their informality. Salomon's use of deception to make his surreptitious snapshots became commonplace amongst European photojournalists by the 1930s.⁶⁷ The Bauhaus teacher Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, who had previously practiced avant-garde abstraction, when he fled to London in 1936 started photographing accidental, ordinary moments of natural life by "taking rapid shots without being observed." The one-time abstractionist had shifted his artistic concern to privilege

⁶⁵ Ibid., 453.

⁶⁶ Mass Observation, or M-O, was a pioneering research organization, formed in Britain to challenge false mass-media images of the working and middle class people, as well as images promoted by academic sociologists and government officials. See Terry Dennett, "The British Film and Photo League," in *Creative Camera*, nos. 197-98 (May/June 1981).

⁶⁷ Batchen, "Guilty Pleasures," 454.

“truth” and “fact”.⁶⁸ Humphrey Spender, who was hired by the Mass Observation initiative (which depended upon the reporting of volunteer native informants), adopted a spy’s methods to observe the working class town, Bolton, as part of an effort at securing a detailed empirical ethnography of modern Britain.⁶⁹

Like Crump, Batchen also attended to the pedigree of the influential Robert Frank, whose outsider’s coolly distant view toward his U.S. subjects gave rise to a new generation of U.S. photographers. According to Batchen, the influence of Frank’s self-conscious street photography emerged in various forms, such as “with a measure of intellectual exhaustion” (in the case of Garry Winogrand) and “with the tawdry tabloid-sensibility of the native informant” (in the cases of Larry Clark and Nan Goldin).⁷⁰ By the 1970s, photographers had accepted such self-conscious street photography as possessing “an established pedigree and a recognized set of aesthetic conventions.”⁷¹ Batchen concludes that the very qualities once associated with “detective photography”—slice-of-life facticity through unmediated representations of reality and an apparent aesthetic indifference to framing, composition, and lighting—have become formulaic to advertising and postmodern mimicry. Sherman’s late 1970s black-and-white photographic series, *Untitled Film Stills*, is evidence of such employment of the “look of surveillance” by an artist who utilizes artifice to mimic stock female roles, such as were assumed by the characters in Hollywood B-movies, all played by herself.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 455.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 455-456.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 458.

⁷¹ Ibid.

In examples ranging from early pioneers of the medium to photographers of the Post-modern era, Batchen traced a persistent, underlying desire to use the camera to capture reality without drawing attention to the act of photography itself.

Batchen also noted that technological developments in photography contributed to the practices of artists as well as of amateurs who adopted the available advancements of the industry. Naturally this leads to my own question of what kind of photographic practices—among those who pursue the “desire to see without being seen”—have emerged in the digital photographic era.

I accept Batchen’s central argument that “the desire to see without being seen” has existed since the inception of photography, and that it evolved in accordance with the development of culture and technical apparatuses. The four photographers who are the focus of this dissertation amplified such a practice, both overtly and covertly. I will expand upon Batchen’s brief characterization of works by Clark and Goldin in full chapters, exploring the complex layers of cultural contexts and personal motivations surrounding their photographic practices.

Martha Rosler’s essay, “In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography),”⁷² originally published in 1981, questioned the truisms surrounding documentary photography as regards its motivations, political impact, and the fate of its images. Rosler sees this particular genre of photography, as well as any other recorded medium that strives for objectivity and transparency, as the product of a social system, and she argued that photos of powerless victims served the needs of a socially powerful class. When that happens, the original purpose of the photographs turns into something else, such as promoting the career of the

⁷² Martha Rosler, “In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography),” originally published in *Martha Rosler: 3 Works* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981), was republished in Richard Bolton, ed., *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), in Liz Wells, ed., *Photography: A Critical Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000) and in Martha Rosler, *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975-2001* (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 2004).

photographer, benefiting a charity, and/or drawing attention to the photographic medium itself. “Victim photography,” according to Rosler, is never truly about helping the pathetic subjects depicted in such photographs, but more about promoting social welfare programs, photographers’ careers, or Christian evangelism. Rosler says, “The exposé, the compassion and outrage, of documentary fueled by the dedication to reform has shaded over into combinations of exoticism, tourism, voyeurism, psychologism, metaphysics, trophy hunting—and careerism.”⁷³ Edward Curtis’s romanticization of Native Americans, Jacob Riis’s exposés of the immigrant poor, and Dorothea Lange’s iconic images of Florence Thompson are explicit targets of Rosler’s criticism.

Rosler deplores the tendency toward exploitation that surrounds documentary photography and questions the ethics of what historically have been regarded as objective and transparent photographic records. In Rosler’s view, virtually every photographic image may entail exploitation. As a consequence, she does not construct any alternative, ethically defensible mode of documentary photography—except, as a conceptual exercise, through the example of her own project, *The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems*, a photo-text work (1974-75) that sets out to evade exploitation. Devoid of the indigents historically rife on the Bowery—customarily portrayed as victims in conventional documentary photography—her forty-five black-and-white gelatin silver prints depict the environs rather than the denizens of New York’s skid row, presented alongside text panels whose words variously allude to the drunken state of the men in question.

The moment a documentary photograph, whose purpose was to reform, is sold at an art gallery or shown in a museum, the gap between the original intent behind the work and its

⁷³ Martha Rosler, “In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography),” *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975-2001*, 178.

ultimate fate widens. Rosler's essay alerts us to the ethical valences of the use and acceptance of documentary images. When the focus concerning documentary photographs is on their aesthetic value or the prowess of the photographer, the initial purpose and the question of what happened to the depicted victims become secondary. According to Rosler, any photography that makes claims to objectivity and transparency demands scrutiny because photographs can never really be transparent or objective, and they are fated in any case to be subsumed by conservative social and cultural systems.

I argue that quasi-documentary photographers somewhat escape Rosler's criticism of documentary photography, partly due to their lack of moral intention: they never meant to reform audiences or readers through their work (with the exception of Goldin's AIDS victim photography). While the quasi-documentarians may claim authenticity through their involvement with their subjects, the blurring of boundaries between author and subject add further complications. The stagedness and fictional qualities intermixed with the factuality of their work were never denied by these artists whose final destinations for their work was the art world. The four photographers featured here produced their work as art, not as documentary per se, even if their work may at times be regarded as authentic documentation of the subcultures depicted. Authenticity is not the same as objectivity, and fiction can at times evince more truth or reality than bald statements of fact. However, Rosler's point about "victim photography" still applies to the four cases I present. While the four photographers treated here were recording their subjects ostensibly from the position of an equal, they still assumed a superior role inasmuch as they functioned as observers and recorders who determined the exposures of the photographic images of their subjects, and in that way possess power over their subjects.

Furthermore, these artists capitalized on their images to make a profit and build careers within the art world.

IV. Chapters

My dissertation differentiates and addresses four modes of what might be called quasi-documentary photography as employed by four photographers who have come to prominence during roughly the last quarter of the twentieth century and who all continue to work.

In the first chapter, I trace the history of participant observation in anthropology, including participant observer anthropologists' adoption of photography. The development of participant observer photography—particularly in the United States, from Walker Evans to Diane Arbus—will be discussed. These photographers' subjective reporting perspectives were, to some extent, analogous to the reporting technique employed by the New Journalists in their essays. Among many influences, I cite *Social Landscape Photography in the United States* as a precursor to the non-judgmental, non-moralistic documentary tendency of participant observers. I argue that this proclivity was relevant not only in the United States, but also in Britain, where publication of Arbus's work accelerated the growth of the trend there. I will examine the status of photography in Britain since the 1960s and of Japanese photography in the 1960s and 1970s.

In the succeeding chapters, devoted to the individual artists, I identify the different characteristics of each participant observer's visual methods and pinpoint his or her artistic sources and precursors. Four more or less distinctive visual modes will emerge, each exemplified by one of the photographers in question. In my second chapter, I examine Larry Clark's photographs of adolescents obsessed with drugs and sex, which fill the pages of his notorious photobooks, *Tulsa* (1971), *Teenage Lust* (1983), and *1992* (1992). Prior to Clark's *Tulsa*, the depiction of adolescents, particularly troubled youths, had been realized by outsider

photographers. The self-conscious street photography influenced by Robert Frank paved the way for U.S. photographers such as Bruce Davidson and Danny Lyon, whose documentation of rising subcultures (Brooklyn gangs for Davidson and motorcycle gangs for Lyon) brought considerable attention. I argue that Clark's emergence as a recorder of sensational material, which brought sudden visibility to drug-abusing teenagers, followed from the milieu that had been established by outsider photographers. This chapter will also discuss Clark's films, which deal with similar subject matter, such as *Kids* (1995), *Bully* (2001), and *Ken Park* (2002). With his *Tulsa* project, Clark began as an observer but progressed to becoming part of the story, to the point that he saw himself as an insider. However, I argue that over time Clark shifted toward a more outside and voyeuristic mode, as he persisted in photographing a subculture to which he no longer belonged. Identifying strongly with his subjects throughout, Clark asserts that his images are broadly autobiographical. This chapter also examines the ways in which Clark portrayed the bodies of his subjects within the context of the literature on body politics.

In Chapter Three, I will examine the emotional impact of Nan Goldin's diaristic images of her own subculture, including her lovers and her friends. Goldin's formative student period in the 1970s in Boston, where she initiated her life-long relationships with drag queen friends and lovers, will be examined. From the beginning of her career, Goldin's personal life provided the material for her work. Her life on the Lower East Side of New York City, beginning with her move there in 1978, was intertwined with the *No Wave* scene. Goldin's seminal slideshow, the *Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, was developed in this context. Her participant observer technique, which I describe as an integrated mode, depended on her communal relationship to her subjects. While Goldin's vision of her adopted community of friends was sometimes sarcastically labeled the "Family of Nan," this suggestion of the (would-be) universality of her images contradicted

the particularity of the cultural environment to which she belonged and which she promoted. This conceptual dilemma will be examined in light of Louis Kaplan's analysis of Jean-Luc Nancy's work, *The Inoperative Community*. Another label for Goldin, that of "snapshot photographer," will also be analyzed closely. Lastly, *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing* (1989), Goldin's powerful portrayal of the loss of her intimate community—her friends dying of AIDS—and her activist curatorial work on their behalf is presented in detail.

In Chapter Four, I will consider what I call the disassociated observer mode of British photographer Richard Billingham, who is known for photographing his own family: his alcoholic father, Ray; his tattooed mother, Liz; and his brother, Jason. *Ray's a Laugh* (1996) features visceral images of private life captured in haphazardly framed snapshots that never show the photographer. Before addressing Billingham's work, Chapter Four devotes lengthy space to the history of the representation of working class subjects in Britain. Increasingly, toward the 1970s, British photographers turned toward a more subjectivized form of documentary photography, and that tendency continued through the 1990s. There was a rising interest in family photography during the 1990s as representations of contemporary family photography revealed the diverse structures of the domestic arrangements of the British people.

This chapter revisits *Ray's a Laugh*, and the editorial process of producing the book is discussed as a complicating factor. In addition, I consider how the artist's notorious video *Fishtank* (1998)⁷⁴ brought the immediacy of his intimate family life to the public; this chapter examines that work in the context of British Social Realism, a genre in which depictions of the underclass were the principal topic. Billingham's unscripted video works are compared to other

⁷⁴ Besides *FishTank* (1998), other video works by Billingham include *Ray in Bed* (1999), *Tony Smoking Backwards* (1998), *Liz Smoking* (1998), *Playstation* (1999), and *Bradford Trip* (1996).

artists' video and film works, including *An American Family* (1973),⁷⁵ a proto-reality television series. Billingham's unique vision, established through his family photographs, stands somewhere between family snapshots and art photography, as I explain within the context of addressing his particular participant observer position.

Chapter Five will investigate the oeuvre of Japan's most widely published photographer, Nobuyoshi Araki, focusing particular attention on several books that marked his career, such as *Sentimental Journey* (1971), which received considerable attention for its honest expression of his intimate personal life with his beloved wife, Yoko. More personalized forms of photography were rising in Japan during the late 1960s and early 1970s due to rapid changes in the sociopolitical climate there. Photographers such as Shigeo Gocho and Masatoshi Naito will be briefly discussed. I will emphasize the significance of Araki's experimental avant-garde work during his early career. His *Xerox Photo Album* (1970) and *Kitchen Ramen Restaurant* shows will be examined. Believing that the "I-novel" is the form of expression most closely resembling photography, Araki immersed himself in his subject, striving to minimize the physical distance between artist and sitter.⁷⁶ Other notable publications, such as *Pseudo-Diary* (1980) blurred the boundaries between the real and the fictional through the manipulation of the date function and the visual narratives of the book. In my discussion of it, what I term Araki's reflexive mode of photography will be examined. Lastly, this chapter will devote space to discussing the artist's notorious *Tokyo Lucky Hole* (1990), photographs of the sexual customs of the Kabuki-cho entertainment district of Shinjuku, Tokyo, shot between 1983 and 1985. His fascination with the

⁷⁵ *An American Family* was a weekly documentary that followed the real life travails of the Loud family of California.

⁷⁶ I-novel is a genre in Japanese literature that involves writing about oneself. This genre was founded based on the Japanese reception of Naturalism during the Taisho Period (1912-26). The form reflects greater individuality and a less constrained method of writing.

sex industry of Japan and his cheerful engagement with the sex workers will be critically viewed through a history of prostitution and of the status of women in Japan. In these sexual images, Araki maximizes the performative qualities of the models and of himself before his own camera. This performative mode, as I call it, within participant observer photography will be examined.

Grouping these four artists into one cohesive study will allow comparisons not only within the field of still photography, but also with works in film, literature, and anthropology. The artists' cinematic presentations, slide shows and films/videos extend the continuum of still photography into a growing trend of multi-media art. Participant Observer techniques may combine both the would-be objective (documentary reality) and the artificial (contrivance/fiction) while also blurring the line between author and subject. My conclusion will consider the cultural and social forces that led to these artists' working methods and will address their influence on subsequent art photography.

Chapter One

Photographer as Participant Observer

I. Participant Observation in Anthropology

The terms *participant observer* and *participant observation* have their roots in anthropology, where they emerged in the 1930s as the principal approach within ethnographic research. Employed by anthropologists who relied on the cultivation of personal relationships with local informants as a way of learning about a culture, participant observation involved techniques of observing and participating in the social life of a group. A number of photographers have adopted a similar mode of practice.

It is unclear when the terms *participant observer* and *participant observation* first came into use. According to Kathleen M. and Bille R. DeWalt, the earliest appearance of the term *participant observation* was in a treatise on anthropological methods published in the early 1920s.⁷⁷ Eduard C. Lindeman, an early advocate of the *emic/etic* approach, referring respectively to the viewpoints of the insider (native informant) and the outsider (observer or researcher), considered that the complete answer to the question “what is going on?” should come from the perspectives of both the researcher (outsider) and the participant (insider).⁷⁸ To reach this goal, he advocated the use of participant observers in all social research into group behavior. In Lindeman’s terminology, a participant observer would be a key native informant who had been trained to scrutinize his own group and who observes his own circumstances, as opposed to an outside researcher who may have adopted a participant role.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Kathleen M. DeWalt and Bille R. DeWalt, *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2002), 7.

⁷⁸ Eduard C. Lindeman, “Observation and the Participant Observer,” *Social Discovery: An Introduction to the Study of Functional Groups* (New York: Republic, 1924), 177-200.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

While all humans are both participants and observers in their daily lives, what defines participant observation is the systematic use of the information that ensues for social scientific purposes. The method requires explicit recording and analysis of observations. Participant observation differs from the more formal ethnographic research techniques of interviewing, structured observation, questionnaires, and the quantitative methods of data collection. Informality and casual intimacy characterize the approach. Ethnographers practice their method by living in the community they study, participating in both usual and unusual activities, “hanging out” and conversing (in contrast to interviewing), while consciously observing and recording what they observe.

Although the actual term *participant observer* was not used until the 1920s, early examples of utilizing immersion in a foreign culture may be found in the lives of explorer Richard Francis Burton and anthropologist Frank Hamilton Cushing, both of whom were active in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Richard Francis Burton (1821–1890) was an English linguist, and ethnographer who served in the army of the British East India Company. He became proficient in Hindustani, Gujarati, Panjabi, Marathi, Persian, and Arabic, and studied social customs in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. After seven years in India, Burton was intimately familiar with the customs of Muslims and prepared to embark on a Hajj, a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. It was this journey, undertaken in 1853, which first gave him notoriety. Disguised as a Sindhi Muslim, he prepared for his ordeal through laborious study and religious practice, even undergoing circumcision in order to further reduce the risk of discovery as a non-Muslim. His lifelong interest in the sexual practices of other cultures also led him to investigate brothels in India and the Middle East, and it is suggested that Burton was a participant in these sexual

activities. Isabel Arundell, Burton's wife, a prudish Catholic woman living in England, burned his personal papers shortly after his death. Presumably, she feared that others might discover her husband's "indecent" through his writing, which contained descriptions of his investigations into the sexual practices of the Middle East, including a potentially scandalous report about young male prostitutes in a Karachi brothel. The truth about life in the British colonies and Burton's personal sexual practices would have threatened her sense of the artificial social barrier erected between "native inferiors" and their colonizers, potentially inducing other English "masters" to "go native."

As another early case in point, in 1879, the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) assigned Frank Hamilton Cushing (1857-1900) to collect information about Zuni Pueblo Indians living in the southwestern United States in 1879. Cushing was expected to spend about three months in Zuni Pueblo country, but ended up living with the Zuni for four and a half years (1879-84).⁸⁰ He learned the Zuni language, gradually was accepted by the Zuni, and finally was inducted into the Priesthood of the Bow and given the Zuni name *Tenastali*, "Medicine Flower."⁸¹ Cushing's goal was to understand Zuni life and culture internally, holistically, and organically through long-term involvement, fluency of language, and intuitive insight. Interestingly, having become enmeshed in the web of Indian life, the undisciplined Cushing lost the ability to write analytically and objectively about the Zuni culture, such that he produced few publications on the topic. Cushing was thus criticized for becoming too involved and was accused of having "gone native."⁸²

⁸⁰ Curtis Hinsley, "Ethnographic Charisma and Scientific Routine: Cushing and Fewkes in the American Southwest, 1879-1893," *Observers Observed: Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork*, ed. George W. Stocking, Jr. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 53-69.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁸² Cushing's successor, Jess Fewkes was considered to be a more "disciplined" anthropologist who produced more publications about the Zuni culture. Fewkes kept a more distant approach than Cushing's (*Ibid.*, 53-69).

While Cushing was the first anthropologist to use participant observer techniques in his work, the Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski is usually credited with fully developing the methodology. In 1914, Malinowski traveled to Papua New Guinea where he conducted fieldwork at Mailu and later in the Trobriand Islands (**fig. 1.1**). The First World War broke out during his trip and Malinowski was stranded in the Trobriands. Initially avoiding contact with the native Trobrianders, whom he considered “savages,” Malinowski eventually succumbed to loneliness and surrendered his earlier resistance to participating in the native society. Although the term *participant observation* is not mentioned in his writings, Malinowski developed its methods: he learned the local language and formed close friendships with the people. What distinguished his approach from earlier ones is Malinowski’s emphasis on everyday interactions and observations through immersive relationships with his subjects rather than directed inquiries into specific behaviors. In this way, he established practicality as an important component of ethnography, thereby launching the field of functional anthropology.⁸³

Another early example of participant observation is found in Beatrice Potter Webb’s treatise *My Apprenticeship* (1926), which describes the author’s methods as a researcher while working with the social reformer Charles Booth in the 1880s. The daughter of a nineteenth-century British industrialist, Webb, who was raised in privileged conditions but had a lifelong concern for the poor, sought to gain acceptance in London’s working class neighborhoods. In 1883, with the help of her mother’s nurse, Webb succeeded in disguising her identity while visiting poor neighborhoods. She took a job as a rent collector in public housing in order to gain access to her research subjects in their native environment. She even worked as a seamstress in a

⁸³ Raymond Firth, “Bronislaw Malinowski,” *Totems and Teachers: Key Figures in the History of Anthropology*, ed. Sydel Silverman (New York: Altamira Press, 2004), 75-102.

London sweatshop in 1888. Her participant observer technique was limited, however, since she did not live in the poor neighborhood she studied.⁸⁴

Lindeman's concept of the *participant observer* was referenced in a number of papers and books by the mid-1920s, and by the 1930s participant observation had been employed both as an approach to a holistic description of a culture and as a means to focus discussion on a particular aspect of social life. By the 1940s, the term *participant observation* was widely used in both anthropology and sociology. Some authors had begun to include the term in titles of their articles: for example, Joseph D. Lohman's "Participant Observation in Community Studies" (1937), and Florence Kluckhohn's "The Participant-Observer Technique in Small Communities" (1940).⁸⁵

Although not an anthropological study, another well-known case in which the participant observer method was used effectively by a writer to gain insight into another culture involved John Howard Griffin, a white native of Mansfield, Texas, who published *Black Like Me* (1961), a book based on the author's 1959 firsthand experience of six-weeks' travel through the racially segregated states of the South disguised as a black man (he dyed his skin and treated and dyed his hair in order to achieve the effect).⁸⁶

The alteration of Griffin's appearance suggests a divided self. Griffin wrote on November 7, 1959, "The completeness of this transformation appalled me. It was unlike anything I had imagined. I became two men, the observing one and the one who panicked, who

⁸⁴ DeWalt and DeWalt, *Participant Observation*, 5.

⁸⁵ Joseph D. Lohman, "Participant Observation in Community Studies" *American Sociological Review* 2 (December 1937): 890-98; Florence R. Kluckhohn, "The Participant-Observer Technique in Small Communities," *American Journal of Sociology* 46 (November 1940): 331-43.

⁸⁶ A film version of the book, starring James Whitmore as Griffin, appeared in 1964.

felt Negroid even into the depths of his entrails.”⁸⁷ The next day, Griffin visited his regular shoeshine man, Sterling, who was black. At first, Sterling failed to recognize Griffin, but eventually he accepted Griffin’s explanation and even gave him a job as a fellow shoe shiner. Griffin wrote, “An odd thing happened. Within a short time he lapsed into familiarity, forgetting I was once white. He began to use the ‘we’ form and to discuss ‘our situation.’ The illusion of my ‘Negro-ness’ took over so completely that I fell into the same pattern of talking and thinking. It was my first intimate glimpse.”⁸⁸

More recent projects that have employed participant observer techniques include works by researchers who study deviant subcultures, such as those of drug smugglers and dealers, bank robbers, gangsters, and poachers. Patricia and Peter Adler covertly researched the culture of “wholesale” illicit drug smugglers and dealers in the 1980s. After six years of participant observation, fieldwork, and extensive interviews in a southern California community of drug dealers, Adler offered a vivid account of a deviant lifestyle to which few people outside the subculture were able to gain entry and few people inside the culture were able to describe scientifically. Patricia Adler argued that she would have not been able to carry out her research without actively using drugs and partying with her subjects in order to gain their trust.⁸⁹

Unlike the Adlers, Philippe Bourgois openly conducted his research, audio taping and interviewing his drug world informants.⁹⁰ J. Katz studied bank robbers and gangsters in a similar way, while Richard Brymer researched hunters and poachers in North America and Mexican

⁸⁷ John Howard Griffin, *Black Like Me* (New York: Signet, 1960), 16; portions of this book first appeared in *Sepia* magazine, produced by Good Publishing Company (aka Sepia Publishing), an African-American owned publishing company in Fort Worth, Texas.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁸⁹ Patricia Adler, *Wheeling and Dealing: An Ethnography of an Upper-Level Drug Dealing and Smuggling Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

⁹⁰ Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

American gangs in the Southwest.⁹¹ Brymer's knowledge of local dialect Spanish, which he acquired while growing up with Mexican cowboys working illegally in the southwestern United States, helped him to socialize with gang members in a natural manner.⁹²

Long-term participation is the only way for researchers to gain access and for subjects to develop the level of trust required. More formal research methods offend and alienate informants. Also, for researchers who study activities such as sorcery, witchcraft, and shamanism, patient long-term participation is necessary if they are to be accepted by the community. Today, participant observation is considered the foundation of ethnographic research and underlies many other techniques used in ethnographic fieldwork.⁹³ However, a narrower view of participant observation is held by Kathleen and Bille DeWalt (2002).⁹⁴ They see it only as one of several methods that fit into the general category of qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, research.⁹⁵ Its methods enhance the quality of data collection and analysis rather than assessing the dimensions and distribution of phenomena. The relationship between collection and insight is also at issue in photographic aspects of this practice.

The trend of participant observation in anthropology saw steady growth beginning in the 1970s, not only in the United States, but also in Britain. Among the reasons for this shift were the "growing difficulty of gaining access to traditional, non-Western sites, and the political and moral questionableness of so doing; critique of a merely quantitative sociological appraisal of the West," and "a burgeoning appreciation of sophisticated studies being undertaken of their

⁹¹ Jack Katz, *Seductions to Crime: Moral and Sensual Attractions in Doing Evil* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

⁹² Richard A. Brymer, "The Emergence and Maintenance of a Deviant Subculture: The Case of Hunting/Poaching Subculture," *Anthropologica* 33 (1991): 177-94; Brymer, "Hanging Out with the Good' Ole Boys, Gangsters, and Other Disreputable Characters," *Doing Ethnography: Fieldwork Settings*, ed. Scott Grills (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), 143-61.

⁹³ James P. Spradley, *Participant Observation* (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1980).

⁹⁴ DeWalt and DeWalt, 8.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

own societies and cultures by anthropologists in North America, Scandinavia, and also France.”

⁹⁶ In a review of academic works based on field research on the island of Whalsay, Scotland by British anthropologist Anthony Cohen, Brendan Quayle suggested that he was witnessing the “coming-of-age” of British ethnography.⁹⁷ During the 1980s, leading British anthropologists expanded their focus from rural cultures to urban, industrial, and migrant ones.⁹⁸ Max Gluckman, Jimmy Littlejohn, Raymond Firth, Rosemary Harris, and Joe Loudon advocated for participant-observation fieldwork to be carried out in Britain as it traditionally had been in Africa, New Guinea, and South America.⁹⁹

The examples recounted in this section show how an outsider might go about entering a culture disguised as an insider, especially when approaching activities that the observer’s society considered exotic, forbidden, inferior, or savage. In order to penetrate barriers, these researchers blended in through language, costume, and the alteration of their bodies. They *posed* as participant observers by disguising themselves as members of a tribe in order to infiltrate that tribe and in so doing acted in a manner akin to an intelligence operative functioning as a mole or double agent, thus remaining voyeuristic spies and, therefore, outsiders.

This method, once employed only by a privileged few, no longer belonged to them exclusively. With the rise of the Civil Rights, Women’s Rights, and Gay Rights movements, there was a rapid adoption of participant observation by those who recognized the peculiarities and specificities of their own cultures. Insiders trained themselves to become native informants on their own communities and cultures. The participant observer photographers about whom I

⁹⁶ Nigel Rapport, “Introduction,” *British Subjects: An Anthropology in Britain* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2002), 5.

⁹⁷ Brendan Quayle, “Review of *Belonging*, edited by A.P. Cohen,” *Man (now JRAI)* 19 (1984): 682.

⁹⁸ Rapport, *British Subjects*, 5.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

write effectively adopted this method. I argue that the emergence of this method in photography coincided with the shift in the field of anthropology from concentration on the exotic to the study of cultural and class differences close to home.

II. Early Participant Observation Photography: James Mooney

The earliest examples of the use of photography as a tool of participant observation in ethnography may be found in the work of mid-nineteenth century expeditionary professionals, educators, natural scientists, missionaries, and social documentarians who adopted the emerging technology to record their exotic subjects' as yet "unexplored" worlds. A forerunner of such methodology, notable for eschewing the habit of fostering stereotypes of an "inferior savage," was U.S. anthropologist James Mooney (1861-1921). Unlike the formal portraitists of the exotic other, who posed their subjects as if they were scientific specimens, Mooney was more engaged. He adopted participant observer methods in his research into ghost dances, stories, and songs, widespread religious practices amongst Native Americans. Mooney's fieldwork was both extensive and intensive. He lived for several years among the Cherokee, Cheyenne, and Kiowa and visited tribes in the Southeast, the Great Plains, the Great Basin, and the Southwest. His numerous books reveal an encyclopedic tendency to compile rosters and maps of all the Indian tribes. Mooney repeatedly visited the same tribes over the years in order to acquire complete data as well as to develop his knowledge of their languages as a means to verify the accuracy of his interpreters' translations. He also trained Indians to understand what he was pursuing in his work. His photographs reflect a thorough and careful research style. Early images of tribal

members record general behavior and appearance, whereas later images of the same tribe reveal more intimate individual knowledge.¹⁰⁰

Throughout his photographic career, Mooney used both dry-emulsion glass plates and flexible film, but by 1891, Mooney had begun to use the Kodak film camera introduced by George Eastman in 1888.¹⁰¹ The cumbersome photographic technology available before 1888 explains why there is a shortage of photographic evidence despite the earlier adoption of participant observation by explorers such as Burton: carrying a heavy camera and dark room equipment and supplies was simply too cumbersome to allow intimacy between photographer and subject. While poor focus or the inclusion of Mooney's shadow and tripod often mar these photographs, they satisfactorily afford a candid record of his experiences and observations. A degree of reckless execution in photography can also evince a certain quality of authenticity. I argue that what are, from a conventional vantage point, the bad compositions or low-quality work generally executed by the four contemporary protagonists in this dissertation could be said to hark back to Mooney's work as tokens of authenticity.

Photographing Native American rituals was not an easy matter, as Mooney had to deal with countless political and cultural obstacles. For one thing, the shamans objected that his presence at "such a proceeding would destroy the efficacy of their incantations."¹⁰² Mooney, unlike his more aggressive predecessors Burton, Cushing, and Griffin, did not disguise himself as a native nor did he conduct himself as one of them, but instead kept his distance. In order to gain access to the natives' ceremonies, Mooney was required to develop rapport with his prime informants. Often, his portraits include members of other tribes, suggesting that Mooney sought

¹⁰⁰ Ira Jacknis, "In Search of the Imagemaker: James Mooney as an Ethnographic Photographer," *Visual Anthropology* 3 (1990): 194.

¹⁰¹ Jacknis, "In Search of the Imagemaker," 187.

¹⁰² James A. Mooney, "The Cherokee Ball Play," *American Anthropologist* 3, no.2 (April 1890):114.

to gain trust by showing that other non-whites had already embraced him. The Indians accepted him even more readily when he could show them photographs of Ghost Dancers from distant tribes. By this means, he was able to obtain the first photographs of *Wovoka, or Jack Wilson, the Paiute prophet of the Ghost Dance* (**fig.1.2**). Talking to Wovoka's uncle, Charley Sheep, Mooney gives us an insight into why portraits dominate his work:

In a casual way I then offered to show him the pictures of some of my Indian friends across the mountains, and brought out the photos of several Arapaho and Cheyenne who I knew had recently come as delegates to the Messiah. This convinced him that I was all right, and he became communicative. The result was that we spent about a week together in the wikiups (lodges of tulé rushes), surrounded always by a crowd of interested Paiute, discussing the old stories and games, singing Paiute songs, and sampling the seed mush and roasted piñon nuts.¹⁰³

Once Mooney gained the trust of the Indians, he was able to document ceremonies that were otherwise forbidden to outsiders. These photographs of ritual ceremonies along with images of landscapes and dwellings constitute the majority of Mooney's work.¹⁰⁴

Most of Mooney's photographs were taken outdoors. He declined to use a flash as it could disturb ceremonial proceedings. His best interior shot is *View into mescal (peyote) tipi: Kiowa reservation, Okalahoma* (1892) (**fig.1. 3**), for which he poked his camera into the tepee during daylight and managed to record much of the interior detail. Clearly, it was the need for light that led Mooney to pose his subjects outside.¹⁰⁵

As for ceremonial shots, two examples represent Mooney's visual strategy. *Hinano 'ei [Arapaho] of the Ghost Dance religion* [National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian

¹⁰³ James A. Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, In Part 2 of *14th Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology for the Years 1892-1893* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1896), 768.

¹⁰⁴ Jacknis, "In Search of the Imagemaker," 196.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 186.

Institution, (neg. 55298)] (**fig. 1.4**)¹⁰⁶ shows four Ghost Dancers who are encircled by Indian spectators. Mooney took the picture from outside the circle, giving an overall sense of the ceremony rather than focusing on such details as the facial expressions of the dancers. The image suggests his role as a cautious anthropologist who did not wish to disturb his subject and who seeks to maintain objectivity. With few exceptions, his ceremonial photographs were candid images of naturally occurring events not staged for the camera. Nevertheless, as Ira Jacknis concluded, the quality of Mooney's images is often mediocre and much of his visual work involved images (not photographs) produced by others.¹⁰⁷

Mooney was by no means the only anthropologist taking photographs of his or her subjects. John Hillers, the field photographer who preceded Mooney, photographed the Hopi and Zuni, but Hillers's beautifully composed pictures fail to show daily life. Another contemporary of Mooney, Matilda Coxe Stevenson, a female photographer, made images of ceremonies in sequence that tend to be more superficial than Mooney's.¹⁰⁸ Later, members of the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE), such as John R. Swanton and John P. Harrington, took pictures, but these were more in the way of snapshots made by anthropologists than anthropologically informed photographs.¹⁰⁹

When compared to the best-known photographer of Native Americans, Edward S. Curtis, who also photographed many tribes and concentrated on portraits, Mooney's

¹⁰⁶ Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie responds to this image as a descendant of Indians, giving a moving personal account in her article "Where Is a Photograph Worth a Thousand Words?" *Photography's Other Histories*, ed. Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 40-52.

¹⁰⁷ Jacknis, 204.

¹⁰⁸ Nancy O. Lurie, "Women in Early American Anthropology," *Pioneers of American Anthropology: The Uses of Biography*, ed. June Helm (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1966), 29-81.

¹⁰⁹ Jay Ruby, "Up the Zambesi with Notebook and Camera or Being an Anthropologist without Doing Anthropology ... with Pictures," *Society for the Anthropology of Visual Communication Newsletter* 4 (Spring 1973): 12-15.

photographs tend to be more candid. And while Curtis insisted that Native Americans appear in old-fashioned garments for the camera, Mooney was generally content to document the natives as he found them. As Jacknis points out, for Curtis and many other photographers who focused on Native American subjects, the image was the final goal, whereas for Mooney it was only one part of a total ethnographic corpus.¹¹⁰ As a founder of visual anthropology in the United States., Mooney compares favorably with Franz Boas, who also employed a multi-media approach to ethnographic recording, utilizing native texts, verbal notes, artifacts, photographs, and so on. However, Boas usually employed a professional photographer, whereas Mooney took his own pictures on virtually all his field trips, thus ensuring a more direct relationship to his subjects.¹¹¹

Mooney established a photographic practice in which the photographer records the intimate lives of his subjects in such a way that his personal view is brought to the foreground. The occasional inclusion of Mooney's shadow and that of his tripod draws attention to his presence and involvement in the creation of the image. That factor helps to a degree to blur the lines of psychological and social distinction between the observer and the observed, although Mooney never became a member of a Native American tribe.

III. Participant Observation Photography: from Evans to Arbus

A version of the participant observation method is also found in the paired teams of writers and photographers who worked on Farm Security Administration (F.S.A.) projects during the Great Depression when the U.S. federal government established social welfare programs to relieve poverty. A dozen elite photographers were hired to work under the direction of Roy Stryker. The historical section of the F.S.A. compiled more than 270,000 images of life in the

¹¹⁰ Jacknis, 205.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 205-6.

United States between 1935 and 1943, shot by such photographers as Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Russell Lee, Arthur Rothstein, and Gordon Parks. The term *documentary* was established to denote the merging of reportage with the investigative methods of journalism and sociology in order to create new forms of mass-media imagery, especially in photography.¹¹²

F.S.A. photographs often accompanied reports and texts in magazines and photography books. Photographs were used to illustrate the content of books such as John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), a novel about the Joads, a poor family of migrant sharecroppers, in which the author moves freely between fact and fiction. Steinbeck added photographs of migrants by Horace Bristol. Another example is Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell's 1937 book *You Have Seen Their Faces*, in which the plight of the Southern tenant farmer was shown through text, photo, and caption. Without the photographer or the writer meaning to do so, however, their subjects were exploited in order to engender pity in the audience. Often, the captions tended to diminish the dignity of the tenant farmers for the amusement of the reader.

In 1936, James Agee, who objected to Bourke-White and Caldwell's book for its disrespectful treatment of its subjects, was assigned by *Fortune* magazine to cover the same topic for its "Life and Circumstances" series, in which a photographic and textual record of a representative white tenant farmer family was expected (**fig. 1.5**). Although not government sponsored, their mission was similar to that of most F.S.A. documentary work. Agee, a journalist, and Walker Evans, an accompanying photographer, spent six to eight weeks in the summer of 1936 in Alabama, researching three white sharecropping families stuck in desperate poverty: the Gudgers, Woods, and Ricketts (pseudonyms for the Burroughs, Tengles, and Fields). However, what Agee and Evans produced proved unacceptable to the mainstream

¹¹² Other various forms of documentaries during the 1930s, including nonfiction film, popularized casework studies, social science writing, documentary reportage, and documentary books are thoroughly analyzed in William Stott's book, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

magazine that commissioned them. Instead, their project became the book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), which was, as one critic put it, “one of the most spectacular publishing failures” of the year in which it appeared.¹¹³ The book was republished in 1960, and in time, their project came to be considered one of the most daring, dramatic, and artistically successful experiments in narrative history.¹¹⁴ Rather than maintain a safe distance, as did most other social documentary photographers and writers, Agee and Evans engaged in everyday activities such as eating meals with their research subjects. They were there also as paying guests, and while compensating their subjects for meals and lodging may have affected the relationships in question, it also gave them access to their private lives.¹¹⁵ Agee is known to have slept in his subjects’ homes in order to gain a sense of their living conditions, although Evans was not for such rough going; he stayed at a nearby hotel.¹¹⁶ Agee’s intimate writing style constitutes a meditation on reporting and intrusion, on observing and interfering with subjects. Often troubled and self-conscious, he describes his subjects’ reactions to his presence.¹¹⁷ Agee felt himself to be “a spy, traveling as a journalist,” while he described Evans as “a counter-spy, traveling as a photographer.”¹¹⁸ Agee’s honest struggle with his responses to the world of the sharecroppers was something new. With painstaking attention to the details of their daily lives, he produced a

¹¹³ Victoria A. Kramer, *James Agee* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1975), 75.

¹¹⁴ Shelley Fisher Fishkin, “The Borderlands of Culture: Writing by W.E.B. Du Bois, James Agee, Tillie Olsen, and Gloria Anzaldú,” *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Norman Sims (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 147.

¹¹⁵ Jerry L. Thompson, “Boston Interview,” *Walker Evans at Work* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 125.

¹¹⁶ Gilles Mora and John T. Hill, “Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,” *Walker Evans: The Hungry Eye* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993), 198.

¹¹⁷ “By the time I raised my hand, they had looked away, and did not see me, through nothing in their looking had been quick with abruptness or surreptition. . . . I had no doubt Walker would do what he wanted whether we had ‘permission’ or not, but I wanted to be on hand, and broke into a trot.” James Agee and Walker Evans, “Near a Church,” *Let Us Praise Famous Men* (New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1969), 39.

¹¹⁸ James R. Mellow, *Walker Evans* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 376.

riveting text about contemporary U.S. culture.¹¹⁹ Despite this breakthrough effort of intimate reporting, Agee's shyness was thought to be an obstacle to penetrating the minds of his characters. Despite their proximity to their subjects, both Agee and Evans were reluctant to delve into their lives with intrusive and provocative questions or to immerse themselves fully in their society—unlike the New Journalists who emerged thirty years later.

In the same year that Agee and Evans took their project to the Deep South, *Time* magazine founder Henry Luce acquired *Life* magazine, which had been a humor and general interest magazine since 1883. Adopting a European model, the publication soon became a weekly news magazine with a strong emphasis on photojournalism. The Luce *Life* was the first all-photographic U.S. news magazine, and it dominated the market for more than forty years. Stories of the Great Depression and World War II were told through photographs accompanied by written commentaries.

The magazine assigned staff photographers to devote many days to following their subjects in order to arrive at their storylines. One notable *Life* magazine assignment was the photo-essay *The Country Doctor*, which appeared in the September 20, 1948 issue, about Ernest Ceriani, a physician working in the small Colorado town of Kremmling. Taken by W. Eugene Smith, this photo-essay provided an intimate portrait of a country doctor saving lives in a small town.¹²⁰ For his project, Smith shadowed Dr. Ceriani for twenty-three days, capturing the drama in everyday small town events that called upon the doctor's skills. Smith's technique for achieving this extraordinary intimacy was to use the then novel tactic of "fading into the

¹¹⁹ Fishkin, "The Borderlands of Culture," 147.

¹²⁰ Smith had photographed a similar subject, "The Small Town Doctor at War," for *Parade* (July 1943), but the assignment for *Life* magazine is considered more substantial and experimental. William S. Johnson, ed., *W. Eugene Smith: Master of the Photographic Essay* (New York: Aperture, 1981), 42-43.

wallpaper”, telling the doctor’s story from the viewpoint of a concerned participant.¹²¹ The twenty-eight photographs show the doctor performing surgery, examining a dying patient, treating a child, et cetera, in unevenly lit, tight spaces that seem to enhance the sense of urgency conveyed (**fig.1.6**). Smith shot these intense scenes from close up, sometimes sacrificing clear focus and orderly composition. In contrast, images of the doctor at leisure were taken from a more “socially appropriate” distance, situating him in his daily surroundings in calm and orderly compositions (**fig.1.7**). Smith’s photo-essay became a benchmark for pictorial essays in the 1940s and 1950s, earning credit as the first “photo story” of modern photojournalism.

While *Life* magazine lost some of its momentum after the 1950s, perhaps due to competition from television, other magazines provided a venue for similar photo-essays. The 1960s was a period of experimentation in which magazines sought to establish clear, inspiring alternatives to television. Publications constantly challenged, expanded, and redefined their very nature while exploring the important cultural, political, and social issues of the day.¹²² Not only were these magazines and newspapers publishing unconventional essays, but they also provided opportunities for equally unconventional photographic images to accompany their assignments on unusual topics.

Diane Arbus, née Nemerov, (1923–1971), who was building a career in both the commercial and fine art realms, relished such opportunities. Throughout the 1960s and up to 1972, Arbus published over two hundred and fifty pictures in more than seventy magazine articles, featuring thirty-one photographs in eighteen articles in *Esquire* alone. *Harper’s Bazaar*, another forum for Arbus’s work, published sixty-three photographs in twenty-two articles.

¹²¹ William S. Johnson, 43.

¹²² Thomas W. Southall, “The Magazine Years, 1960 – 1971,” *Diane Arbus Magazine Work*, ed. Doon Arbus and Marvin Israel (New York: Aperture, 1984), 154.

These magazines had previously used photographs only to introduce characters into the stories, not to move the narrative forward. Arbus's challenge was to distill the story into one or more images, such that the pictures would carry the significance of complex feelings and psychological realities. In addition, Arbus frequently provided text to go along with her photographs. Such texts often drew upon her interviews with her subjects, delivering their uncensored voices, which were intermixed with her own impressions.

A noteworthy photographic report by Arbus (text by Bynum Shaw) was "Let Us Now Praise Dr. Gatch," which was published in the June 1968 issue of *Esquire*.¹²³ Three photographs were included. As its title suggests, the article harks back to the spirit of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Featuring Dr. Donald E. Gatch, a crusading country doctor who fought hunger and parasitic diseases in a poverty-stricken rural community in South Carolina's Beaufort County, Arbus composed her subjects in an obvious effort to emulate Evans' photographs for *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Her topic is also reminiscent of Eugene Smith's "A Country Doctor." Arbus spent several days accompanying Donald Gatch on his rounds, photographing him with his patients. One of the three photographs (**fig. 1.8**) from this assignment shows a group of children along with a few adults in a shabby, cramped room, which roughly approximates one of Walker Evans's photographs of a tenant farmer with his family in Hale County, Alabama in 1936 (**fig. 1.5**). Arbus's photograph, which accompanied Bynum Shaw's report on the devastating conditions of starvation and parasitic infections against which the young Dr. Gatch battled, has a more reportorial look. The image selected for *Esquire* gives an immediate sense of the environment of a black community lacking plumbing and electricity.

¹²³ Bynum Shaw, "Let Us Now Praise Dr. Gatch," *Esquire* (June 1968): 108-111, 152-56.

Evans's photographs concentrate on the personalities of the individuals portrayed in Agee's book, often employing crop and zoom to present the subjects devoid of background (**fig.1.9**). Even when he shot interiors, Evans adhered to a simplified visual language, in keeping with the spare conditions the white sharecropping families lived under (**fig.1.10**). By the time Evans took up the project *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, he had settled on a documentary style of straightforwardness and a direct simple manner, reminiscent of that exemplified by Paul Strand's *Blind Woman* (1916) (**fig.1.11**), although his cropping reveals the photographer's predilection for modernist language prior to settling into his documentary style.¹²⁴

Arbus was aware of Evans's work when she made her photographs. In 1938, at the age of fifteen, she and her new boyfriend Allan Arbus (her future husband) went to see Evans's one-man show at the Museum of Modern Art, *Walker Evans: American Photographs*.¹²⁵ Arbus also met with Evans in late September 1962 when she was seeking criticism prior to her

¹²⁴ Prior to and during the 1930s in the United States, photographers had been influenced by modernist aesthetics. Photographers such as Edward Weston and Tina Modotti employed the close-up shots and sharply detailed approach to ordinary objects practiced previously by Paul Strand. Against the conservative avant-garde photography of Pictorialism, which Strand regarded as "the expression of an impotent desire to paint," Strand went for direct representation of his subjects. Based upon his understanding of "the limitations and at the same time the potential qualities" of the photographic medium, Strand produced unsentimental close-up portraits of people on the streets (**fig.1.11**) and near abstract works using patterns of light and dark discovered in the surroundings of everyday life. "Photography: Paul Strand, 1917," *Photography: Essays & Images*, ed. Beaumont Newhall (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1980), 219.

Alfred Stieglitz called Strand's photographs "brutally direct" and "devoid of all flimflam; devoid of trickery and of any 'ism'; devoid of any attempt to mystify an ignorant public, including the photographers themselves." Alfred Stieglitz, *Camera Work*, no.49/50 (June 1917), 36.

Strand's interest in photography stemmed in part from his sense of social concern. He studied with Lewis Hine at the New York Ethical Culture School in 1907 and produced works that emerged from a moral concern for humankind.

While modernist aesthetics influenced most photographers in the United States during the 1930s, their individual choices of subject matter varied with their responses to the particular manifestations of the Depression to which they were witnesses and observers. Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), 280.

¹²⁵ Elizabeth Sussman and Doon Arbus, "A Chronology", *Diane Arbus: Revelations* (New York: Random House, 2003), 126.

Guggenheim project proposal “American Rites, Manners and Customs.”¹²⁶ For Arbus, Evans was a central figure and a significant predecessor in documentary photography and vernacular photographs. Arbus adopted Evans’s unselfconscious emphasis on the subject over the author.¹²⁷

Among her diverse interests, Arbus was driven to capture aspects of marginal subcultures, which required that she adopt a unique approach. First, she engaged in thorough research on fringe activities, as her well-preserved personal notes indicate. Then she set about convincing her subjects to participate in her projects. She posed her subjects, or waited for them to pose themselves, talking with them as she worked. Often she would visit their homes or return to photograph them again years later. Her active engagement with her subjects even led her in one case, for example, to her becoming an erstwhile nudist herself in order to photograph people at a nudist camp.

Arbus likewise became personally engaged, for example, with a cohort of midgets, whom she depicted in a group portrait of the Russian Andrew Ratoucheff and his friends, seen within their own domestic surroundings (**fig. 1.12**). Ratoucheff became a continuing fascination of Arbus’s, reappearing in her work over time. Arbus’s portrayal of these marginalized people was executed with a great deal of care and sympathy, and a sense of humor is felt throughout her work. Her engagement with her subjects can be detected also from a photograph taken by one of her subjects that shows her interacting with them (**fig.1.13**).

A photograph taken by Garry Winogrand at a peace march in Central Park’s Sheep’s Meadow on April 15, 1967 (**fig.1.14**) captures Diane Arbus, a flower in her mouth, carrying her

¹²⁶ Sussman and Arbus, 163. In 1963, and again in 1966, Arbus received Guggenheim Fellowships in support of “American Rites, Manners and Customs.” During those years, she spent the summers traveling across the United States photographing a host of subjects: beauty contests, community festivals, public and private gatherings, and numerous subjects dressed in the costumes of their professions and avocations in hotel lobbies, dressing rooms, and living rooms.

¹²⁷ Sandra S. Philips, “The Question of Belief,” *Diane Arbus: Revelations* (New York: Random House, 2003), 61.

Mamiyaflex twin lens reflex camera while shooting one of the participants. The use of a top viewfinder camera allowed Arbus to hold the camera at chest height, thus freeing her face to engage her subjects naturally and fully, an apt choice for her intimate technique.

The challenge of creating a photograph that rendered something akin to the experience of being there intrigued Arbus. It was her distinctive outlook toward her subjects that characterized her work. Unlike her documentary predecessors of the 1930s and 40s, whose photographs were made in the service of social causes, Arbus's aim, consonant with the attitudes of fellow 1960s photographers Garry Winogrand and Lee Friedlander was, according to John Szarkowski, "not to reform life, but to know it"; "not to persuade but to understand."¹²⁸ "New Documents," (**fig.1.15, fig.1.16**) an exhibition of sixty photographs by these three photographers, curated by Szarkowski at the Museum of Modern Art in 1967, displayed Arbus's non-commercial work alongside that of Friedlander and Winogrand, marking her arrival as an artist. What united these three photographers was neither style nor sensibility, but "the belief that the commonplace is really worth looking at, (and demands) the courage to look at it with a minimum of theorizing."¹²⁹ Arbus's portraits of the most ordinary and the most exotic of subjects were regarded as authentic expressions that revealed the world "as it is," imperfections and frailties included. The MoMA exhibition, which toured other cities in the United States and Canada, met with keen interest from general audiences and critics alike, with Arbus's images of subjects on the margins of the society arousing particular shock and curiosity.¹³⁰ In contrast to

¹²⁸ John Szarkowski, "New Documents: Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, Garry Winogrand," (February 28 – May 7, 1967). Curatorial Exhibition Files, Exh. #821. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

¹²⁹ Exhibition brochure and wall label, "New Documents: Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, Garry Winogrand," 1967, CUR, Exh. #821. MoMA Archives, NY.

¹³⁰ For responses to the exhibition, see Chauncey Howell, *Women's Wear Daily* (March 2, 1967); Margery Mann, "View from the Bay: Arbus – Does She Cater to the Peeing Tom Within Us?," *Popular Photography* 6 (Dec. 1969): 25-6; Herb Weitman, "At An Exhibition," *St. Louis Post Dispatch* (June 18, 1967); Ann Ray Martin, "Telling As It Is," *Newsweek* (March 20, 1967):110.

Winogrand and Friedlander, Arbus's participatory engagement with her subjects—the nudist, the transvestite, and the bizarre individual whose way of life was removed from the norm—brought her work wide attention. “Observing, understanding, and ‘leaving alone’ that which exists,”¹³¹ her revealing photographs gave some degree of public acceptance to subjects living on the outermost social strata. Arbus arguably paved the way for this dissertation's four photographers through her approach toward her subjects as well as her fascination with deviant lifestyles of people outside the mainstream of society.

IV. New Journalism

The gradual shift in photographers' adoption of participant observation approaches coincides with the emergence of a broader cultural phenomenon during the 1960s and 1970s: New Journalism. The editors of the same magazines that Diane Arbus worked for were active proponents of the young writers associated with the new movement. The “New Journalists” used deliberately immersive reporting techniques, crossing the boundaries of their own personal and professional identities to report stories without imposing judgment. By so doing, they challenged traditional standards of objective reporting through a barrage of criticism of its underlying assumptions. This new perspective took issue with the very concept of “the fact,” the basis of traditional journalism, as an observable and verifiable phenomenon. New Journalism's most particular contribution was to develop a writing style that blurs the distinctions between author and subject and even the lines between fact and fiction. In many ways, Arbus's work might be considered a visual manifestation of New Journalism.

¹³¹ John Gruen, “Showing It Like It is,” *New York/World Journal Tribune* (February 26, 1967): 31.

New York, long a cultural center for ambitious non-fiction writers, naturally became the hub for the development of New Journalism. Numerous magazines and newspapers sponsored experimental reporting during the 1960s. *New York* magazine, published first as a Sunday supplement to the *New York Herald Tribune* and independently as of 1964, *Rolling Stone*, founded in 1968, *The New Yorker*, founded in 1925, and *Esquire* all became major venues for the birth of New Journalism.¹³² Other magazines that offered New Journalism were *The Atlantic Monthly*, *CoEvolution Quarterly*, and *Scanlan's Monthly*. Some of the major writers of New Journalism to emerge in this microcosm were Joan Didion, Gay Talese, Jimmy Breslin, Norman Mailer, and Hunter S. Thompson. The canonical works of New Journalism are Talese's profile of Joe Louis (1962), Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1966), Wolfe's *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* (1964), and Mailer's *The Armies of the Night* (1968).¹³³ Mostly in their 20s and 30s,¹³⁴ these young writers experimented in a form of non-fiction that spawned a social and aesthetic generational identity.¹³⁵ Professional journalism's "truth" has never been so fiercely contested as it was in the late 1960s and early 1970s, at a politically heightened moment in history, ripened by the social upheavals of the Anti-War Movement, the

¹³² Markets outside New York were rarely able to support the financial extravagance of immersion reporting. Short stories that first appeared in magazines were more easily published later as a book than were articles featured in daily newspapers.

¹³³ Gay Talese, "Joe Louis: The King as a Middle Aged Man," *Esquire* (fall 1962); Truman Capote, "In Cold Blood" was first published as a four-part serial in *The New Yorker*, beginning with the September 25, 1965 issue. Later it was published as a book, *In Cold Blood* (New York: Random House, 1966); Tom Wolfe, "The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby," *Esquire* (1964), then published as a book, in 1965 by Farrar, Straus, Giroux; The first 90,000 words of Norman Mailer's "The Armies of the Night" appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, 1968. Later it was published as a book, *The Armies of the Night: The History as a Novel/The Novel as a History* (New York: The New American Library, Inc, 1968).

¹³⁴ Not all New Journalists were young writers. Truman Capote (1924-1984) was 42 when he published *In Cold Blood* in 1966 and Norman Mailer (1923 -2007) was 45 years old by the time *The Armies of the Night* was published in 1968.

¹³⁵ John J. Pauly argued that the culture of New Journalism is often experienced as the politics of style. See his article, "The Politics of the New Journalism," *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed Norman Sims (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 110-129.

Civil Rights Movement, the rise of Feminism, and the grass roots counterculture movements characterized by hippies, communes, and mind-altering drugs.

Tom Wolfe's book *The New Journalism* (1973), an anthology that showcases the new style of writing, tendered one definition of New Journalism. In his forward, Wolfe declares, "it just might be possible to write journalism that would ... read like a novel."¹³⁶ The New Journalism embodied "the discovery that it was possible in non-fiction, in journalism, to use any literary device from the traditional dialogisms of the essay to stream-of-consciousness, and to use many different kinds simultaneously, or within a relatively short space ... to excite the reader both intellectually and emotionally."¹³⁷ In order to engage the reader, the New Journalists transformed the traditional voice of the narrator. The genteel, understated narrator that had been established in eighteenth-century British novels no longer excited the mid-twentieth century reader. Wolfe described the traditional journalist as having "a pedestrian mind, a phlegmatic spirit, a faded personality."¹³⁸ His criticism did not address issues of objectivity versus subjectivity, but instead centered on "a matter of personality, energy, drive, bravura ... style, in a word."¹³⁹

According to Wolfe, New Journalists often spoke in the first person, allowing the author's voice a strong presence. They were stylistically free, sometimes rude, and held shifting points of view by entering the minds of their characters by adopting stream of consciousness techniques.¹⁴⁰ One of their most noticeable mannerisms is a profusion of dots, dashes,

¹³⁶ Tom Wolfe, *The New Journalism with an Anthology*, ed. Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson, (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 9.

¹³⁷ Wolfe, *New Journalism with an Anthology*, 15.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

exclamation points, italics, and even invented punctuation. Shouts, nonsense words, onomatopoeia, mimesis, and pleonasms all appear in this kind of experimental writing.¹⁴¹ In similar fashion to the photographers in this dissertation, who go in and out of their visual scenes freely,¹⁴² New Journalists blurred the definition of the author. This interchangeability of viewpoints, while maintaining a first person narrative, is characteristic of both the written and visual forms of these parallel movements and signifies a cultural shift that is key to understanding them.

Wolfe also provided a social hierarchy of literature. Novelists are regarded as upper class; the middle class comprises playwrights, essayists, critics, biographers, and “men of letters” who give analysis and “insight” into the world; constituting the lower class are the journalists: the “day laborers who dug up slags of raw information for writers of higher ‘sensibility’ to make better use of.” The trouble was, these lower class writers began to pursue the highest aim of literature, to write something “like a novel.”¹⁴³

Among the New Journalists, arguably the foremost was Hunter S. Thompson (1937-2005), whose work has been described as *Gonzo Journalism*. The term *Gonzo* was used by *Boston Globe* magazine editor Bill Cardoso in 1970 when he described as “pure gonzo journalism” Thompson’s *The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved*, written for the June 1970 *Scanlan’s Monthly*. Drawings by British illustrator Ralph Steadman, who was known for

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 21.

¹⁴² Larry Clark frequently appeared before his camera along with his subjects. Nan Goldin goes further, freely participating in scenes before her camera, appearing with a friend or lover or in deliberate self-portraits. Billingham, on the other hand, never enters the scene, even though it is his own family members who are his subjects. Araki adopted a highly fluid method of coming in and out of his photographs by handing over his camera to others during the course of shooting, thereby blurring his role as the author to the greatest extent.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 25; Ibid.

his work in *The Times* of London and England's political satire magazine *Private Eye*, defined the *Gonzo* look.

Despite much dispute as to when *Gonzo* first appeared in U.S. slang, it has always been associated with Thompson and his fiercely subjective blurring of the distinction between author and subject, between fact and fiction. His drug-fueled stream-of-consciousness writing, along with its profusion of quotations, sarcasm, humor, and exaggeration, pushed the New Journalism to its outer limits. Later, the term *Gonzo* was applied to other artistic endeavors involving a heightened subjectivity on the part of the author, including the *quasi-* or *Gonzo-* documentary photography of two artists who are subjects of this dissertation, Larry Clark and Nan Goldin, who likely were acquainted with the work of New Journalism during its heyday.¹⁴⁴ Although Billingham and Araki were never referred to in that way, I contend that their methods also qualify them for this term.

Thompson based his style on William Faulkner's idea that "fiction is often the best fact." While the things he wrote about are fundamentally true, he supported his ideas with a minimum of factual data submerged in sarcasm and satirical humor. For example, when Thompson turned his attention to politics, he was passionate about Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern. While Thompson broadcast his admiration for McGovern and his contempt for McGovern's Democratic rivals, he was especially vocal in his abiding hatred of Richard Nixon. Frank Mankiewicz, McGovern's campaign manager, called *Fear and Loathing on the*

¹⁴⁴ Although the four photographers in this dissertation did not use the term *Gonzo* in characterizing their own work, some critics did. For example, Felicia Feaster used the term, "gonzo documentary style" in describing Nick Broomfield's documentary film *Streetwise* (1984) in her article, "Chasing Reality," 32.

Campaign Trail, Thompson's reportage of the 1972 presidential election, "the least factual, most accurate account."¹⁴⁵

Excess, whether real or merely imagined or exaggerated, is a key element of Thompson's writing. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*, which originally appeared as an essay in two issues of *Rolling Stone* in 1971, is a prime example. In it, Raoul Duke (Thompson's pseudonym) and his three-hundred-pound Samoan attorney Dr. Gonzo travel to Las Vegas to cover a motorcycle race and a convention of district attorneys. Here, Duke describes his preparation for the journey:

We had two bags of grass, seventy-five pellets of mescaline, five sheets of high-powered blotter acid, a salt shaker half full of cocaine, and a whole galaxy of multi-colored uppers, downers, screamers, laughers ... and also a quart of tequila, a quart of rum, a case of Budweiser, a pint of raw ether and two dozen amyls.¹⁴⁶

A letter Thompson wrote to Warren Hinckle, his editor at *Scanlan's Monthly*, reveals much about his mental state. "After 4 days without sleep—due to all-night, soul-ripping doom & disaster talk—I arrived in NY in a state of crazed angst, far gone in a pill-stupor and barely able to think much less write."¹⁴⁷ Thompson's use of drugs and alcohol to induce stream-of-consciousness or simply to experience being high or drunk may have delivered a more immediate experience to the reader. At the least, Thompson's language seems to reflect the effects of intoxication on his writing. The writing itself, therefore, is in a way performative and

¹⁴⁵ Mankiewicz appears in archival footage in the recent film, *Gonzo: The Life and Work of Dr. Hunter S. Thompson* (2007), directed by Alex Gibney; see also: A.O.Scott, "Beyond Fear Loathing, Movie Review, Gonzo: The Life and Work of Dr. Hunter S. Thompson," *New York Times* (Friday, July 4, 2008).

¹⁴⁶ Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dreams* (New York: Second Vintage Books Edition, 1998), 4. "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas by "Raoul Duke" first appeared in *Rolling Stone* magazine 95 (November 11, 1971) and 96 (November 25, 1971).

¹⁴⁷ Hunter S. Thompson's letter to Warren Hickle on May 15, 1970, printed in *Fear and Loathing in America: The Brutal Odyssey of an Outlaw Journalist, 1968 – 1976*, ed. Douglas Brinkley (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 296.

to read it is to undergo a form of direct experience, not merely to apprehend information.

Interestingly, the subjects of the four artists in this dissertation generally engaged in excessive use of mind-altering substances: amphetamines for Larry Clark and his subjects; various drugs and alcohol for Nan Goldin and her milieu; alcohol for Billingham's father; and alcohol in the sex clubs for Nobuyoshi Araki.

One of the shortcomings of New Journalism emerged paradoxically from what some considered a key strength: its non-judgmental nature. Detractors characterized New Journalism as no more than entertainment, lacking the seriousness of writing forms that advanced a critical point of view, while aiming instead for a more superficial exploration and description of social manners.¹⁴⁸ While it is true that New Journalists often suspended moral judgment in their writings, these works were much more than superficial reports by outsiders. By providing the reader with a vicarious firsthand experience through their own intrepid immersion into the lives of people so different and so often neglected by the mainstream, these writers achieved a kind of moral egalitarianism, allowing the reader to come to his or her own critical view of the matter. The New Journalists explored the psychedelic drug movement and the anti-war movement. They infiltrated U.S. national political conventions and the financial world, powerful entities that worked hard to control their public images. Similarly, the principal photographers in this dissertation also brought firsthand experience via deeply embedded positions free of moralistic perspectives. Life captured before their cameras delivered immediacy while pushing critical distance to the side. The result was to allow viewers a vicarious intimacy with the subjects of these photographers.

¹⁴⁸ The most vocal critic of New Journalism was Dwight MacDonald. Other notable attacks against New Journalism were levied by Renata Adler and Gerald Jonas. See Dwight MacDonald, "Parajournalism, or Tom Wolfe and His Magic Writing Machine," *New York Review of Books* (August 26, 1965): 3-5 and "Parajournalism II: Wolfe and the *New Yorker*," *New York Review of Books* (February 3, 1966): 18-24; Leonard C. Lewin, with Renata Adler and Gerald Jonas, "Is Fact Necessary?," *Columbia Journalism Review* (Winter 1966): 29-34.

Subjectivity is another essential element of New Journalism. New Journalism has been characterized as *subjective journalism*. Traditionally, reporting requires persistent investigation into the facts. Even fiction writers must perform research in order to produce works that ring true. This sometimes tedious, messy, dirty, boring, or even dangerous labor is central to journalism. Journalists invade others' privacy, asking intrusive questions. While a third person narrative was typically employed to convey the subject's perspective, a first person voice could be injected into the narrative to attest to the veracity of the observations, implying: "I was there, this is how it affected me, therefore it is true and you can believe it."

The major figures of New Journalism met with varying degrees of success. Tom Wolfe expressed his great disappointment in reading James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, calling Agee "too polite, too diffident to ask personal questions of these humble folk or even draw them out." Wolfe found similar defects in Mailer's work and he called Murray Kempton "the most diffident soul of all."¹⁴⁹ According to Wolfe's criteria, the more naïve the writer, the more successful: "They go ahead and do it" and "there are no sacerdotal rules; not yet in any case."¹⁵⁰

These journalistic practices created a particular intellectual milieu in which new forms of intimate reporting were made possible, whether in writing or in photography, allowing the viewer to enter the realms of others without prejudgment. However, it is important to note that there are limits to depending solely on these methods—a limit reached, for example, when the affluent New Yorker Tom Wolfe reported a story on a California surfer.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Wolfe, 44-45.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁵¹ Tom Wolfe's book, *The Pump House Gang* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1968), is a collection of essays and reportage on various aspects of 1960's counterculture. The most prominent story in the book, from which Wolfe takes its title, is about Jack MacPherson and a gang of fellow surfers who frequented a former sewage

V. Other Factors

1) Social Landscape Photography in the United States and Publication of Arbus's Work in Britain

The acceptance of participant observation photography in the visual arts owes a debt not only to the intellectual milieu of the period, but also to developments in the art world in general during the late 1960s and early 1970s. In a counterculture characterized by the rise of feminism and the anti-Vietnam War movement of the 1960s, the established worldview dominated by Cold War ideas, values, and beliefs was disrupted, giving rise in the art world to radical movements such as Minimal Art, Land Art, and Conceptual Art, which eventually found their way to acceptance, though not without controversy.

A commanding influence over art photography during the late 1960s and early 1970s was accomplished through commentary by John Szarkowski, who became the Director of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art in 1962, and by photographer Garry Winogrand (1928-1984). Skeptical of the moral imperatives of their predecessors, Szarkowski and Winogrand acted to widen the scope of what constituted photographic art and fostered “a climate for an unprecedented exploration of the straight aesthetic, particularly in hand held

pump house at Windansea Beach in La Jolla, California. In a follow-up story for the *Los Angeles Times* in 1990, many members of the pump house gang were interviewed. Some of them claimed that Wolfe took liberties with the facts to embellish and mythologize their lifestyle while others believed that Wolfe's characterizations were accurate. John M. Glionna, “An Era Revisited; 25 Years Ago, Tom Wolfe Immortalized a Group of Teens from Windansea Beach in ‘The Pump House Gang’; Now, Some of the Gang Recall It With Mixed Feelings,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 25, 1990.

The authenticity of the experience within Wolfe's report has been the subject of criticism. When it came to modern art and architecture, his detractors questioned his qualifications to pass judgment on his subjects. For example, Douglas Davis said of Wolfe's *Painted Word* (1975) that it would not succeed because “Wolfe is no longer out there, mixing it up with his subject. . . . Instead he is sitting back . . . but not so far as to wrinkle his white linen suit. . . . Tom Wolfe theorizing about subjects he doesn't understand . . . such as modern art.” [Douglas Davis, “Crying Wolfe,” *Newsweek* (June 9 1975): 88.] The best collection of critical response to Tom Wolfe's work I have found is Doug Shomette, ed. *The Critical Response to Tom Wolfe*, Critical Responses in Arts and Letters 3 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992).

camera.”¹⁵² Putting form and content on an equal footing, Szarkowski said in 1976, “Only the description itself identifies the thing described.” Winogrand stated, “I photograph to find out what the world looks like photographed.”¹⁵³ According to them, a photograph is a surrogate for the world that the camera has rendered for us, not a direct experience of life. These innovators were always cognizant of photography as a medium that possesses simultaneity of fact and artifact, belief and disbelief, and reality and illusion that are equally emphasized. Szarkowski found exemplary aesthetics in vernacular photography¹⁵⁴ and brought magazine photography into the MoMA mainstream. His 1964 exhibition “The Photographer’s Eye”¹⁵⁵ and his 1967 exhibition “New Documents” endorsed, respectively, his taste for this kind of photography and for photography indebted to such genres. These everyday expressions were admitted in part on account of their suspension of moral judgment. Meanwhile, images of subcultures and countercultures, such as were depicted in works by Arbus, Winogrand, and others, were soon to be accepted by museums, largely due to the support, encouragement, and influence of Szarkowski.

Besides these two exhibitions by Szarkowski, two other shows in 1966 helped to define the new photography trend: the Brandeis University exhibition *Twelve Photographers of the*

¹⁵² Jonathan Green, “Surrogate Reality,” *American Photography: A Critical History 1945 to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984), 102.

¹⁵³ Szarkowski and Winogrand, as cited in Green, 99.

¹⁵⁴ “Vernacular photography,” produced by unknown photographers, refers to photographs of everyday life, including family albums and travel photography. Art is not its goal. The past decade has seen increased interest in vernacular photography among photography historians. For more on this subject, see Stacey McCarroll Cutshaw et al., *In the Vernacular: Photography of the Everyday* (Boston: Boston University Art Gallery, 2008). Geoffrey Batchen pioneered the study of vernacular photography. According to Batchen, the genre is not intended as art, and includes snapshots, commercial photography, and even objects such as photographic jewelry.

¹⁵⁵ The exhibition and the catalogue took the form of five formal categories – ‘The Thing Itself,’ ‘Detail,’ ‘The Frame,’ ‘Time,’ and ‘The Vantage Point.’ Szarkowski selected works that use these categories knowingly or unknowingly as if they were the building blocks of successful photographs. John Szarkowski, *The Photographer’s Eye* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966).

American Social Landscape,¹⁵⁶ and the George Eastman House exhibition in the same year, *Contemporary Photographers: Toward a Social Landscape*, which included Bruce Davidson, Danny Lyon, Duane Michaels, Lee Friedlander, and Winogrand.¹⁵⁷ Curated by Nathan Lyons, *Toward a Social Landscape* showcased a set of works that focused on the qualities of the camera's vision, while largely expressing indifference to issues of social reform. A major figure, Lee Friedlander, who was very impressed by Robert Frank's *The Americans*, took a road trip throughout the United States, publishing its outcome as *The American Monument* (1976), which consisted of approximately two hundred images of town squares, cemeteries, parks, roadsides, et cetera. Often incorporating reflections and shadows of himself, as well as the devices of spatial compression and the intentional inclusion of artifacts left by his camera and equipment (the outline of its rectangular frame and the record of which lens and film was used), Friedlander hinted at mysterious storylines through peculiar monuments such as statues, telephone poles, and road signs (**fig.1.17**). His attitude, however, was detached and non-participatory. Szarkowski understood Friedlander's work in the context of formalism, claiming that the photographer's work focused more on the "aesthetic commitment" of his camera's vision.¹⁵⁸ Friedlander foregrounded a posture of disinterestedness in his subjects while photographing them literally and transparently, producing, in Szarkowski's words, "false documents" in which the specificity of people and places is less important than in the

¹⁵⁶ *Twelve Photographers of the American Social Landscape*, Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, January 9 – February 12, 1967. This show included works by Bruce Davidson, Robert Frank, Lee Friedlander, Ralph Gibson, Warren Hill, Rudolf Janu, Simpson Kalisher, Danny Lyon, James Marchael, Duane Michals, Philip Perkis, and Tom Zimmermann.

¹⁵⁷ *Contemporary Photographers: Toward a Social Landscape*, George Eastman House, Rochester, New York, December 17, 1966 – February 20, 1967. Nathan Lyons, ed., *Toward a Social Landscape; Bruce Davidson, Lee Friedlander, Garry Winogrand, Danny Lyon, Duane Michals* (New York: Horizon Press and Rochester: George Eastman House), 1966.

¹⁵⁸ John Szarkowski, "Lee Friedlander," *The Museum of Modern Art Press Release* no. 119A (December 5, 1974).

documentary tradition.¹⁵⁹ Martha Rosler has argued that Friedlander's work resisted the established formal canons by "systematic negation," reorienting the direction of the sixties within photography and within art in the United States.¹⁶⁰ In deconstructing and fragmenting their subjects, the Social Landscape photographers may have broken the rules of good photography, but, led by Friedlander and Winogrand, they tipped "the balance between form and narrative toward form," and tilted "the scales between individual expression and neutrality toward neutral vision, or disinterested irony."¹⁶¹

Winogrand, like Friedlander, aimed his camera at the streets of the 1960s and '70s (**fig.1.18**), concentrating on subjects that reveal human nature according to the artist's bluntly personal vision through his signature "Winogrand tilt" perspective and abrupt cropping (**fig.1.19**). By hastily selecting characters that best depicted situational irony, Winogrand emphasized and exercised the formal aspects of photography.¹⁶² In some ways, Friedlander and Winogrand strove to achieve something analogous to the acknowledgement of materiality and the flatness of painting found in the New York School, whose work had been canonized a decade earlier.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Martha Rosler, "Lee Friedlander, An Exemplary Modern Photographer," *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975-2001*, 114; originally published under the title "Lee Friedlander's Guarded Strategies" in *Artforum* 13, no.8 (April 1975).

¹⁶¹ Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), 350.

¹⁶² He bluntly refused attempts to attach meanings to his pictures, emphasizing that his primary concern was formal. Dennis Longwell, "Monkeys Make the Problem More difficult: A Collective Interview with Garry Winogrand (1972)," *The Camera Viewed: Writings on Twentieth-Century Photography Vol.2.*, ed. Penniah R. Petruck (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979), 118-128.

¹⁶³ The ascendancy of a formalist critical regime in the United States, led by Clement Greenberg's advocacy of the New York School painters, would have influenced the tendencies of Winogrand and other photographers in their emphasis on the formal nature of photography, resulting, perhaps, in their cultural bias against articulating "content."

From its inception in the second half of the nineteenth century, photography simultaneously raised two distinct issues. When a lace or a leaf is imprinted onto reactive paper by the magic of sunlight, that paper represents both materiality itself and a window into another world. Ever since the invention of the medium, photographers have pursued this idea of capturing the world. What was forgotten or repressed was the flatness of the machine-made results. Social Landscape photographers, while understanding the ironies found in unexpected social situations, were very much aware of the materiality of film, of the conditions of photography, and of the vision through their cameras.

The museum world's acceptance of a new genre depicting everyday subcultures and countercultures in the new formal approach found in works of Social Landscape photographers in the United States extended to Europe and beyond, mainly through publications. For example, Michael Rand, art director of the *Sunday Times Magazine* of London, took note of Diane Arbus's success in *New Documents* at MoMA and invited her to create a photo-essay on American families for his London magazine. English curiosity about the peculiarities of American culture inspired the art director to hire Arbus, which led to the publication of five articles in the *Times* of London in 1968. Arbus suggested the topics and provided photographs to accompany the articles. "Two American Families," published on November 10, 1968, consisted of photographs Arbus later included in her limited edition, two of which are recognized as her best works: *A Young Brooklyn Family Going for a Sunday Outing* (1966) (**fig.1.20**), and *A Family on Their Lawn One Sunday in Westchester*.¹⁶⁴

In 1969, *London Times Magazine* deputy editor Peter Crookston became editor of *Nova*, a short-lived women's fashion and general interest magazine. Crookston and Rand co-sponsored

¹⁶⁴ Thomas W. Southall, "The Magazine Years, 1960 -1971," *Diane Arbus Magazine Work*, ed. Doon Arbus and Marvin Israel (New York: Aperture, 1984), 169 -170.

Arbus's trip to England to work on projects for both publications, a collaboration that resulted in three articles in *Nova*. The support of two British editors brought Arbus closer to her artistic intentions than had her previous work at *Esquire* and *Harper's Bazaar*.¹⁶⁵ The recurring theme of peculiar families presented fresh ideas to those who thought of the family as a universally uniform entity free of discord and division after the model depicted in Edward Steichen's iconic MoMA exhibition, *Family of Man*, as well as in the typically patronizing views of the family promoted through picture magazines such as *Life*. Arbus's representation of the unusual family in its diverse forms presaged, for example, the depiction of a dysfunctional working-class British family by a younger artist, Richard Billingham.

2) Status of Photography in Britain since the 1960s

Richard Billingham's mid-1990s photographs of his own family's chaos, his alcoholic father, vociferous mother, and disorderly brother, have been termed "a political documentary targeted to the upper middle-class audience" while addressing issues of working class poverty.¹⁶⁶ The domestic social landscape Billingham recorded, while falling loosely within the tradition of Diane Arbus's subjects, differs from Arbus's approach thirty years earlier, as Billingham provided a working-class perspective of his own, since he was living in the conditions of the subjects he was recording.

Britain, at the time Arbus's work was introduced there, saw the emergence of new and independent approaches to documentary photography.¹⁶⁷ In general, there was a lack of interest

¹⁶⁵ Southall, "The Magazine Years," 169-170.

¹⁶⁶ Outi Remes, "Reinterpreting Unconventional Family Photographs: Returning to Richard Billingham's "Ray's a Laugh" series," *Afterimage* (May-June, 2007) (<https://www.entrepreneur.com/tradejournals/article/print/165167343.html>)

¹⁶⁷ For information on photography in Britain from the late 1960s to the late 1980s, see David Alan Mellor, *No Such Thing As Society*, published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name in 2008.

in non-commercial avant-garde work and fine art photography and its publication. Tony Ray-Jones (1941 – 1972), who studied photography at Yale in the early 1960s, returned to Britain in 1965. Ray-Jones produced works on the English at leisure, capturing the comedic aspects of social class divides and the foolhardiness of certain behaviors that lay within the constraints of British life (**fig. 1.21**, **fig. 1.22**). The ironies of the situations occurring simultaneously in Ray-Jones's work might bring to mind Winogrand, while his surreal decisive-moment images seem influenced by Henri Cartier-Bresson. His project was published posthumously as *A Day Off* (1974).¹⁶⁸ His approach toward his fellow citizens is that of a fleeting spectator, mildly engaged but maintaining a critical distance. Perhaps he had experienced culture shock after living in the United States for five years.

Tipping the balance toward narrative and away from form, British photographers, in contrast to U.S. Social Landscape photographers, established a social realism in the strong tradition of British social documentary photography.¹⁶⁹ It is noteworthy that during the 1970s a vigorous Marxist and Marxist-feminist critique of documentary photography emerged. John Tagg (1949-), Victor Burgin (1941-), and Jo Spence (1934-1992) were central figures in this

¹⁶⁸ Tony Ray-Jones, *A Day Off* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974); a reproduction of the cover image and a few other pages from the book are published in *The Open Books: A History of the Photographic Book from 1878 to the Present*, ed. Andrew Roth, (Göteborg: Hasselblad Center, 2004), 302-303.

¹⁶⁹ Worker-photographers from left-wing groups organized to reveal working conditions, opposing the “bourgeois picture-lies” in Europe and Russia during the 1920s. The best-known example is *AIZ* in Germany. See Leah Ollman, “The Worker Photography Movement: Camera as Weapon,” in *Multiple Views: Logan Grant Essays on Photography*, 1983-89.

Mass Observation, or M-O, was a group formed in Britain to challenge false mass-media images of the working and middle classes, and images promoted by academic sociologists and government officials. See Terry Dennett, “The British Film and Photo League,” in *Creative Camera*, nos. 197-98, (May/June 1981). Humphrey Spender (1910-2005) worked for M-O. Bill Brandt (1904-1983), although not working for M-O, made documentaries with a purpose similar to that of M-O. Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History*, 294-296.

milieu of British critics and artists who investigated the intersections of political and social power and photographic documents.¹⁷⁰

During the late 1970s and 1980s, Chris Killip (b.1946), a photographer from the Isle of Man, photographed the effects of de-industrialization and globalization, candidly portraying oppressed residents of northeastern England during the administration of Margaret Thatcher, whose southern-oriented economic and political policy neglected the concerns of northerners. Shot in black and white, the results of this project were published in *In Flagrante* (1988).¹⁷¹ Serious in its tone, Killip's straight shots, often employing close-ups, deliver an emotionally powerful narrative of the dire conditions of his subjects, instilling pessimism in the viewer (fig.1.23).

¹⁷⁰ John Tagg, who graduated from Royal College of Art, London in 1973, began to teach art history and turned his interest to the history of photography from art history in 1976. He organized conferences on photography and curated *Three Perspectives of Photography* at Hayward Gallery, London in 1979. Many of his essays were included in his book, *The Burden of Representation: Essays of Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), in which Tagg examined previously unexplored photographic history, including documentary images. He rejected the idea of photography as a record of reality, instead offering accounts of the institutionalization of the photographic process and its social and political consequences.

Victor Burgin who came to prominence as an originator of conceptual art in the late 1960s, participated in now-historical exhibitions such as *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969) and *Three Perspectives on Photography* (1979). Burgin, who was trained as a painter, turned to photography as a political act. His work has always emphasized the role of the spectator in interpreting works of art, believing that the meaning is never simply "there", but is always produced by the viewer. In the 1970s, Burgin's signature black-and-white photographs combined documentary style imagery with texts in the manner of advertisements from glossy magazines. In this period, his interest was in the construction of the subject in a patriarchal and media dominated society, and in showing how mobile and provisional are the ways in which masculine sexuality is structured.

Jo Spence and Terry Dennett co-founded the Photography Workshop, a research, educational, and publishing project, in 1974. The Workshop was committed to addressing class and women's issues. See Comedia/Photography Workshop, *Photography/Politics: One* (London: Photography Workshop, 1979) and *Photography/Politics: Two* (Surrey, U.K: Unwin Brothers, 1986). The Photography Workshop called into question various institutional photographic practices, engaging in the widest possible debate on the politics of visual imagery. Importantly, the publications by the Workshop re-examined the earlier traditions of left wing photography before they were elevated and rarified as part of the bourgeois "documentary tradition" within various art establishments.

Jo Spence's photographic installation *Beyond the Family Album*, part of the exhibition *Three Perspectives of Photography* in 1979, as well as her book *Putting Myself in the Pictures: A Political and Photographic Autobiography* (Seattle: The Real Comet Press, 1988) offer a class-based and feminist interrogation of the social normalization of the family album. See also Spence's writings collected in *Cultural Sniping: The Art of Transgression* (London: Routledge, 1995). My thanks to Siona Wilson for pointing to these key critiques of documentary and of the idea of the family album.

¹⁷¹ Chris Killip, *In Flagrante*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1988.

The sense of social disaster presented by Killip also animated works by Paul Graham (b. 1956) and Martin Parr (b. 1952). Both photographed their respective subjects in color, bringing their images of life closer to reality. Their projects define the New Colour Documentary in Britain. For instance, for his project *Beyond Caring* (1984-85),¹⁷² published in 1986, Graham visited office of the Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS) in London to capture the hopelessness and boredom found inside social service offices. Graham shared the experience of his subjects as he was unemployed at the time of his project. An injection of color into his potentially grim subject, however, makes the reality of the scene clash with our attraction to the images (**fig.1.24**). Often, a slanted view of run-down government offices brings a sense of disorientation, as though seen from the perspective of a spy, apt for revealing the truth about the failed policies of Thatcherism that benefited the few while contributing to high unemployment amongst an underclass that depended on state sponsored subsistence subsidies. Graham used a medium format camera, which explains why many images seem haphazard; debarred from using a camera within government offices, Graham must have shot them quickly from whatever angles were available—the corner of a room or the bench next to his seated subject.

Unlike Killip or Graham, whose concern was for the underprivileged, Martin Parr aimed his camera at a self-serving British middle class in his book *The Cost of Living* (1989). In saturated color images, Parr assumes the position of a sociologist or anthropologist examining a group from a detached perspective while at the same time bringing a satirical humor similar to the works of Ray-Jones, albeit without the irony. The way the British middle class dresses and interacts in various social situations—family gatherings, parties, teenage social gatherings—is portrayed in vivid colors, as the photographer's eye notices the accidental colors of

¹⁷² Paul Graham, *Beyond Caring*, London: Grey Editions, 1986.

consumerism, such as a woman's red nail polish matching the fruit set on a table (**fig.1.25**). Parr captures the polite, genteel, modest constraint of the middle class through an exaggeration of stereotypes, revealing boredom and alienation within the community.

While British photographers who resided in or traveled to the United States brought to Britain the influence of 1960s American photography, other contemporary British art photographers established a new paradigm rooted in a strong social documentary tradition. Anna Fox, for example, introduced realism as a core issue by showing her subjects from the perspective of a disassociated insider, strongly signaled in the works of her immediate British predecessors Paul Graham and Martin Parr.

3) Japanese Photography of the 1960s and 1970s

The 1960s and 1970s constituted a seminal period in the development of modern photography in Japan. Photography books and magazines, as opposed to galleries and museums, were the principal agents influencing photographers. The new genre of U.S. Social Landscape photography was introduced chiefly by visiting Western photographers, as well as by the introduction of their work through publications in Japan.¹⁷³ In addition, lectures by a leading educator and critic of photography, Tatsuo Fukushima, influenced young Japanese photographers during the late 1960s.¹⁷⁴ “Kompōra” photography, from the Japanese

¹⁷³ As examples: the 1959 Grove edition of Robert Frank's *The Americans* (sold at 1,600 yen), the catalog for Nathan Lyon's exhibition, *Contemporary Photographers: Toward a Social Landscape* (sold at 1,980 yen), Garry Winogrand's *The Animals*, William Klein's *New York* (1957) (sold at 2,600 yen), Robert Frank's *The Lines of My Hand* (Yugensha, 1972, sold at 7,200 yen); Lee Friedlander's *Photographs* (1978) were available at bookstores specializing in foreign books and bought by enthusiastic Japanese readers, as evidenced by the personal testimony of Ryuichi Kaneko in “Introduction,” *Japanese Photobooks of the 1960s and '70s* (New York: Aperture, 2009), 7-9.

¹⁷⁴ In the late 1960s, it was common practice for Japanese photography students to attend lectures given by Tatsuo Fukushima. Famous for curating the landmark exhibition *Junin-no Me [Eyes of Ten]*, Fukushima introduced students to the work of Robert Frank, William Klein, Ed van der Elsken, Edward Weston, and other major Western photographers, as well as to important Japanese photographers like Tomatsu, (Ryuichi Kaneko, *ibid*, 7).

transliteration of the title of a 1966 U.S. exhibition, *Contemporary Photographers: Toward a Social Landscape*, emerged among young Japanese photographers. They photographed mundane events in the sober tones of “simple, straightforward” compositions (**fig. 1.26**), following their understanding of American Social Landscape photography.¹⁷⁵

Two highly influential books shaped the trend in Japanese photography during this period. William Klein’s *New York* was distributed in Japan in 1957, a year after its initial publication in Paris. Klein’s grainy social documentary style, along with the unusual design of his book, made a marked impression on younger Japanese photographers, as evidenced by their reinterpretations, e.g., the photobook of Eikoh Hosoe.¹⁷⁶ Dutch photographer Ed van der Elsken’s (1925-1990) *Sweet Life*¹⁷⁷ made a big hit when it appeared in a Japanese edition in 1968. *Sweet Life* consisted of wide-ranging images from the photographer’s 1960-61 journey to West Africa, the Malay Peninsula, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Japan, the United States, and Mexico.¹⁷⁸ The diaristic tone of his “personal documentary” style as well as the book’s unusual layout—with double-page run-ups and montage-like juxtapositions of seemingly unrelated images—and its non-linear narrative approach did not escape the notice of keen observers in the circle of Japanese photography.

¹⁷⁵ Such works were created by Takanashi Yutaka, Ishimoto Yasuhiro, Gocho Shigeo, Shimozu Takyuki and Sato Kuniko, who mostly shot commonplace scenes. Kiyoji Otsuji described these images as “simple, straightforward” in his essay, “The Age of Ideology Is Passing,” in a special edition of *Camera Mainichi* in June 1968, entitled “Symposium: Contemporary Photography.” Typical snapshot compositions such as placing subjects in the center of a horizontal frame were often employed by the young *Kompora* photographers. The inclinations of *Kompora* photography were markedly different from those of *Provoke* era photography. Iizawa Kotaro, “The Evolution of Postwar Photography,” *The History of Japanese Photography*, ed. Anne Wilkes Tucker (Houston, Texas: The Museum of Fine Arts, 2003), 221-222.

¹⁷⁶ Gerry Badger and Martin Parr, “Provocative Materials for Thought: The Postwar Japanese Photobook,” *The Photobook: A History Volume 1* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2004), 266-311.

¹⁷⁷ It was originally published in New York, Germany, Spain, and Holland in 1966, and in France and Japan in 1968.

¹⁷⁸ Badger and Parr, “The Indecisive Moment: The ‘Stream-of-Consciousness’ Photobook,” *The Photobook: A History Volume 1*, 254-255.

The development of participant observer photography is not limited to the regions discussed in this study, but may be found also in Latin America, Africa, and elsewhere. However, this project is not a survey of participant observer photography throughout the world; it is a series of case studies. The focus on four artists may appear to be limiting, but together they represent a distinctive chronological development, starting with Clark, followed by Goldin, and proceeding to Billingham, with Araki simultaneously developing his own distinctive approach. This dissertation also makes an argument for the global influence of this art form as evidenced by the impact of American Social Landscape photography beyond the United States. While awareness of these works of participant observer photography that partly overlap with Social Landscape photography arose through publications, their influence has proven multi-dimensional and reciprocal. Some British social documentary photographers became teachers in prominent university programs in the United States and have produced photography projects here since the 1970s.¹⁷⁹ Japanese photography was introduced to U.S. audiences by John Szarkowski and Shoji Yamagishi at MoMA in 1974. *New Japanese Photography* showcased works by sixteen avant-garde Japanese photographers, some of whom were being introduced to American audiences for the first time.¹⁸⁰ In 1979, the International Center of Photography in New York held an exhibition titled *Self-Portrait Japan*.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Tony Ray-Jones taught at San Francisco Art Institute in 1971. Chris Killip, Manx photographer has taught at Harvard University since 1991. Paul Graham moved to New York in 2002.

¹⁸⁰ Ken Domon, Yasuhiro Ishimoto, Shomei Tomatsu, Kikuji Kawada, Masatoshi Naitoh, Tetsuya Ichimura, Hiromi Tsuchida, Masahisa Fukase, Ikko, Eikoh Hosoe, Daidoh Moriyama, Ryoji Akiyama, Ken Ohara, Shigeru Tamura, and Bishin Jumonji presented their works in the show. John Szarkowski and Shoji Yamagishi, *New Japanese Photography*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1974).

¹⁸¹ Curated by Shoji Yamagishi, *Japan: A Self-Portrait* took place between April 27 and June 3, 1979. The exhibition consisted of works by nineteen Japanese photographers who focused on postwar Japan's conflicts and concerns. Artists included were Ikko Narahara, Hiroshi Hamaya, Shoji Ueda, Nobuyoshi Araki, Issei Suda, Ryoji Akiyama, Hiroshi Yamazaki, Miyako Ishiuchi, Masahisa Fukase, Taiji Arita, Gasho Yamamura, Kikuji Kawada, Daido Moriyama, Haruo Tomiyama, Jun Morinaga, Kishin Shinoyama, Shinzo Hanabusa, Hiromi Tsuchida, Shomei Tomatsu.

VI. Various Positions of Participant Observer Photographers

a. “Outsider” Participant Observers: Bill Eppridge and Jim Goldberg

In 1965, Bill Eppridge documented heroin addicts for *Life* magazine.¹⁸² His photo-essay—presented alongside a story by James Mills about John and Karen, a pair of New York City junkies—offered a close look at the vicissitudes of addiction, ranging from the act of shooting up to getting locked up in jail (**fig.1.27**). The article was the product of the photographer/writer team’s close observation of the couple over two months. The photographs of the heroin addicts appear unposed and the subjects seem natural before Eppridge’s camera. George P. Hunt, the managing editor of *Life*, explained in a note how the two “squares” (Eppridge and Mills) gained the trust of the heroin addicts, which involved learning their argot, such as “narco” (narcotics detective) and “square” (non-users), and spending many hours awake at night. Eppridge and Mills succeeded in persuading their subjects “to do something good” for society for a change.¹⁸³ Eppridge, initially an “outsider,” became to a degree embedded in the sordid life of the junkies. There was even an incident in which he was picked up in a hotel lobby by narcotics detectives convinced that he had stolen his camera and *Life* credentials. As for the reason Karen and John acted so freely before Eppridge’s camera, Mills suggested that “they enjoyed their role. For once they could savor the role reversal of the teacher-student, judge-dependent, do-gooder-addict relationship they had always known. For once, *they* were the figures of authority. For the first time, *they* were the front end of the hyphen, and the squares were the students.”¹⁸⁴

Being high on drugs may have made the junkies less self-conscious about exposing themselves to these two non-threatening journalists, as the drugs may have induced a kind of

¹⁸² Photographs by Bill Eppridge and essay by James Mills, “The Nightmare World of the Junkie. New York’s “Needle Park”: An Island of Oblivion,” *Life* 58, no.8 (February 26, 1965): 66B-93.

¹⁸³ The editors of *Life*, *The Great Life Photographers* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2010), 151.

¹⁸⁴ Mills quoted in Hunt, *Life* (February 26, 1965): 3.

disguise of the self. Moreover, the role reversal may have encouraged them to perform more dramatically than usual. In some episodes, the well-composed photographs of the couple occasionally make the two junkies look like film characters charged with emotion.

The photo-essay on John and Karen presents the unfolding story of a couple who appear to be normal, but whose inside story is a hotbed of drug addiction. Exposing the drama of the co-dependent couple in carefully arranged layouts mixing text and photographs, the *Life* article carries the clear moral purpose of presenting the destructive effects of drug addiction to the readers of a picture magazine prone to adopting a patronizing tone. By showing their struggle at an intimate level, the article's purpose is clearly to affect readers in a personal way. The two compliant subjects risked exposing their secrets not only to the public, but also to authorities. What happened to them later in life is not a matter of record, to my knowledge, but this project is said to have engendered a friendship between them and their documenters. The essay also developed into a book by Mills,¹⁸⁵ which, in turn, became the source material for Joan Didion's screenplay for the 1971 film "Panic in Needle Park," starring Al Pacino.¹⁸⁶

Another illuminating example of the participant observer method as employed by an outsider is Jim Goldberg's project of 1987 to 1995, which looked at teenage runaways in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Culminating in the publication *Raised by Wolves* (1995),¹⁸⁷ this collection of photographs, text, interviews, documents, and photos excerpted from the children's family albums provided ample insight into the lives of runaway children through narratives based upon real situations. It is shaped by sophisticated montage techniques and narrative elements. Most of the runaways and adults were given false names to protect their identities.

¹⁸⁵ James Mills, *Panic in Needle Park* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1966).

¹⁸⁶ Roger Greenspun, "Screen: Schatzberg's 'The Panic in Needle Park,'" *New York Times*, July 14, 1971.

¹⁸⁷ Jim Goldberg, *Raised by Wolves*, ed. Philip Brookman (New York: Scalo, 1995).

The photographer himself appears as “Jim Goldberg”, a participant in a story that revolves around two main troubled characters, Echo and Tweedy Dave. Through these two, Goldberg was introduced to many other characters. Stories handwritten on scraps of papers by the teenagers themselves accompanied Goldberg’s photographs, revealing dark stories of parental abuse, drug abuse, prostitution, crime, and fear, but also youthful hopes and desires. The inclusion of the handwritten notes injected into the project the subjects’ own voices—a method that Goldberg had used in a previous project, *Rich and Poor* (1985)¹⁸⁸—bringing a sense of authenticity and frankness to his images. However, the stories told by the teenagers were not always truthful or consistent. Tweedy Dave’s handwritten account of his life states:

My mom was 15 yr old Junkie slut
 who I aint never seen
 My old man is a Biker From Hell
 The Fucked Up Ass hole shot me in
 the gut when I was 12 yrs old
 aint Gone home since or had one¹⁸⁹

Goldberg’s photos of Tweedy Dave’s thin arm and of his belly bearing a huge surgical scar accentuate the horrible child abuse he described (**fig.1.28**). Coincidentally, at the same time that Goldberg was assembling a record of Tweedy Dave, an Australian producer was developing a series of thirty-six film segments about Tweedy Dave, one of which was aired on NBC’s *West 57th Street*, a newsmagazine program. Dave told the TV host that he ended up on the streets because: “My father raped me, then shot me in the stomach when I was nine.”¹⁹⁰

However, these accounts by Tweedy Dave were evidently fabricated. Tweedy Dave may have been raised by a middle-class Christian family in Texas, and the scar he brandished as the artifact of a gun shot wound came instead from an operation to treat a birth defect. Jeffrey

¹⁸⁸ Jim Goldberg, *Rich and Poor* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1985).

¹⁸⁹ Goldberg, *Raised by Wolves*, 33.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 297.

Marrs, from Texas, who adopted Tweeky Dave and his sister, spoke with Jim Goldberg over the phone after Tweeky Dave's death from poor health and refuted Dave's version of why he had left home and how he got the scar. At his funeral, his friends offered fragmented stories that Dave had told them, and his age, the real story of his past before his life on the streets, and the reason for his disfigurement were all addressed, without leading to any definitive or coherent story. Dave himself once discussed his self-mythologizing in a conversation with Goldberg:

Jim: When did you create this whole mythology of Tweeky Dave?

Dave: I do it as I go along. I've always had a fantastic imagination, plus a perspective on where I'm at.

Jim: Why make things up?

Dave: 'Cause it's better than the truth. It doesn't hurt as much. I'd just make up stories about myself, like I was a cowboy and goin' off and fuckin' robbing and shit. I was always into that. Fuckin' Billy the Kid and Jesse James and shit. I think that's where a lot of this persona of Dave comes from. I went from being Billy the Kid to being a guitar slammer to being a junkie. That way I don't need a fucking psychiatrist. I already told them to just leave my head alone.¹⁹¹

Dave's habitual fabrications about his biography contribute to Daniel Morris's observation that a form of "theatrical performances" was entailed in Goldberg's project, as the subjects effectively "enact[ed] their lives for [his] camera."¹⁹²

For *Raised by Wolves*, Goldberg adopted hipster language, mimicking street slang while in other ways maintaining his identity as "a nervous outsider" in unsettling situations—including life-and-death scenes—that he not only witnessed and recorded, but in which he sometimes tried to intervene. Goldberg served as a confidant to his subjects and, almost as a social caseworker might, provided urgently needed help at times when he felt a compulsion that overrode his interest in photographing his subjects. He often received late night

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 36.

¹⁹² Daniel Morris, "Revising the New York School Social Documentary Tradition: Image-Text Relations in Jim Goldberg's *Rich and Poor* and *Raised by Wolves*," *After Weegee: Essays on Contemporary Jewish American Photographers* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 109.

phone calls from kids in trouble, and when Echo was about to deliver her baby, Goldberg drove her to the hospital. Based in this close and continuing relationship with his subjects, Goldberg portrayed with empathy their harrowing living conditions, serving as intimate witness to their lives.

Goldberg's long-term project seems to present the full spectrum of the runaway teenagers' lives as he assumed multiple positions: of confidant, surrogate parent, oral history recorder, messenger, and beyond. The book suggests the vicissitudes of the various modes Goldberg pursued, ranging from active image-maker, to embedded reporter, to voyeuristic witness, be it of intravenous drug use or youthful sexual activities. The result is that *Raised by Wolves* conveys a powerful cumulative impact.

b. Native Informants as Subjects and Authors: Wendy Ewald and Zana Briski

Some photographers employed teaching skills with “native informants” as a means of gaining access to, and understanding the subculture to which those informants belonged. “Native informant” is a loaded and slippery term.¹⁹³ For my purposes in this dissertation, I am accepting a conventional anthropological definition of the native informant as a member of a society on which an observer informant reports—an individual who may serve as a willing interlocutor with that observer informant. By contrast, a traditional outside informant must generally learn a language and a culture in order to report on that (foreign) culture to an audience. As one kind of example, photographers Wendy Ewald and Zana Briski have both used children as native informants. Because children tend to easily trust friendly adults, these women

¹⁹³ The concept of “native informant” was debated by critics such as Julia Kristeva and Gayatri Spivak. See Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) and Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

were able to instruct their juvenile subjects in photographic techniques and to collect the results of the children's efforts. In other words, rather than or in addition to (in Briski's case) the professional photographers themselves documenting their young subjects, they engaged the children to become observers of their own lives, in ways both spontaneous and deliberate.

Wendy Ewald (b.1951) taught children to use cameras at three public elementary schools in the coalfields of Letcher County, Kentucky between 1975 and 1982. The results were published in the photobook *Portraits and Dreams* (1985)¹⁹⁴ (**fig.1.29**). Ewald, who arrived in Kentucky in February 1975 fresh out of college, rented a small house on Ingram's Creek, one of the most remote valleys in Letcher County, where one third of the residents were living below the poverty line. She recalled, "I wanted to get to know the people, and the one thing I could offer was to teach their children to take pictures."¹⁹⁵ Students between seven and fourteen years of age were asked to photograph their own lives, including family and community activities, among other assignments by Ewald. The book is divided into sections devoted to self-portraits, animals, family portraits, and dreams. The result—a complex collection of images of the young photographers, their friends, animals, landscapes, homes, and dreams, including violent fantasies—evidences children's potentially acute powers of observation. This method of using native informants—in this case, subjects generally regarded as too young or naïve to successfully operate cameras—has a particular claim to authenticity as well as a claim to avoiding undue voyeurism or patronization.

London-born New York resident photographer Zana Briski (b.1966) rented a room in Sonagachi, the Calcutta red light district, to photograph female prostitutes, an assignment that

¹⁹⁴ Wendy Ewald, *Portraits and Dreams: Photographs and Stories by Children of the Appalachians* (New York: Writers and Readers Pub, 1985).

¹⁹⁵ Amber Online, "Portraits & Dreams by Wendy Ewald," under "Side Gallery," <http://www.amber-online.com/exhibitions/portraits-dreams-by-wendy-ewald> (accessed June 16, 2012)

took nearly two years. Frustrated in her attempts to gain access to the lives of the prostitutes, she encountered their children and taught them how to use a camera and, in the process, produced the highly acclaimed documentary film, *Born into Brothels* (2003), which won the Academy Award for best documentary feature of 2004, among other honors. A book version of Briski's project, *Born into Brothels: Photographs by Children of Calcutta* (2004), and a similar and more extensive book, *Kids with Cameras* (2005), were published to help raise funds for these needy children.¹⁹⁶ Briski's initial choice of subject, a red light district in India, is a challenging one, she recounts in her film, as her subjects were universally afraid of being exposed to scrutiny by law enforcement. But the children became her mediators and escorts as they had open access to the domestic spaces of their prostitute mothers and the surrounding environment. Intimate details were captured by the children (**fig.1.30**, **fig.1.31**), from scenes of abject poverty to images of playful activities among childhood friends to self-portraits.

Briski's photographs serve a two-fold purpose. They are invaluable social documents of the destitution that traps girls in a system of prostitution, typically by the age of fourteen. At the same time, they evidence Briski's teaching, as the images reflect the children's study of compositions, camera angles, cropping, and so on. Briski aimed ultimately to remove the seven children with whom she worked most closely from their deleterious environment and to provide them with educational opportunities. While those aims won her accolades internationally as the lives of these unfortunate children were displayed relentlessly on the film festival circuit, in India she was criticized sharply on several counts, and the film could not be shown there since

¹⁹⁶ Zana Briski, *Born into Brothels: Photographs by the Children of Calcutta* (New York: Umbrage, 2004); Zana Briski, *Children with Cameras* (New York: Children with Cameras, 2005).

the filmmakers needed to protect the identities of the sex workers. One woman who helped Briski has since expressed her feeling of being “used”.¹⁹⁷

As Seema Sirochi wrote in *Outlook India*, Briski’s film ultimately seems to be less about the hard reality of prostitution and its effects on young lives than about the filmmaker’s journey.¹⁹⁸ Partha Banerjee, who worked as a translator in post-production for the film was critical of its failure to inform viewers that sex workers in Sonagachi have benefited from years of local activism as well as from the efforts of social workers and health care professionals.¹⁹⁹ While several children’s lives were evidently improved as a consequence of Briski’s film, and the Sonagachi district received international attention, the film is an example of an outsider from a privileged Western country portraying the lives of the poor in the developing world for the benefit of Western audiences as well as for her own professional gain.²⁰⁰

Ewald’s and Briski’s projects are important instances of the use of pedagogy as a powerful tool for making an impact on the lives of disadvantaged children, but the controversy surrounding Briski’s film shows the multiple layers of exploitation which may be entailed in such enterprises, and may be felt strongly by the insiders. For that matter, it may be impossible for an outsider to document others without risking exploitation, especially in cases where the privileged are viewing the underprivileged, and the greater the cultural difference, the greater the potential for harm.

¹⁹⁷ Sandhya Dutta told a Calcutta newspaper about feeling “used” because people in other countries were watching a film about her life while she could not. Seema Sirochi, “Zana’s Shutters,” *Outlook India* (March 14, 2005), <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?226761> (accessed July 16, 2012).

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Partha Banerjee’s letter to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, February 1, 2005, Documentary “Born into Brothels” and the Oscars: an Insider’s Point of View by Partha Banerjee, http://mukto-mona.net/Articles/partha_ban/born_into_brothels.htm (accessed July 16, 2012).

²⁰⁰ For further discussion on these issues regarding documentary photography and film, see Martha Rosler’s essay, “In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography),” originally published in *Martha Rosler: 3 Works* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981).

The relationships Ewald and Briski had with their subjects remained those of teacher to pupil, mentor to mentee, and, in Briski's case, rescuer to rescued. The photographers served as instructors who allowed their pupil-subjects to express themselves through the medium of photography. Learning photography gave these children a means of escape from their situations (temporarily for most, more long-term for a few). While the teenagers Goldberg pictured bordered on the helpless with only a small chance of reform, Ewald's and Briski's youthful subjects appear more as agents of their stories and, perhaps, of their own salvation.

c. Participant Observer as Parodist: Nikki S. Lee

Korean-born Nikki S. Lee (b.1970) (Korean name: Lee Seung-Hee) developed what she termed "Projects" during her graduate school years at NYU—that is, photographic recordings of herself hanging out with various demographic or social groups or subcultures, each one for a month or so, learning and adopting their semiotic codes of fashion and behavior. The groups included, among others, the hip-hop African-American community (**fig.1.32**), rednecks in Ohio, Korean schoolgirls, lesbians (**fig.1.33**), and strippers.²⁰¹ Her imitations of her subjects' lifestyles and her interactions with each group were captured in snapshots taken with cameras more typically used by amateurs—cameras replete with a then-standard date function. The dates that appear on each image add to the illusion of their authenticity as documentation.

Of her relationship to her subjects, Lee said, "I don't live with the people. I just hang out. I have to have boundaries. What I do is fake documentary."²⁰² Her practice, sometimes

²⁰¹ The Young Japanese (East Village) Project (1997), The Hispanic Project (1998), The Tourist Project (1997), The Lesbian Project (1997), The Punk Project (1997), The Drag Queen Project (1997), The Yuppie Project (1998), The Seniors Project (1998), The Ohio Project (1999), The Schoolgirls Project (2000), The Skateboarders Project (2000), The Exotic Dancers Project (2000), The Hip Hop Project (2001). The book, *Projects*, was published in 2001.

²⁰² Jessica Kerwin, "Faking It: From Trompe l'Oeil Fashion to Faux Documentaries; the New Reality Is Completely Twisted," *W Magazine* (September 2001): 416-18.

called mockumentary, has been viewed by critics as a form of postmodern parody and pastiche.²⁰³ The photographs, which Lee exhibits under her own name, were shot by members of the communities in which she was temporarily involved, by passersby, or by her Korean friend Soo Hyun Ahn. The resultant images include the kind of loosely posed or unposed-looking scenes identified with snapshot aesthetics.

Her images document her performative art projects, and the dates on them are the actual dates on which they were shot. But as realistic as the images may appear, they all represent her temporary and superficial assimilation into the various groups that she infiltrated. Disguised by heavy stage makeup, costumes, and props, Lee evinces an uncanny, chameleon-like ability to switch her identity from one project to the next. She transforms her sexuality (in the lesbian and drag queen projects), her ethnicity and race (in the Hispanic, Hip Hop African-American, and White American in Ohio projects), her age (in the senior and schoolgirl projects), and her occupation (in the stripper, skateboarder, swinger, and tourist projects) while functioning at once as performer/model and, more importantly, as director.

Lee's interest in masquerade and the alteration of identity through clothing, makeup, and props has prompted comparison to Cindy Sherman's oeuvre, especially the black-and-white *Film Still* series (1977- 1980), in which the artist Sherman role-played stereotypical parts associated with actresses from Hollywood B movies. Like Sherman, Lee constructs herself as an art star whose viewers are fascinated by the various identities she simulates. Sherman's images were entirely fabricated and largely shot in her studio by herself, whereas Lee's images were created by others in the context of actual social situations and the environments she infiltrated.

²⁰³ Louis Kaplan, "Reforming Community: Nikki S. Lee's Photographic Rites of Passing," *American Exposures: Photography and Community in the Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 189.

Lee openly exposes her intentions to the members of the groups she photographs. The success of her work depends, in part, on how closely her appearance and behavior mimic those of the group members. For example, *The Schoolgirls Project* and the *Yuppie Project* are less striking than *The Hispanic Project* or *The Seniors Project*, especially to the eyes of someone (such as myself) who knows where Lee comes from—as a Korean of a privileged, upper middle-class background. When Lee impersonates an identity closer to her own, the undertaking appears less challenging, and so is less striking.

d. Participant Observer Method as a Platform for Art

Many art photographers have employed participant observer methods, annexing them to their practices, whether on a short- or long-term basis. Some of these artists, such as Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Rineke Dijkstra, Mary Frey, Adrienne Salinger, and Gillian Wearing, have recruited strangers for their projects, often focusing on human relationships and the emotions they entail.

Between 1995 and 1998, Adrienne Salinger (b.1956) approached individuals who lived alone, encountering them variously at laundromats, bookstores, on the streets of California and New York, and so on. Once she befriended them, Salinger spent the day with them, photographing them in their homes and interviewing them. The result of her project is *Living Solo* (1998),²⁰⁴ a collection of fifty portraits rich in details both photographic and textual. Shot with a 4 x 5 view camera, these portraits of sitters in their domestic surroundings evidence her subjects' lifestyles and class background. Clearly framed photographs of the individual subjects provide ample information about how they lived: their manner of dress, the degree of neatness

²⁰⁴ Adrienne Salinger, *Living Solo* (Kansas City, MO: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 1998).

of their homes, their choices of decor, and types of housing (**fig.1.34**).²⁰⁵ One might easily draw conclusions about each subject's personality from these studies alone, but the texts reveal what the photographs do not, and these subjects' life stories come as surprises filled with fascinating details. Salinger's subjects vary in their occupations, age, economic class, and race. Her study evokes an aura of respect for people who live alone, members of, what the artist described as, "Possibly ... the first generation in which living alone is presumed to be a legitimate choice rather than a declaration of defeat."²⁰⁶ Salinger's project is akin to sociological and ethnographic studies in its random sampling of a given group—to which, incidentally, she belonged: in her early forties at the time of the project, she was living alone in Albuquerque working as an associate professor of art at the University of New Mexico. But these daylong encounters (from the first meeting with her subjects to entering their homes and completing the interviews and photographs, impressively, each individual portrait was completed on a single day) brought qualitative information as well, revealing stories both happy and unhappy. Salinger's subjects appear to have in common a sense of self-possession and ease within their surroundings, as well as a willingness to offer candid revelations about their personal histories—relationships with partners, parents, and siblings; broken family connections, divorces, estrangements and deaths; sexuality, rediscovered identities, and careers; fears and hopes—all recorded in video and later transcribed by the artist. Reading the accompanying texts brings the realities of these sitters' histories into focus, while the photographs present a single representation of an individual in a

²⁰⁵ Rooms have been frequent subjects for many photographers. Salinger, prior to the *Living Solo* project, photographed teenagers in their bedrooms, mostly in Syracuse and on the West Coast. The product was published as *In My Room: Teenagers in their Bedrooms* (1995). New York-based Israeli photographer Lily Almog photographed women in their bedrooms. In *Bed Sequence* (2002), she strives to unmask her subjects by presenting them in apparently candid shots that were actually acted out scenarios in which they meditate, exhibit their bodies, and so on. While the sitters appear unposed, they are nonetheless obviously aware of the presence of the camera; though they avoid eye contact with the photographer, they behave awkwardly while lying in their beds.

²⁰⁶ Salinger, *Living Solo*, xi.

domestic setting (different for each subject, be it bedroom, living room, library, closet, kitchen, or studio), devoid of any relationship dramas or loneliness. Mostly, they appear to be self-aware individuals who perceive their realities clearly. Through the trust that developed between the photographer (as a fellow single) and her subjects, *Living Solo* is filled with what Roland Barthes called *studium*.²⁰⁷ Salinger also highlights the disparity between the appearances of the strangers and their actual histories.

British photographer and video artist Gillian Wearing (b.1963) took an approach comparable to Salinger's by using as subjects strangers whom she met on the street and in parks. However, Wearing's presentation of the personal lives of her subjects was more provocative than Salinger's. Wearing's work ranges from images of herself dancing in a Peckham shopping center in London (1994) to inviting strangers to confess before her video camera while wearing comical masks (*Confess All on Video* [1994]). Her work merged the reality of her own life with that of others by utilizing staged elements. The spate of reality TV shows in Britain in the mid-1990s might have encouraged artists such as Wearing to make such confessional and performance-enhanced works. Wearing acknowledged in an interview the influence of television on her work:

It was definitely a 1970s thing that I picked up on – those earnest, serious documentaries about everyday people, like *Seven Up* (Michael Apted, 1964) and *The Family* (Franc Roddam, Paul Watson, 1974), which was the British equivalent of the US documentary *An American Family*. I was interested in remembering how

²⁰⁷ Barthes used the Latin term *studium* in his discussion of photography defining it as “a classical body of information,” meaning an “application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment, ... but, without special acuity.” [Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 25-26]. It is precisely such “a classical body of information” that Salinger's images and texts deliver to this viewer. For a fuller discussion of the term *studium*, see Geoffrey Batchen, ed., *Photography Degree Zero: Reflections on Roland Barthes's Camera Lucida* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009). Every author in the book mentions *studium*, usually in comparison to Barthes's other popular concept, *punctum*. However the most extensive discussions on *studium* may be found in the following chapters: Geoffrey Batchen, “Palinode: An Introduction to Photography Degree Zero,” 3-31; Jane Gallop, “The Pleasure of The Phototext,” 47-56; Michael Fried's “Barthes's *Punctum*,” 141-170; Carol Mavor's “Black and Blue: The Shadows of Camera Lucida,” 211-242, and Geoffrey Batchen's “Camera Lucida: Another Little History of Photography,” 259-274.

I was affected by them at the time—the realization that people who were not that dissimilar from you or your friends were being represented.²⁰⁸

Appearing natural, being unselfconscious and spontaneous, being yourself before a camera even if your life may not be considered socially presentable, became a cultural norm, or at least viewers became accustomed to art works that explore the boundaries of private activity and public space—both physical and psychological.

As an example, Wearing's signature work, *Drunk* (1999), showed several alcoholics from London streets staggering around the artist's studio (**fig.1.35**). Taking over two years to complete, this twenty-three minute, three-section video exhibits the behavioral effects of intoxication on subjects who are seemingly unselfconscious before the camera. Against a white backdrop, the drunkards' buffoonery was presented at art gallery exhibitions.²⁰⁹ The video aestheticized these otherwise marginalized individuals, showing them removed from their usual environment (the streets), isolating their forms and movements.

Bringing private lives into the public realm was further explored by Wearing in *Theresa* (**fig.1.36**), a series of candid photographs of a street drinker with various lovers. Adjacent to each photo appears an intimate handwritten text by the male lover depicted in it. Written on scraps of paper, these "odes" provide an account of Theresa beyond her evident obesity and alcoholism. The texts present her as an understanding woman possessing a good sense of humor. Portraits of each couple (Theresa with each different man in each photo) appear against varying backgrounds; presumably they were shot in different rooms (perhaps the male lovers' bedrooms or hotel rooms Wearing rented for the shoots).

²⁰⁸ "Interview: Donna De Salvo in conversation with Gillian Wearing," *Gillian Wearing* (London: Phaidon, 1999), 15.

²⁰⁹ It was shown at the exhibition "Gillian Wearing: A Trilogy" at Vancouver Art Gallery between July 13, 2002 and October 27, 2002. Still images from the video *Drunk* (1998) are reproduced in catalogues of exhibitions, including Mark Beasley, *Gillian Wearing: A Trilogy* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2002), 10-15.

Both *Drunk* and *Theresa* center around the reality of the featured individuals, yet their explicitly fictive or constructed nature is an integral aspect of these works. Wearing developed a certain kind of relationship between her subjects and her camera. Recruited from the streets, Wearing succeeds in bringing embarrassingly private phenomena to the public realm of art galleries and museums. But the pronounced theatricality of her pseudo-documentary works suggests a departure from the evocation of a spontaneous, unpremeditated reality to a more isolated realm of aesthetics.

Chapter Two

Voyeuristic Mode: Larry Clark

This chapter addresses the representation of alienated youths by Larry Clark (b. 1943, Tulsa, Oklahoma), a photographer who lived among them—indeed, as one of them—in the 1950s and 1960s in his hometown of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Clark’s work should be seen within the context of the emergence of the issue of disaffected youth in mass media during the postwar period. I will examine the differences between photographs and films made by outsiders versus those created by insiders recording a subject largely new to general viewing audiences. Larry Clark has been a perpetual insider to adolescent culture—and some might argue, a perpetual adolescent as well—from the time of his own teenage years. Over the course of his career and life, he shifted gradually from an insider position toward a voyeuristic approach to his subjects. Because he continually crossed and re-crossed the boundary between insider and outsider perspectives, Clark’s oeuvre raises important questions about the ethics and politics of photographic practice.

With the publication of his first book, *Tulsa* (1971), Clark claimed his authority as an “insider” photographer of his own culture. *Tulsa*, which opens with a confessional preface by Clark, providing what Abigail Solomon-Godeau called a “certificate of authenticity,” posed questions about the dynamics of insider and outsider positions.²¹⁰

i was born in Tulsa Oklahoma in 1943. when i was sixteen i started shooting
amphetamine. i shot with my friends everyday for three years and then left town
but i’ve gone back through the years. Once the needle goes in it never comes out.
L.C.²¹¹

²¹⁰ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “Inside/Out,” in *Public Information: Desire, Disaster, Document*, ed. Gary Garrels (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1995), 56.

²¹¹ Larry Clark, *Tulsa* (New York: Lustrum Press, 1971), unpaginated.

Narrated in lower case text, from its beginning, *Tulsa* signals that it is, at least on one level, the photographer's autobiography. His insider position gave Clark access to the problematic low life of white American working class kids.

Before analyzing Clark's *Tulsa*, I will provide a historical background of juvenile delinquency, the overriding theme of Clark's oeuvre. This social history provides a rationale for representation of disaffected youth culminating in Clark's extreme expressions of the phenomenon through his insider participant observer position.

I. Youth Culture and Photography in Mid-Twentieth Century United States

Rebellious youth culture arose as a new photographic subject during the postwar period in America. In the early twentieth century, adolescence had not yet been identified as a discrete state of human development, partly because people married younger, often in their late teens, embarking on factory and office careers, childrearing, and homemaking. At the advent of World War II, teenagers were first identified as a distinct social group in the United States. Wartime conditions raised public awareness of the problems of youths left largely unsupervised due to fathers being absent from the home while on active military service and mothers being in the workplace earning family income and fulfilling the patriotic duty to produce armaments and other supplies for the war effort.

Teenagers were also significantly affected by shifting economic factors. As ever fewer American lived and worked on or near farms, there were fewer after-school and summer occupations for teens, most of whom were not sufficiently mature or qualified to work at the jobs their fathers had left vacant. The idleness and lack of structured after-school time led cities from Detroit to Atlanta to New York to be confronted with increasing juvenile delinquency.

Having the war years to bond with their peers and create a distinct and separate culture, teens were disinclined to cede the territory they had gained once the war ended and parents became more available. In addition, postwar prosperity kept teens in school longer, providing more leisure time and placing automobiles at the disposal of an increasing number of teens, allowing greater mobility. Juvenile delinquency emerged as a subject in literature and movies, as well as in the federal government: in 1955, President Eisenhower asked Congress for \$5,000,000 to combat juvenile delinquency, a dramatic increase over 1954's paltry allocation of \$75,000.²¹²

The question of what leads teenagers to antisocial behavior and juvenile delinquency is one of the most fertile research subjects in the social sciences, especially in the field of psychology. Adolescence has been called a period of “storm and stress,” during which age is a more constant factor in determining criminal conduct than other demographics, including social status, race, or family configuration.²¹³ Some research indicates that elevated testosterone levels in fifteen- to seventeen-year-old boys contribute to higher rates of violence, while other researchers argue that stress in adolescence is determined by culture not biology, positing that adolescent storminess is not a universal phenomenon.²¹⁴ In developed countries, in any case, problems surrounding adolescence and juvenile delinquency persisted and emerged as subjects in art, literature, and cinema, which afforded material for reflection and public discussion.

²¹² Michael Barson and Steve Heller, *Teenage Confidential: An Illustrated History of American Teens* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998), 48.

²¹³ In 1905, the psychologist G. Stanley Hall described the adolescent period of human development as characterized by “storm and stress” and others agreed. See David E. Brandt, *Delinquency, Development, and Social Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 48. For the close relationship between the age factor and crime, see James Q. Wilson and Richard J. Herrnstein, *Crime and Human Nature* (New York: Free Press, 1986).

²¹⁴ Margaret Mead used participant observation methods to research adolescent development on the South Pacific island of Samoa while living there for several years in the 1920s. The results of her study, which showed no signs of a stressful adolescence among the youth of the island, were published in her book, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1950). Alternatively, see J.H. Brooks and J.R. Reddon, “Serum testosterone levels in violent and non violent young offenders,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* (1996); 52, 475-483.

The rebellious youth culture of 1950s America emerged as a notorious subject, especially in cinema, opening up taboo topics around sexuality, crime, and drug use, and leading to heated public controversy, both domestically and abroad. Films such as *The Wild One* (1953) (**fig.2.1**), *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) (**fig.2.2**) addressed the failures of the educational system, the increase in juvenile crime, and the erosion of traditional family values. The public responded alternately with enthusiasm and widespread moral panic. In Europe, the influence of American movies dealing with juvenile delinquency became a concern; *Rebel Without a Cause* was the only movie of the 1950s to be denied a censorship certificate in Britain.²¹⁵ These films were called “juvenile delinquency movies,” which became a rising genre of filmmaking in the 1950s in the United States.²¹⁶

The sensational response to the subject of youth culture was not confined to the realm of film, but also applied to literature. A novel written by British author William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (1954), about school children who, when stranded outside modern civilization, regress to savagery, signaled the rise of the primitive youth gang, and was interpreted by some as an ex post facto explanation for the rise of Nazism and the atrocities of World War II.²¹⁷ While the novel was not a success in Britain at the time it appeared, it had become required school reading by the early 1960s in the United States. The book was adapted for film in 1963.

²¹⁵ British Board of Film Classification database. The BBFC, analogous to the MPAA in the US, is a film industry sponsored rating agency.

For a discussion of American juvenile delinquency movies of the 1950s and their effects, see Daniel Biltereyst, “American Juvenile Delinquency Movies and the European Censors: The Cross-Cultural Reception and Censorship of *The Wild One*, *Blackboard Jungle*, and *Rebel Without a Cause*,” in *Youth Culture in Global Cinema*, ed. Timothy Shary and Alexandra Seibel (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 9-26.

²¹⁶ Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 1-18; James Gilbert, *A Circle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 178-195; Timothy Shary, *Generation Multiplex: The Image of Youth in Contemporary American Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 82.

²¹⁷ Claudia Durst Johnson, “Nazis and Gangs: William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954),” in *Youth Gangs in Literature: Exploring Social Issues through Literature* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 93-100.

In the United States, Viking Press released Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* in September 1957, a book that evoked the free-spirited youth of the fifties and quickly became a cultural icon of the Beat Generation.²¹⁸ Based on Kerouac's personal experience of taking a road trip across the United States, it had a spontaneous writing style inspired by jazz, poetry, and drugs. This "Beat" style was known for its unpolished, improvisational, unstudied ("first thought, best thought"), and lyrical qualities as well as for its celebration of a counter-establishment lifestyle. Thus, the Beat aesthetic emerged as at once gritty and semi-mystical.

In photography, an outsider whose approach was in some respects comparable to that of Kerouac, brought a refreshing perspective to the task of recording the American youth culture of the 1950s. A new literary magazine, the *Evergreen Review*, placed *Newburgh, New York* (1955) (**fig.2.3**), by Swiss photographer Robert Frank (b.1924), on its cover (no.4, 1957). Frank, who toured the United States with the support of a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship, had produced a photograph of a motorcyclist at a road rally as the first image from among his Guggenheim photographs to be published in the United States.²¹⁹ It was a felicitous choice, considering the fast changing youth culture of the 1950s, which in time proved to be a precursor to the social rebellions of the 1960s. Kerouac and Frank met shortly after publication of *On the Road* and ended up working together. Kerouac wrote an improvisational essay for Frank's Guggenheim project, which was published in book form as *The Americans* (1959).²²⁰ In addition, *Evergreen Review* featured nine of Frank's photographs along with Kerouac's text,

²¹⁸ Kerouac's *On the Road* was published in 1957, but had supposedly been produced during a frenzied three weeks of spontaneous writing in 1951. The 120-foot-long roll of paper on which the novel was typed still exists. Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991).

²¹⁹ Jeff L Rosenheim, "Robert Frank and Walker Evans," in *Looking In: Robert Frank's The Americans* (Washington DC: National Gallery of Art and Göttingen: Steidl, 2009), 160.

²²⁰ It emerged earlier in France, in French. Robert Frank, *Les Américains*, ed. Alain Bosquet (Paris: Robert Delpire, 1958).

“On the Road to Florida,” in the January 1970 issue. Kerouac’s piece was based on a road trip with Frank that provided a privileged view of Frank working.²²¹ Frank recorded many subjects on his journey—ranging from a movie premiere to a funeral, and a political rally to a factory—but images of the new youth subculture counted among his more frequent topics. As examples, consider the images of middle-class teenage boys in a candy store (**fig.2.4**) and of gay Latino teenagers (**fig.2.5**). A strong sense of gaze is employed in these images. In the first image, a boy at the lower right corner of the photo delivers a piercing look, while a chrome arrow on the jukebox appears aimed at a seated boy’s downcast or possibly closed eyes. The figures are blurred slightly, except for the metal arrow, probably due to their movement. In the photograph of the three gay teenagers, whom Frank encountered on the streets of New York City, his subjects look directly at the photographer, although one of them hides his face with his open hand. Such instances of partially obscured vision—signaled here by the closed eyes and the covered face—frequently occur in *The Americans*, perhaps articulating the in-built barrier between a photographer and his subjects.

The question of identity was an issue for Frank, the son of a Swiss mother and a German Jewish father, who witnessed his father’s personal conflict during the Nazi reign. While Frank and his brother obtained Swiss citizenship, his father did not. Many of Frank’s relatives who remained in Germany perished in the Holocaust, while Frank himself had a safe, affluent upbringing in Switzerland. Coming to the United States in 1947, Frank observed the transience and fluidity of American culture, in sharp contrast to the more rigidly structured life of the Swiss. In a letter to his parents in 1947, Frank, apparently disconcerted by American ways,

²²¹ Jack Kerouac, “On the Road to Florida,” *Evergreen Review*, no.74 (January 1970): 42-47; anthologized in *Literature and Photography Interactions, 1840 – 1990: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Jane M. Raab (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 394.

reported of his life in the United States, “Only the moment counts.”²²² Already an outsider as a German Jew in Nazi-era Switzerland, he now felt himself an outsider as a European in America, with its vastly different values, including the view of adolescence as a stage of life when youths were seemingly held responsible only to themselves.

Frank joined a circle of avant-garde artists in New York during his first years in America. Upon receiving the Guggenheim fellowship in 1955, he undertook an arduous, nine-month journey covering more than thirty states and 10,000 miles. On November 7, 1955, Frank was stopped by the Arkansas State Police without a stated reason and was held for twelve hours, undergoing a barrage of questions in the McGhee, Arkansas city jail, only to find himself accused of being a “communist.”²²³ He also faced hostility when he took pictures of disaffected high school teenagers in Port Gibson, Mississippi in September 1955 (**fig.2.6, fig.2.7**). He was bullied and, once again, called a “communist.” An unpublished photograph shows the teenagers’ reactions toward Frank. While a certain engagement is evidenced by some of them gazing directly at the photographer, there is an obvious division in their minds between the “communist” photographer and themselves.²²⁴ The image did not survive the final edit of the book.

Frank said, “what I have in mind, then, is observation and a record of what one naturalized American finds to see in the United States that signifies the kind of civilization born here and spreading elsewhere.” Frank, who was naturalized in 1963, saw his newly adopted

²²² For the background of Frank’s family and his early artistic influence, see Sarah Greenough, “Resisting Intelligence: Zurich to New York,” in *Looking In: Robert Frank’s The Americans*, 2-37. This book provides the most up-to-date, substantial account of Frank and his canonical work.

²²³ Frank’s documentation for his Guggenheim project listed references that include the Russian sounding name Alexey “Brodovitch,” which was partly why he was accused of being a communist. (Rosenheim, 154)

²²⁴ The four images of the high school teenagers are reproduced in Jonathan Green, “The Americans: Politics and Alienation,” *American Photography: A Critical History 1945 to the Present*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984), 80; work prints from 1956 were assembled in 2008 and reproduced in *Looking In*, 167-172; the image under discussion is on page 167.

culture from the vantage point of an outsider, though his subjects were generally within a close distance to the photographer.

The result of the huge editorial process of trimming twenty-seven thousand photographs to eighty-three was a book published by Robert Delpire in Paris in 1958 as *Les Américains*, accompanied by writings in French about American political and social history. A year later, in 1959, Grove Press in New York published *The Americans*.²²⁵

At the time of the U.S. publication of *The Americans*, Bruce Davidson, then a rising twenty-four-year-old American photographer—he had published his photographs in *Life* magazine and had joined the prestigious Magnum Photos agency—took notice of youth gangs in New York, where he was living. In the late fifties, teenage street gangs troubled New York, as they did many U.S. cities. Davidson became familiar with a gang of teenagers in Brooklyn who called themselves “The Jokers.” At first, he approached the troubled teenagers through “Youth Workers,” part of a youth board formed to counter violence amongst teenage gangs. But Davidson soon was accepted by the gang, and he began “hanging out” on street corners with them and going to Coney Island, where they ventured with their girlfriends. The results of his involvement were published in *Esquire* magazine in 1960, accompanied by an essay by New Journalist Norman Mailer.²²⁶ In his photographic report, Davidson focused on the vulnerability of the members’ emotions, which they disguised by their “cool” poses. He produced images of troubled teenagers, but not generally at moments when they engaged in criminal or forbidden acts. Davidson captured moments when the boys and their girlfriends lounged at the beach

²²⁵ Robert Frank, *Les Américains*, ed. Alain Bosquet (Paris: Robert Delpire, 1958), reprinted as *The Americans* (New York: Grove Press, 1959).

²²⁶ Norman Mailer, “Brooklyn Minority Report,” photographed by Bruce Davidson, *Esquire* (June 1960): 129-37.

aimlessly or embraced in a car, hung out at a bar or in an empty room, or flocked in front of a tattoo parlor (**fig.2.8, fig.2.9, fig.2.10, fig.2.20**).

Davidson's Brooklyn gang photos sometimes give an impression of visual irony. For instance, "Two Young Men Walking Past a Church at Night" (**fig.2.10**) shows a blurry image of two Brooklyn gang members passing a church building on West Houston Street in Manhattan at night. Obscured doubly by the darkness of the night and the blurriness of the photo, this image catches less the detail than the essence of the opposing elements. Frank's *The Americans* was having a great impact on photography around the same time as Davidson photographed the Brooklyn gangs. But having found the Swiss-born photographer's portrayal of Americans depressing, Davidson strove to cast American youth in a somewhat more sympathetic light.²²⁷ Perhaps less abrupt in his approach, but no less melancholic than Frank, Davidson tended to position the Brooklyn gang members off center, frozen in action, making them appear to be fashionable heroes and heroines in a romantic narrative (**figs.2.8, fig.2.9, fig.2.10**). The cool look of teenage gang members, whose lean young bodies languidly lie about, was eventually picked up by the fashion world. Shortly after his Brooklyn gang photographs appeared in *Esquire*, the art director of *Vogue* magazine asked Davidson to photograph fashion models in color with the same vision he had for the Brooklyn gangs.²²⁸

After the Brooklyn gang project, Davidson's interests shifted toward other social topics, including the Civil Rights movement, Spanish Harlem (in a project later published as *East 100th Street*), and various commercial projects. In all these endeavors, Davidson assumed the position of a quiet and peripherally participating observer. As was the case when he photographed the Brooklyn gangs, his subjects were seemingly indifferent toward him while he was capturing

²²⁷ Bruce Davidson, *Bruce Davidson Photographs* (New York: Argrinde Publications, 1978), 10.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

them on film. Despite his persistent physical presence, he appears to go unnoticed. For his Spanish Harlem project, Davidson visited the neighborhood for about two years with his 8 x 10 camera in hand. Eventually, he was recognized as the “picture man” by the neighbors, and his presence became part of the scene. He even gained access to the homes of some impoverished tenants who wanted him to provide visual evidence of their dire living conditions in support of their demand for improvement.²²⁹

Danny Lyon, another photographer whose subjects were somewhat similar to those of Davidson—from rebellious youth, to the civil rights movement, to the urban poor—pushed even further the role of the participant when dealing with his subjects. Lyon took an interest in a Midwestern version of the Hell’s Angels, the Chicago “Outlaws” motorcycle club of Cicero, Illinois, a group he spent time with between 1963 and 1967. Lyon photographed this community from the inside, making himself an integral part of his subjects’ lives. The work was produced in a small book, *The Bikeriders* (1968), published by mainstream publisher Macmillan.²³⁰ Ranging from group portraits of bikers in action and in repose to images of individuals at home with their families and at other private moments, his photos reflect the arc of his subjects’ daily existence (**fig.2.11**, **fig.2.12**). Lyon often framed his subjects at the center of his images, although he at times preferred abruptly off-center compositions. Several of his images are shot from a voyeuristic perspective, incorporating an exterior scene from within the frame of a window or showing a reflection in a mirror or the polished chrome of a motorcycle (**fig.2.13**). *The Bikeriders* book includes Lyon’s interviews with some of the bikers, which reveal their boasts about fights, gang rape, and other weekend activities. However, the photographs do not document the full extent of the transgressions the Chicago Outlaws reportedly engaged in. The

²²⁹ Davidson, 12-13.

²³⁰ Danny Lyon, *The Bikeriders* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968).

worst behaviors shown in Lyon's account might be tolerated as "cool" or mildly rebellious. That a mainstream house published the book is evidence of the very acceptability of the topic, as Lyon portrayed it.²³¹

However acceptably framed, *The Bikeriders* signaled a noteworthy development in 1960s U.S. photography, namely the emergence of a younger generation of photographers concerned in part with youth culture. Lyon was between 21 and 25 years of age when he was involved with the bikers, so he was part of their generation (he also became a member of the Outlaws). He was able to present his subjects with authenticity, portraying from an insider's point of view their hopes and dreams as well as the reasons for their rebelling against adult authority. His approach toward his subjects favored a complicated, subjectively colored documentary style, rather than adhering to the conventional objective documentary mode. He was embedded with his subjects as he rode together with the Outlaws, incorporating their perspective into his personal view. His approach qualifies as participant observation photography, although it appears that he censored his work to a degree in order to suit a mainstream audience, and perhaps in response to his personal code of morality.

Lyon's association with the Chicago Outlaws may be seen as analogous to the experience of Hunter S. Thompson, who reported on motorcycle gangs around the same time. Between 1965 and 1966, Thompson gained access to the Hell's Angels, a notorious motorcycle gang then based in San Bernardino and Oakland, California. Considering the exclusivity of the group and their mistrust of journalists, cultivating close contact with members was a key factor in the success of Thompson's *Gonzo*-style writing in *Hell's Angels: The Strange and Terrible*

²³¹ Gerry Badger and Martin Parr, "Danny Lyon: The Bikeriders," *The Photobook; A History Volume I* (London: Phaidon Press, 2004), 256.

Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs (1966).²³² Thompson was introduced to the Hell's Angels through Birney Jarvis, a former member of the club, who became a reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. An introduction from a former member was sufficient only as an entrée; it required a considerable amount of time hanging out and riding motorbikes with wary club members to gain their trust. As Thompson recounted later in an interview:

They seemed a little stunned at the idea that some straight-looking writer for a New York literary magazine would actually track them down to some obscure transmission shop in the industrial slums of south San Francisco. They were a bit off balance at first, but after 50 or 60 beers, we found a common ground, as it were. . . . Crazies always recognize each other.²³³

Once Thompson gained their trust, the Hell's Angels were evidently sincere in their participation with his journalistic project, often talking at length into Thompson's tape recorder and reviewing drafts of his article to ensure that he had his facts straight. The gang often visited Thompson's apartment in San Francisco, to the dismay of his wife and neighbors. Yet in 1966, angered by a remark Thompson made, some members of the Angels assaulted him—as had also happened to Lyon. Thompson photographed his own face after his beating by the Angels (**fig.2.14**). Looking beyond the camera, the beaten Thompson looks lost. Thompson photographed his subjects as well. Made around 1965, his color photographs of the Hell's Angels evince more vividness than Lyon's black-and-white images. Some of these images, including one of two men kissing (**fig.2.15**), revealed unexpected behavior among this hyper-

²³² Hunter S. Thompson, *Hell's Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs* (New York: Random House, 1966). The book initially began as an article, "The Motorcycle Gangs: Losers and Outsiders," *The Nation* (May 17, 1965). After the article, Thompson received book offers from publishers that were interested in the topic. Thompson ended up publishing with the mainstream publisher, Random House.

²³³ Craig Vetter, "Playboy Interview: Hunter Thompson," *Ancient Gonzo Wisdom: Interviews with Hunter S. Thompson*, ed. Anita Thompson (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2009), 37; originally published in *Playboy* (November 1974).

macho, presumably heterosexual group.²³⁴ Thompson indicated that occasional homosexual acts (e.g., receiving fellatio from another man at a bar) were a means of attracting attention by “being different” and were performed primarily for their shock value.²³⁵

Lyon’s photographic project on motorcycle gangs and Thompson’s literary project on outlaw motorcyclists present rebellious and disaffected youths whose culture was reserved exclusively for themselves.

II. Clark’s *Tulsa* (1971)

Three years after Lyon’s *The Bikeriders* rendered its report on the rebellious spirit of youth, a book with comparable subject matter but a markedly more intense tone appeared. Larry Clark’s *Tulsa* (1971) depicted an intimate circle of Clark’s friends shooting drugs, engaging in sex, and committing violent acts (**fig.2.16**). Following the popularity of Gene Pitney’s 1960 hit song “24 Hours from Tulsa,” the city had come to represent “young love and family values.”²³⁶ Clark’s images changed that innocent view of the town to one of a home to drugs and guns.

Tulsa (1971) was published by Lustrum Press, a small photo book publishing company founded and led by New York photographer Ralph Gibson (b.1939). Gerry Badger credited Lustrum with being “arguably the best of the small American photo book publishers of the 1970s.”²³⁷ Clark’s relationship with the publisher and photographer Gibson played an important role once Clark moved to New York. Gibson was a former assistant to notable photographers

²³⁴ These photographs, taken by Hunter S. Thomson throughout his writing projects, along with his archives, are reproduced in *Gonzo: Hunter S. Thompson*, American Modern Books, 2007.

²³⁵ Thompson, *Hell’s Angels*, 85-87.

²³⁶ A song in which a young man confesses his newfound love on his way to see his girlfriend/spouse shows his moral conflict about doing the right thing. Ian Jeffrey, *The Photography Book* (London: Phaidon Press, 2000), 93.

²³⁷ In “Larry Clark: Tulsa,” *The Photobook*, 260. Lustrum Press, which produced a book roughly once a year, ceased to operate in 1986.

Dorothea Lange and Robert Frank. A small group consisting of a graphic designer, a lawyer, and Gibson ran the company. Shortly after his military service in the Vietnam War, Clark came to New York City, where he met Gibson, who was living at the Chelsea Hotel. Gibson and Clark, both struggling to become artists, bonded immediately. Gibson had published his own book a year earlier, *The Somnambulist* (1970). A photo book of a dream sequence characterized by stark contrasts and suggestive mystery, it became an instant success. He began to publish the work of other young photographers shortly afterwards, often selecting material with striking or provocative content.²³⁸ Clark made a dummy of his first book and brought it to Gibson, who then showed it to Frank. Danny Seymour (1945-1972), a young photographer and assistant to Frank, whom Clark met in New York in 1971, financed the book with \$5,000.²³⁹ About three thousand copies were printed and distributed through Light Impressions in Rochester, a company that began as a distributor of books and archival products.²⁴⁰ Gibson was faithful to Clark's original dummy design of the book. *Tulsa* brought considerable critical response for its acutely revelatory candid portraits of late adolescent rebelliousness. One of the earliest critics to champion Clark's critical edge appears to have been Alex Sweetman, whose detailed analysis of *Tulsa* was published in *Afterimage* in 1972.²⁴¹ In general, critics such as Sweetman gave *Tulsa* credit for seriousness and originality. They compared Clark's style and subject matter to that of

²³⁸ Ralph Gibson's photographs and his publications were on view at the exhibition "Ralph Gibson and Lustrum Press, 1970 – 1985: A Chapter in the History of Photo Book Publishing," at the Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, Arizona, June 16 through September 30, 2007.

²³⁹ Seymour, scion of a wealthy family, felt himself to be a misfit who associated with lower classes and artists. His photobook in the new personal documentary style, *A Loud Song* (1971), is an autobiographical story of getting off drugs published by Lustrum Press. Seymour drowned while sailing in the Caribbean in 1972.

²⁴⁰ Ralph Gibson, interview by author, Gibson's Tribeca studio, New York City, January 27, 2010.

²⁴¹ Alex J. Sweetman, "Tulsa: Death Is The Unconscious Goal," *Afterimage 1*, no.2. (April 1972): 8-10. Some of Sweetman's points were later reiterated in his article for *Explore* in 1986. See note 154.

the work of Robert Frank or Bruce Davidson.²⁴² Clark's insider position was generally praised, in contrast to the outsider positions assumed by Frank and Davidson. Such favorable notice brought Clark opportunities to exhibit. In 1979, a *New York Times* critic lauded *Tulsa* as no less than, "One of the finest achievements of contemporary photography."²⁴³

While Davidson and Lyon had photographed their subjects over long periods, initially becoming involved with them as outsiders, Clark took the process of identifying with his subjects a step further: Clark himself had been one of those teens whose lives were characterized by drug abuse and violence. Another distinction is that Davidson's and Lyon's vision of rebellious youth was in a way accepted by society, as that vision emerged in mainstream publications and reemerged in the fashion world. Moreover, Davidson's and Lyon's bikers rebelled in their leisure time, but still showed up at their jobs. By contrast, Clark's subjects engaged in truly corrosive rebellious acts as a full-time pursuit. Perhaps most significantly, Davidson's and Lyon's primary goals were making excellent photographs while communicating to the viewer the identity of their subjects; Clark's photographic process was more about figuring out who *he* was, while incidentally revealing the brutal realities of his marginalized community.

Clark's friend Billy Mann is the central symbol of *Tulsa*. The cover photo is the last picture of him alive. Inside the book, this same picture is labeled "dead 1970." On the page next to it appears the artist's own statement, "death is more perfect than life," as if the evidence had been weighed and judgment rendered. Throughout the book, death seems to mingle with life as

²⁴² Sweetman, 9; Owen Edwards, "Exhibitions: The Tulsa Connection," *American Photographer* (December 1979): unpaginated.

²⁴³ Gene Thornton, "Practitioners With a Story To Tell," *New York Times*, September 30, 1979.

the youths pictured indulge in the excesses of momentary pleasures that, in some cases, became the agents of their deaths.

Chronicling the eight years from 1963, when Clark was 20, to 1971, *Tulsa* is divided into three sections by year: 1963, 1968, and 1971, with material from the last year constituting half the book. His friends David Roper and Billy Mann appear frequently, together and separately, in portraits and in candid photos of their daily activities, interspersed with a several-page cinematic-looking sequence of close-ups of them injecting amphetamine and beating a police informant.

Tulsa reveals Clark's talent for dramatic composition and his skilled use of lighting to make melancholy portraits of figures at close range, mostly in indoor settings: distorted images of his friends' reflections in a broken mirror, elongated shadows on a wall, or a face half-submerged beneath the shadow of a car, all represent the psychological darkness of damaged youth (**fig.2.17**, **fig.2.18**). None of the subjects look at the camera. Their blank gazes are directed upward or downward without apparent purpose, displaying a range of emotions from despair to aimless pleasure.

In the first set of photographs in *Tulsa*, from 1963, an aura of silence seems to pervade each subject's awareness of self. Take as an example the seated young man in a shirt whose gaze is cast downward toward a point outside Clark's frame (**fig.2.17**). More than half the frame in this photograph is taken up by the shadow of the sitter. The shadow of the window frame, together with that of the sitter, creates an odd mystery while loosely evoking the story of Pinocchio, the wooden puppet whose nose grew every time he lied. The moral lesson of the fairy tale was about telling the truth: by being honest, brave, and generous, the not-yet-human-puppet becomes human and is accepted by adults. Up until that moment, being a bad boy had

resulted in the punishment of the nose growing and of the puppet being turned into a donkey. The dual nature (good and bad, reward and punishment) of Carlo Collodi's iconic story is likely not what Clark intended at the outset, yet a sense of morality is nonetheless implicit; rather than evincing truth-telling in the context of the expected rules of mainstream society, he pursues truth-telling about the lives of disaffected youth.

Clark first learned photography from his mother, who became a baby photographer. Within a year of her starting that business, the young Clark, then fifteen years old, began helping her at work, carrying and setting up background screens. When Clark was old enough to obtain a driver's license, he took the baby photos himself.²⁴⁴ Clark, who had a lot of trouble at school, was expelled and went to another school where he met the subjects of his work for *Tulsa*. After high school, Clark went to Layton School of Arts, a small art school in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he studied art and photography. Walter Sheffer, one of his teachers at that school, taught Clark advanced portraiture and hired him as an assistant on weekends and in the evenings for wedding photography.²⁴⁵ His exposure to these sessions, particularly dealing with portrait photography, prepared the young Clark to document scenes of his friends' activities while they unfolded. He mastered his equipment and the selection process entailed in deciding exactly what to photograph.

At art school in the 1950s, Clark was exposed to photojournalistic images from *Life* magazine. He was drawn to the story-telling aspect of the photo-essays, despite his abhorrence

²⁴⁴ Larry Clark, interview by Bill Jay on March 14, 1974, from an unpublished archive at the Center for Creative photography, unpaginated.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

for commercial photojournalism.²⁴⁶ Clark's models for his dark pictures came also from his exposure to film noir B-movies, which he grew up watching on TV in the 1950s.²⁴⁷

A portrait of a woman (**fig.2.19**) who takes up the entire frame in a shot made in a dimly lit room captures her dark, anxiety-ridden mood—the nervous pose of her crossed arms, one hand to her mouth, the other dropped on her lap. Clark framed the shot tightly, much in the way cinematographers might, with the top of the subject's head cropped out of the frame. This approach is quite different from Davidson's portrait of a young woman (**fig.2.20**) in the company of a young man, in which she poses under a grey, muted light at a beach, directly gazing at the photographer while her cigarette-wielding hand momentarily touches her chin. Although the photo was shot from within arm's length, Davidson does not crop it tightly. The woman's guarded gaze seems to block the photographer from access to her interior life. Her gaze is mirrored by the young man next her, who might invite comparison with yet another photograph by Clark (**fig.2.21**) in which a teenage boy holds the tightly clenched arm of his friend while the friend is shooting a drug into his arm. The teenage boy looks upward, away from Clark's camera, while the shooter presents his back to the camera. The young men in Clark's and Davidson's photographs (**fig.2.20** and **fig.2.21**) have similar blank expressions of uncertainty, and both assume a low-vantage point, one lying on the beach, the other squatting or seated. Yet, the level of delinquency is markedly different; one is relaxing at a beach with his girlfriend, the other is assisting a friend to shoot speed. Davidson's subject is shown in mid-day boredom and torpor, perhaps just waking up from a nap under the sun, while Clark's youth is shown in a wary state, perhaps in fear of being caught during his secret pleasure. The effect of

²⁴⁶ Mike Kelley, "Larry Clark: In Youth is Pleasure," *Interviews, Conversations, And Chit-Chat 1986-2004*, ed. John C. Welchman (Zurich: JRP|Ringer & Dijon: Les Presses du Reel, 2005), 80.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

the exchange of gazes between the gangs and Davidson is transient and decisive, whereas the rapport between the *Tulsa* junkies and Clark seems more permanent and intimate.

Clark witnessed and recorded the habitual behaviors of his friends over a lengthy period, selecting archetypal images, while Davidson caught whatever good moments he could while his access was allowed.²⁴⁸ Both artists reveal truths about the lives of these subcultures—Brooklyn gangs and Tulsa junkies—that encompass the same age group, although Davidson’s settings range from beaches to candy stores, while Clark’s pictures are claustrophobic, featuring the dark rooms of suburban houses. Outdoor scenes in Clark’s work are rare, and when they do appear, they provide few clues to their context.

Clark’s interest is in individuals. While the book demystifies the lives of the misfits whose secrets are revealed, up to a point, it also has fictional qualities, as the subjects appear almost as B-movie anti-heroes and anti-heroines who reveal a dark side of human nature. The viewer’s feeling is that anything can happen. To some degree, Clark’s friends participated in shaping the look of the photos by influencing Clark during the photographing process. Clark chose relatively good-looking pictures of his friends so that, with their approval, he could continue to make the pictures.

Not all the images possess crisp focus. Some are grainy, blurry pictures, as if an amateur rather than a detached professional had taken them. Far from the perfect “decisive moments” of Henri Cartier-Bresson, these imperfect non-moments convey the nervous, impromptu, un-composed qualities of lives going nowhere fast. Some of the photographs capture Clark’s friends in self-destructive activities, as in a picture of a blond young man screaming while

²⁴⁸ Owen Edwards made a brief comparison between Davidson and Clark. He noted that *Tulsa* conveys “both the criticism and affection of the insider; not an outsider’s empathy,” in Edwards, “Exhibitions: The Tulsa Connection,” *American Photographer* (December 1979).

holding his right leg where he has just injected a drug. The subject's head and one of his feet are blurry as he moved faster than Clark's shutter speed could capture (**fig.2.22**).

One of the most striking images in *Tulsa* is that of a dark haired young man (Billy Mann) smoking in bed while holding an infant whose wide-open eyes stare directly at the camera (**fig.2.23**). Clark's juxtaposing of the child's innocence with the youth's searing anxiety is calculated to frighten the viewer. Unlike the blurry shots in the book, this photo clarifies the scene with a crisp focus in which a dramatic interplay of dark and light takes place. While his friends evidently deteriorated by doing drugs, Clark seems to have benefited, gaining an intense focus under the influence of amphetamines. He told an interviewer that speed calmed him down and leveled him out.²⁴⁹

Tulsa includes images of bare-breasted girls assisted by their boyfriends to inject drugs. The nonchalant nudity implies that aimless sex accompanied the drug use between these pairs. Without constructing definite narratives, Clark arranges the photographs in a discernible sequence only in the last section of the album. One relatively clear sequence consists of four photographs from 1971 depicting a process of deterioration: first, a young couple engages in shooting drugs into the underwear-clad girl's arm in bed, while her head is cut off by the framing (**fig.2.25**); next, a pregnant woman (perhaps the same girl) is shown in profile, injecting drugs, captured in soft-focus with natural light coming through a window (**fig.2.26**); the following image shows a standing woman in a head scarf holding a bouquet of flowers (**fig.2.27**); the last picture reveals the funeral of an infant, whose dead body lies in a casket (**fig.2.28**). The story depicts the tragic result of drug abuse by a pregnant woman. Clark reveals

²⁴⁹ Raphaël Cuir, "Larry Clark: In the Eye of the Storm," *Art Press*, no. 333 (April 2008): 22-29.

the grim reality of this particular subculture of suburban teenagers, and the painful cost that their decadent choices brought. The effect on the viewer is chilling.

Toward the end of *Tulsa*, Clark, surrounded by young faces, looks much older. He sits shirtless, holding his arm after having received an injection of drugs, eyes closed, waiting for the drug rush to affect his body (**fig.2.29**). The next photograph portrays three young kids (two boys and a girl), all of whom are naked, engaged in drug shooting (**fig.2.30**). As Clark aged, his subjects remain young. Clark, in his second book, *Teenage Lust*, wrote that the teenagers in the neighborhood took him with them in 1972 and 1973. Not only was he an observer with a camera, he was a participant, and occasionally an active instigator of the scene and the story.²⁵⁰

The closed-door activities that Clark depicted evince illicit practices, suggestive perhaps of a post-industrial malaise in a city known as the oil capital of the United States. and home to such public events as the Annual Gun and Knife show. The passage of time is evident in *Tulsa*. Most of Clark's friends from that milieu died and he alone survived the self-destructiveness and communal malaise. Clark was able to escape his early life because he had his art: "I'm working, remember, through all this. That's what sets me apart, folks. I never quite believed this was all real. It was a play. But the thing is my friends died."²⁵¹ Excepting Clark himself, adults and figures of authority are absent from *Tulsa*. If an adult appears, he is an overgrown adolescent who continues to live the outsider's life, as did Clark. The only authority figures invoked, the police, are portrayed as objects of contempt to be avoided. Their presence is felt in the first photograph of 1971 through vulgar warnings written on a piece of cardboard by David Roper (**fig.2.31**).

²⁵⁰ Larry Clark, *Teenage Lust* (Meriden, CT: Meriden Gravure, 1983), unpaginated.

²⁵¹ Guy Trebay, "Hot Flash? The Photographer from 'Tulsa' Resurfaces," *The Village Voice*, October 15-21, 1980, 3.

One sequence of photographs presents dramatically unfolding minutes of violence. Clark is invisible in the photo, but follows behind a man who enters the room of an Asian man who is apparently a police informant. Clark pressed the shutter release as the man beats the Asian, who was unprepared for the sudden assault (**fig.2.32**). There is no room for sympathy toward the pitifully assaulted man, an outsider to the insular community with which Clark was so intimately aligned. The story is told also through terse texts that accompany the sequence, e.g., “police informer” and “everytime i see you punk you’re gonna get the same.”

Clark was so immersed in the outlaw life depicted in *Tulsa* that shortly after its publication he ended up in prison. In 1974 and 1975, he served nineteen months of a five-year sentence at McAlester Penitentiary in Oklahoma for attempted armed robbery. The book’s authenticity was even used against him by the assistant district attorney who waved the recently published book in the air admonishing the jury, “You tell us what kind of a person you think Larry Clark is after you’ve examined his great work of art.”²⁵²

While some have regarded Clark’s work with contempt,²⁵³ it did reveal a particular reality of a segment of American youth that no one else dared to show. A challenge to the viewer arises, in great part, because of the lack of moral perspective. Unlike the New Deal photographers, who assumed a position of humane moral concern for the dehumanized situation of their subjects, Clark occupied a status nearly equal to that of his subjects, participating in their surreptitious and illicit activities. He assumed at once the positions of a self-destructive victim shooting drugs and a keen observer shooting photographs.

²⁵² Alex Sweetman, “Larry Clark: Drugs and Violence, Rhythm and Blues,” *Explore* 24, no.2 (Summer 1986): 5.

²⁵³ The exploitative quality of Clark’s work has been perceived as a problem. Malcolm Jones Jr. described works by Clark and others in the exhibition, “The Young Rebel in American Photography, 1950-1970 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in September-October, 1992 as “reflecting an age of nihilistic narcissism,” in his article, “Nihilistic Narcissists,” *Newsweek*, September 21, 1992, 80.

III. After *Tulsa*—Voyeurism and a Repeated Theme in Clark’s Works

Following the success of *Tulsa* (which enabled Clark to receive grants from a federal arts organization in recognition of his promise as an artist),²⁵⁴ Clark continued to photograph teenagers, the subject that became the overarching theme of his career. His second book, *Teenage Lust* (1983), portrayed promiscuous sexual practices among teenagers and is more graphic, sprawling, and experimental than *Tulsa*. Roughly organized into three parts in loose chronologic order, and including personal snapshots and legal documents, the book is not autobiographical in a conventional sense. It begins with Clark’s family photographs and his move to New York City; the second section presents various run-ins with the law during his pursuit of a hippie lifestyle in New Mexico, Oklahoma City, and other places; finally, the work ends with a group of single portraits of teenage male hustlers in the Times Square area of New York City.²⁵⁵

A wealth of biographical information is provided in the text at the back of *Teenage Lust* and Clark considers this project a confessional endeavor. Clark, though too old to be a participant in the sexual activities of teenagers, occasionally appears alongside his subjects (**fig.2.33**). In order to be included, the older Clark learned the ways of the teenage culture and its slang by socializing with his subjects. For instance, in describing boy hustlers in Times Square (**fig.2.34**), Clark recalls, “These kids on the Deuce—What it’s called, or the ‘doo-wop,’ if

²⁵⁴ Clark received an ‘Imprimatur of Excellence’ grant of \$5,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts in the mid 1970s.

²⁵⁵ The last section of this book comes from Clark’s photographic project, *Forty-Second Street* (1979), and includes portraits of teenagers near the subway stop at Eighth Avenue and 42nd Street in New York City. Clark reveals an episode in his process of gaining the trust of this young group. “What I see there is all these kids who look like they’re hustling, holding on to their peter, selling dope. I started to bang with them and make friends. At first, they thought I was a homo that I wanted to suck their dick. Then they thought I was the cops. Finally they accepted me. I infiltrated them and they would protect me and watch my back. Forty-second Street is under the control of police until midnight. Then it goes back to the people. It changes.” (Guy Trebay, 63).

you're really hip—live where they can. Like the kids in Tulsa.”²⁵⁶ The way Clark included himself in teenage groups was not much different from the way ethnographers used the participant observer technique.

Yet, in contrast to *Tulsa*, in which Clark was fully integrated into the participants' activities,²⁵⁷ his later work shifts toward an increasingly voyeuristic approach in which he becomes complicit in activities that feel wrong to look at (i.e., boy hustlers (**fig.2.35**) exposing their genitals as if enticing a customer or directly gazing at the adult male photographer), despite his efforts to identify himself with his subjects. Critics have termed this voyeuristic approach “exploitative,” and therefore problematic.²⁵⁸ Clark eventually married and became a father of two children, but by refusing to shift away from his interest in teenagers as his personal life changed, Clark progressively marginalized himself from what he depicted—or, the situations excluded him.

His third book, *1992* (1992), also focused on teenagers, yet increasingly there is a directorial attitude manifest in this work. Unlike his earlier reportorial photography in *Tulsa*, the images for *1992* were completely staged. Rather than finding a community of teenagers to infiltrate, Clark hired teenage models to re-enact scenes of teenage crimes, sex, and other

²⁵⁶ Trebay, 63.

²⁵⁷ For *Tulsa*, Clark's friends accepted fully the fact that he was photographing them, as attested by the photographer in an interview. “It was a rangefinder, quiet, no mirrors smashing together [referring to his camera, Nikon FP]. My friends got used to me having it: Larry and his camera. When you shoot speed, you have to tie off. When someone was going to shoot, they'd say. Oh, Larry, tie me off . . . oh never mind, you have your camera. That's how natural it was.” (Ibid).

²⁵⁸ For example, Lynn Zelevansky noted the exploitative quality of Clark in his photographs of the boy hustlers of Times Square in the 1980s, as she wrote, “Clark is not a saint. A photograph of a boy in a bathtub, covering his genitals, his face with the expression of a hunted animal, seems exploitive. The photographer had to be standing over the boy, straddling the tub. There is something questionable about Clark's hanging out with these kids in the first place. In his well-known book, *Tulsa*, he was photographing his own tough youth. Today he is an almost middle-aged voyeur who has infiltrated a sub-culture less sophisticated than his own.” (*Flash Art*, 1985). More recent criticism comes from Badger, as he writes, “[Clark's photos] incessant focus on the sleazy aspect of the lives portrayed, to the exclusion of almost anything else – whether photographed from the ‘inside’ or not –raises concerns about exploitation and drawing the viewer into a prurient, voyeuristic relationship with the work.” (Badger, 260).

disturbing situations. Stripping away earlier narratives found in *Tulsa* and *Teenage Lust, 1992* presents portraits of five teenage models shot in identical frames against simple backgrounds in Clark's studio. These serial shots signaled his move toward film.

In one image (**fig.2.36**) in *1992*, an adolescent boy in shorts and a sleeveless top sits on the floor of what appears to be the corner of a room, aiming a pistol into his mouth in an obvious suggestion of both sexual and self-destructive behavior. This pose has been recreated in Clark's film work. The shadow of a head appears above the teenage boy. Upon closer examination, we notice that the silhouette is the photographer himself projecting the shadow of an adult who has probably been directing the boy. In the next image (**fig.2.37**), the photographer's interest has shifted from his model to his own shadow, as the center of the photograph shows the accidental convergence of the two heads—one belonging to the artist-adult, the other to the youth. The effect is psychologically powerful: the artist's shadow looms over the powerless youth who has been placed in this situation for the purpose of satisfying Clark's obsession with his unresolved personal issues, fixated at around the age of this boy model. The model seems to be the alter ego of the artist, who looms outside the action, yet participates through forceful direction, his participation literalized in the form of his shadow.

1992 is a prelude to Clark's film work, a transitional piece in which he recreates his earlier experiences as a directionless, amoral teenager. The way the photographs are presented follows a cinematic narrative, as similar images with only slight alterations in detail appear on the following pages. Some of the still images in *1992* were enacted later in films such as *Ken Park* (2002).

Purposeful voyeurism pervades *1992*. The genitalia of several young models are revealed through their clothing while they sit open legged. This sexual scanning of teenage bodies

persists throughout Clark's oeuvre. The viewer is put in the uncomfortable position of looking at images of taboo subjects treated in taboo ways. As Ken Johnson has pointed out, Clark is not looking at the boy prostitutes "the way a social worker would see them but the way they might look to a middle-aged pedophile."²⁵⁹ Clark is neither gay nor a pedophile, but the problem persists. Freud provided a useful definition for the symptomatic perversity attached to this kind of experience of looking. "Pleasure in looking [scopophilia] becomes a perversion (a) if it is restricted exclusively to the genitals, or (b) if it is connected with the overriding of disgust (as in the case of *voyeurs* or people who look on at excretory functions)."²⁶⁰

While Clark claims that he used his camera as a tool to express his idea of "kids growing up all over America. Growing up in different ways," the repetitive act of photographing lost teenagers and damaged youth may be viewed as an effort to validate himself, and thereby to antidote lingering psychic pain.²⁶¹ Thus, Clark addressed his own traumatic past through images of others. According to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, repetition compulsion—repeating the same task or recreating a situation, usually interpersonal—is a means of overcoming trauma.²⁶² Freud links "repetition compulsion" to the concept of *thanatos*, the urge toward death. Clark's constant aiming of his camera at his troubled friends as well as at subsequent generations of teenagers, who more or less represent portraits of lost youth, may be interpreted as indicative of his desire to assuage his trauma.

²⁵⁹ Ken Johnson, "Drawing You into the Moral Void of Gorgeously Sensuous Squalor," *New York Times*, March 25, 2005, E2, 29.

²⁶⁰ Sigmund Freud, "Touching and Looking," *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, originally published in 1905, re-printed in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 251.

²⁶¹ Trebay, 63.

²⁶² Sigmund Freud, *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961).

The act of photographing has been importantly associated with the *death instinct*. Freezing the moment in a still image prompts recognition of one's mortality. Roland Barthes, in his *Camera Lucida*, states "Photography may correspond to the intrusion, in our modern society, of an asymbolic Death, outside of religion, outside of ritual, a kind of abrupt dive into literal Death. *Life / Death*: the paradigm is reduced to a simple click, the one separating the initial pose from the final print."²⁶³ In these terms, Clark, as an observer not knowing where the dead-end hedonistic drug activities of his friends were leading, may be seen as an agent of death recording the mortality of youth. At the same time, Clark's work may be seen as representing a resistance to death.

In another view of Clark's body of work, José Esteban Muñoz offered a critical assessment of Clark's photobooks and the film *Kids*²⁶⁴ in his essay "Rough Boy Trade." Muñoz asserted that Clark was "normalizing the 'queer act' of his photographic work" by positioning it within what Clark saw "as a heteronormative frame."²⁶⁵ Muñoz described the boys Clark pictured as "trade," by which he means "tricks and hustlers who commit queer acts yet nonetheless produce a heterosexual identity." Through the rough-boy images, by this account, Clark implicitly framed a depiction of homosocial relations. At the same time, Muñoz found problematic the way women are portrayed in Clark's work. He wrote, "Woman is, once again, a prop that permits the visual exploration of a young man's sexuality and sensuality."²⁶⁶ Images of violence against women are used to position Clark's boys as savage predators. Such tendencies are found throughout Clark's photobooks and film work.

²⁶³ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 92.

²⁶⁴ José Esteban Muñoz, "Rough Boy Trade," in *The Passionate Camera: Photography and Bodies of Desire*, ed. Deborah Bright (London: Routledge, 1998), 167-177.

²⁶⁵ Muñoz, "Rough Boy Trade," 172.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 175.

While Clark's text always insists that the reason for his obsession with photographing young boys is that he wants to be like them (in heterosexual terms), Muñoz suggests that Clark's images reveal a hidden motive of the artist's, namely, that he wishes to have the young boys, i.e., that secretly he desires them sexually. Muñoz offered his theory from his own queer perspective, positing a fresh approach to Clark's project, sensibly cautioning against accepting at face value what an artist claims are his or her intentions and urging detailed analyses of the images where gaps are seen. What Clark says about his own work, and his perhaps homophobic rejection of other meanings underlying his work, could well raise doubts.

IV. Clark's Film and Body Politics: *Kids* (1995) and Beyond

Over time, Clark gradually shifted from still photography to film, the medium best suited to his fabricated scenes of disturbing teenage behavior. There had been signs in his photobooks that Clark was interested in making film. Storytelling through visual images and terse texts was what Clark did best in *Tulsa* and subsequent photobooks. By observing the trend of Clark's inclusion of filmstrips, sequential shots, and the B-movie style frames in *Tulsa* to his new approach in *1992*, one could see that he was moving toward filmmaking.

Like *Tulsa*, Larry Clark's first film, *Kids* (1995, 91min, Color), caused a stir and resulted in a public sensation, perhaps more so because the film reached a wider audience. The public outcry over the explicit content of Clark's film resulted in censorship and fervid criticism. When it was released in 1995, the media went wild. "These 'Kids' Aren't All Right", "Last Chance for Eden," "What's the Matter with Kids Today?," "Jungfrauen Sind Negative," "Think You Had a Bad Adolescence?," and "Growing Up Troubled in Terrifying Way," were among the titles of

major newspaper articles.²⁶⁷ In the case of *Kids*, the challenges of releasing it attached to the question of public acceptance of the film. Miramax, a company with a reputation for edgy projects, produced *Kids*, but founders Harvey and Bob Weinstein had already sold their company to Disney two years earlier. As a “family-oriented” entertainment giant, Disney encountered a conflict regarding the Motion Picture Association of America ratings, as the film realistically depicts sex scenes with teenage actors.²⁶⁸ When *Kids* premiered at the Cannes Film Festival on May 22, 1995, the festival audience was reportedly aghast over this American film that was so raw in manner. Harvey Weinstein became convinced that distributing *Kids* through the conservative Disney company would prove impossible and set out to buy back the film from Disney, establishing Shining Excalibur Films to distribute it privately outside the MPAA rating system.²⁶⁹ In July 1995, the MPAA gave Disney an NC-17 rating for *Kids* due to its “explicit sex, language, drug use and violence,” all involving children, but the Weinsteins released the film independently and without a rating.²⁷⁰

Kids (fig.3.38 – fig.3.41) depicts crude, reckless teenage characters whose only ambitions are casual sex and getting high, much in the way the damaged youth in *Tulsa* and *Teenage Lust* were pictured. The vivid dialogue in this film, however, magnifies the seriousness of their delinquency and provides even greater insight into the lives of these kids, whose excesses do not come cheaply: the film establishes the devastation of AIDS as a plot device. The principal male

²⁶⁷ Anne Kornblut, “These ‘Kids’ Aren’t All Right,” *Daily News*, July 18, 1995, 27, 32; Christopher Knight, “Last Chance for Eden,” *Art Issues Press*, June, 1995, 42-44; Lynn Hirschber, “What’s the Matter with Kids Today?,” *New York Magazine* 23, June 5, 1995, 33-41; Harald Fricke, “Jungfrauen Sind Negative,” *Die Tageszeitung*, May 27/28, 1995, 3; Trip Gabriel, “Think You Had a Bad Adolescence?,” *New York Times*, July 31, 1995, 80-82; Janet Maslin, “Growing Up Troubled, In Terrifying Ways,” *New York Times*, July 21, 1995, C1 & C5.

²⁶⁸ Bernard Weintraub, “Sex, Speculation and Disney,” in “The Name Costner Acquires a Question Mark,” *New York Times*, Feb. 21, 1995, C13-C14.

²⁶⁹ Janet Maslin, “A Rating To-Do Over a Raw Tale of City Teen-Agers,” *New York Times*, May 23, 1995, C13.

²⁷⁰ Jon Pareles, “They’re Rebels Without a Cause and Couldn’t Care Less,” *New York Times*, July 16, 1995, H1.

character, Telly (Leo Fitzpatrick), prides himself on deflowering virgins and brags about his exploits. The lead female character, Jenny (Chloe Sevigny), tries to find Telly after learning he has infected her with HIV. Telly and his friends ride skateboards, drink beer, smoke dope, trespass, occasionally steal, get into a fight with a stranger, and prowl for girls. The girls in the film are depicted as passive prey, although when they talk crudely about sex they can seem no more innocent than the boys.

The shock comes first from witnessing innocent-looking children engaging in dialogue and activities that are unimaginable to some adults (**fig.2.39**). The opening scene begins with Telly kissing a very young-looking girl, perhaps on the verge of puberty, in her room at midday while her parents are out (**fig.3.38**). Telly watches his prey, stripped bare by the self-designated “virgin surgeon,” as she is about to lose her virginity and innocence in a scene that might well be a painful experience for the viewer. Throughout the film, we see a world of teenagers run amok in the absence of adult authority. Parents and other adult figures appear in only three scenes: the nurses at an HIV clinic where Jenny and Ruby (Rosario Dawson) get tested; Telly’s mother breastfeeding a baby, clueless as to what her son does with his days; and a sympathetic taxi driver who notices her passenger Jenny’s despair after she learns the devastating result of her HIV test. Otherwise, it is a kids’ world, in which parents are absent, their bedrooms serve as places for illicit acts of deflowering, and their apartments are the settings for wild parties. The younger kids learn from their older “brothers” how to smoke marijuana and how to have sex.

Depictions of teenage lives of debauchery and brutality have a long lineage in American movies,²⁷¹ and such films have not been the exclusive domain of American filmmakers.²⁷² What

²⁷¹ Notable examples of American films about teenage debauchery and brutality include: *The Wild One* (1953), *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), and *Blackboard Jungle* (1955). Efforts to understand teenagers and gut reactions of alarm appeared alongside each other for decades. Adolescents were “screaming wild animals” in the 1955 film *Blackboard Jungle*. A police officer explains that they had “no home life, no church life, no place to go. Gang

differentiated Larry Clark's *Kids* from earlier movies about juvenile delinquency, and what made it so controversial, was the lack of adult authority or even an adult point of view. In *Kids*, the camera, which in some films represents the narrator's or the viewer's alter ego, provides no anchor, but merely tags along with the characters, giving the impression of shooting the story without a distinct point of view or, at best, from the intimate point of view of the teenagers. The apparent authenticity of dialogue and lifestyle in *Kids*, which depicts underprivileged teenagers of New York City, makes the scripted film seem more like a documentary. To make it seem more authentic, Clark employed aesthetics that shift between an artfully shot film and a grainy, banal home video. Throughout the film, a raw energy fills the screen, with innovative camera work and vivid dialogue rife with teenage slang.

Some aspects of *Kids* show Clark's knowledge of film noir, as did some of his previous photographic images. For example, the scene in which Jenny finds Telly engaged in sexual activity with another girl evokes the dark anxiety of watching a crime movie in which anything might happen (**fig.2.40**). Half way through the film, the viewer has already seen too much—drugs, sex, alcohol, vulgar slang, tattoos, spitting, beating, urinating, filthy home environments, et cetera. The excess leads to nothingness. At the end of the movie, we see a drunken Casper

leaders have taken the place for parents.” 1960s films on this subject include the 1963 adaptation of Golding's “*Lord of the Flies*” (directed by Harry Hook, 1990), “*Menace II Society*” (directed by Albert Hughes and Allen Hughes, 1993), and Tim Hunter's 1986 film “*River's Edge*,” about the morbid sadness and moral confusion of youth who grew up in the suburban nuclear family. A 1970s example is *American Graffiti*. The 1980 film “*Over the Edge*” concerns teenagers who riot out of boredom in their planned suburban community.

²⁷² A Spanish film, *Stories of Kronen*, which was shown at the same time as *Kids* at the Cannes Film Festival depicts a similar theme. Jean-Pierre Améris's 1999 film, *Mauvaises Fréquentations* (“Bad Company”), is a disturbing story of an innocent girl dragged into prostitution by a boy who seduces her. *Cruel Story of Youth* (*seishun zankoku monogatari*) (1965, 96 min.) was directed by Nagisa Oshima, with Yusuke Kawazu and Miyuki Kuwano. The Japanese film depicts teenage lovers—symbols of Japan's alienated youth—who, determined to transcend their middle-class upbringing, become entangled in a squalid criminal underworld. The film started the Japanese New Wave and has been compared with both *Breathless* (directed by Jean-Luc Godard, 1960) and *Rebel without a Cause* in the way it defined both a movement and a generation.

(Justin Pierce)²⁷³ in a blank stupor the morning after an orgy, the embodiment of the nihilistic end that Clark scripted (**fig.2.41**).

The realistic rendering of such explicitly raw material as is depicted in *Kids* came partly from Clark's belief that a film about teenagers should emerge from within their culture rather than from an adult point of view. Clark felt that older films about teenagers that had cast adult actors in teen roles had failed to project the reality of the subculture in which Clark had been immersed since the 1950s. He was determined to avoid this pitfall when making his own film about teen culture in the 1990s. One savvy decision was to hire nineteen-year-old screenwriter Harmony Korine, whom Clark had met while skateboarding in New York City. Korine understood exactly what Clark wanted, and completed the screenplay in three weeks. Clark knew that the narrative, dialogue, and even the actors had to come from "the inside." Years of infiltrating this subculture helped Clark get the most truthful depiction of a particular population of disaffected teenagers in New York City in the mid-1990s. While critical reception was mixed, most reviewers saw the milieu depicted in *Kids* as an accurate, if partial, view of urban teen life.

Clark's next film, *Another Day in Paradise* (1998), reflected his personal experience as an ex-junkie, as he adapted a story of the same title by Eddie Little (1955-2003), published in January 1998. The writer has a personal history similar to Clark's, as his fictionalized portrayals of youth and heroin addiction in his books come directly from his own experience. Little, known as an "outlaw writer," was running an AIDS assistance organization in Los Angeles at the time of his writing of this book, and managed for a while to stay "clean," but eventually died of a

²⁷³ Justin Pierce was twenty years old when the film was shot. Larry Clark discovered the British-born American actor while skateboarding in Washington Square Park in New York. After enjoying some success with his career as an actor, Pierce led a troubled life, ending with his death in 2000 when he was found hanging in his room at the Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas. ("Justin Pierce, 25; Starred in "Kids," *New York Times*, July 13, 2000.)

drug overdose in a motel room in 2003.²⁷⁴ The riveting sense of authenticity conveyed by Little's book made it an optimal choice for Clark, who had already achieved a great degree of realism in his previous film, *Kids*. The film takes place in 1971, in the Midwest and in California. Bobbie, a fourteen-year-old Irish boy (played by Vincent Kartheiser, who was 19 at the time), comes from a troubled family. He is a runaway who lives off the proceeds of vending machine robberies. Bobbie and his girlfriend Rosie (Natasha Gregson Wagner) team up with two adult criminal junkies who become their surrogate parent figures. The major thief and drug dealer Mel (played by James Woods) and his heroin-addicted girlfriend Sidney (played by Melanie Griffith) "adopt" these two lost souls. Mel teaches Bobbie how to use a gun as well as how to become a professional thief, and he gives lessons on the rituals of living as junkies. Sidney takes up the warmer role of a motherly figure to the kids, shopping with Rosie, helping Bobbie flee the possibility of being killed by Mel.

This tightly structured film feels more like a Hollywood movie, although it retains the aura of an authentically realistic view of the subculture of junkies of 1970s America such as no other film had portrayed. Compared to the gritty quality of *Kids*, *Another Day in Paradise* offers a luxurious visual tone, perhaps a result of the ample financing provided by a bank. Clark noted that he wanted to make "a film about the lifestyle" of an outlaw.²⁷⁵ Clark's motivation to make this film also came from his recognition of the inaccuracy of Hollywood films about outlaws, to which he pointedly objected.

Working against the Hollywood process of making formulaic movies, Clark's approach to filmmaking instigated battles among the crew, the actors, and himself. Instead of using real street kids, as he did for *Kids*, Clark employed professional actors for *Another Day in Paradise*,

²⁷⁴ Mary Rourke, "Eddie Little, 'Outlaw Writer,'" Obituaries, *Los Angeles Times* (May 24, 2003).

²⁷⁵ Larry Clark, interview by A.G. Basoli, "Larry Clark Snaps Another Shot of 'Paradise,'" *IndiWire*. http://industrycentral.net/director_interviews/LC01.HTM (accessed February 11, 2012)

actors whose stellar performances bring to the screen with apparent realism the language and habits of junkies, while the visuals and the pulsating period music of the 1970s blues and soul songs render the film sufficiently pleasurable to absorb the viewer into a story of crime, violence, and drugs. The film's success lies in its ability to tread a fine line as it merges realistic elements into a fictional plot. Drawing upon his intimate knowledge of outlaw lifestyles, Clark included a drug robbery that leads to disastrous consequences: shooting, injury, a drug overdose, murders, and death.

Another Day's sense of urgency is communicated through unstable, fast-shifting images by Eric Edwards's handheld camera work (for example, in the scene of Bobbie's vending machine robbery) (**fig.2.42**) as well as the vibrant soundtrack that stitches the scenes together. Clark uses the soul music of the '60s and early '70s (for example, Otis Redding and Percy Sledge) and features the blind soul singer Clarence Carter (b.1936) playing at a club. To date, *Another Day in Paradise* is Clark's most Hollywood-like film, yet it radiates more authenticity than any other Hollywood film that treats a similar theme.

For Clark's next film, he moved away from street kids and gangs to portray middle-class suburban adolescents whose problems are no less severe than those seen in the previous two films—and may even be worse. *Bully* (2001) (**fig.2.44**, **fig.2.45**) is based on a factual event that took place near Fort Lauderdale, in Broward County, Florida in 1993. Written by Zachary Long and Roger Pullis, it was adapted from a “true crime” book, *Bully: A True Story of High School Revenge* (1998), by Jim Schutze.

In *Bully*, Marty (played by Brad Renfro) has been a friend of a slightly older boy, Bobby Kent (Nick Stahl), since third grade. Marty is a high school dropout who has been subjected to bullying by Bobby, who verbally abuses him and beats him up occasionally. Marty is a surfer

who works at a sandwich counter with Bobby, and lives with his parents and younger brother. Bobby's father expects him to go to college and is unhappy that he hangs out with his dropout surfer friend. Bobby makes a gay porn video for profit, and encourages Marty to dance at a gay club. Bobby Kent is an "Eddie Haskell"-like character who seems to be liked by adults but hated by his peers.²⁷⁶ Lisa (Rachel Miner), who works at Pizza Hut, falls in love with Marty. Her best friend, Alice (Bijou Phillips) gets involved with Bobby, who sexually abuses Lisa and Alice. Lisa gets the idea that getting rid of Bobby would solve all the problems she and her friends have. Out of neediness and loneliness, Lisa wants Marty all to herself, but she does not see Marty for what he truly is—a center-less, confused, loser who vacillates between sweetness and violence. Lisa and her friends plot the killing like a party plan, hiring a Mafia hit man (Leo Fitzpatrick, who acted in *Kids*, but had since grown up), who purportedly helps the clueless teenage conspirators carry out the murder of Bobby. After a failed first attempt, Bobby is seduced and then stabbed to death by his friends. His body is dumped into an alligator-filled swamp.

Employing skilled teenage actors, *Bully* flows smoothly in a well-acted, well-scripted, and visually seductive style that lacks the improvisational quality of *Kids*. What is striking is that there are parents assuming greater importance in this film than in Clark's previous works. Perhaps significantly, Clark himself plays a minor role as an adult who assumes a moralistic position.²⁷⁷ Yet, the kids' parents are largely ignorant of what has been going on with their adolescent children. These kids are not street kids or gang members as in Clark's earlier films,

²⁷⁶ In the iconic 1950's American television program *Leave it to Beaver*, Eddie Haskell was a disingenuous sycophant who often perpetrated mean-spirited pranks for which he would escape blame by implicating others; in short, he was a weasel.

²⁷⁷ In real life, all seven participants in the murder of Bobby Kent were charged and pled guilty, a story that made big headlines at the time. For Clark, who had been fascinated by stories of teenage crime—as evidenced by his collection of news clippings about juvenile criminals, later included in gallery shows—the story of Bobby Kent was a compelling choice for the subject of a movie.

but rather middle-class, white, suburban kids enjoying leisure time, surfing, going to malls, and driving a Mustang convertible. Inside their rooms and their cars, the teenagers have sex, get stoned, and plot the killing of a friend. As in Clark's earlier films, the young actors in *Bully* are unguardedly exposed. Lying around in each other's arms in bed, engaging in intense sexual scenes, mingling with friends in a cramped room or at the beach, wearing nearly nothing, the actors yield completely to the camera.

Bully's portrayal of hedonistic, amoral, aimless American youths received sharply divided criticisms. Generally, Clark's grasp of the reality of his subjects' lives was praised, and he was even called a "moralist" by some. But other critics found the film troublesome. One critic called Clark "no moralist," and another critic denounced "his solidarity with the empty minds of the characters," calling the film "merely disgusting" and "morally corrupt."²⁷⁸ Critics objected to Clark's giving such a carnal description of the reality of his subjects' world without questioning why they were violent and why they lacked a perception of the world outside their own limited experience. None of the characters in the movie seemed to care about anything beyond their immediate surroundings. Their version of paradise consists of video games and porn, sex and casual drug taking. Even after committing their crime, they seem untouched by reality. A.O. Scott's problem with *Bully* was the director's "refusal to engage the difficulty of the subject and the absence of any genuine curiosity about the inner lives of his characters, however blighted they may be," while another frustrated critic pointed out the film's failure to delve into the same question, "Why?"²⁷⁹ For this reason, Clark did not get the R-rating he had

²⁷⁸ Jamie Malanowski, "Larry Clark, Moralist, In the Florida Suburbs," *New York Times* (Jul 8, 2001, AR12); David Denby, "The Current Cinema: Us and Them," *The New Yorker* (July 30, 2001, 84-85); A.O.Scott, "Deadpan Decadence, With a Sneer of Disgust," *New York Times* (July 13, 2001, E10).

²⁷⁹ A.O. Scott, *New York Times*, E.10; David Denby notes that the film "offends and frustrates our desire to understand" the characters' behaviors (Denby, *The New Yorker*, 85.)

hoped for from the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA). Instead, Clark received a fax from the MPAA stating, “Our advice to America is: Hide your children.”²⁸⁰ The film was eventually released unrated by its producer, Lions Gate.

Clark’s next film, *Ken Park* (2002) (**fig.2.46**), portrays four dysfunctional families living in a California suburb. The plot lines revolve around the activities of teenagers from each of the families. Co-directed with Edward Lachman, with a screenplay supplied by Harmony Korine, the writer for *Kids*, the film is based on stories about teenagers with whom Clark had been acquainted as well as stories reported to him. The film is most daring in its frank nudity and the audacity of its subject matter.²⁸¹ It opens with an introduction to a red-haired skateboarder named Ken Park (Adam Chubbuck). He skateboards to a local skate park where he removes a video camera and a pistol from his backpack. Then, he shoots himself while recording his suicide. Teens crowd around the scene. The film does not explain why Ken committed suicide until its end. The rest of the film focuses on Ken’s circle of friends: Shawn, Claude, Peaches, and Tate, whose problems are no less troubling than Ken’s.

One skateboarding teen, Claude (Stephen Jasso), has a macho, weightlifting, beer-drinking father (Wade Williams) and a cigarette-smoking pregnant mother (Amanda Plummer). The massive father is unemployed, and abuses Claude verbally, physically, and even sexually, when he is drunk. The dysfunctional parents watch the *Jerry Springer Show*, a tabloid TV talk show during which guests crudely display vulgarity and pettiness as they reveal the conflicts of their intimate personal relationships. Clark signals that the lives of the families in *Ken Park* are

²⁸⁰ Stephen Lemons, “Larry Clark: Hide your children! The director of the controversial new film “Bully” and 1995’s “Kids” talks about sex, violence and parenting,” *Salon.com* (Friday, July 20, 2001, 12:00 EDT), http://archive.salon.com/people/conv/2001/07/20/larry_clark/index.html.

²⁸¹ *Ken Park* was unrated and unreleased in the United States, while it was banned in Australia for the apparent immorality depicted in the film.

no better than those of the guests on a lowbrow TV show that revels in situations of adultery, incest, racism, and inflammatory family situations that often lead to violence on the studio set.

Another teenager, Shawn (James Bullard) has oral sex with his girlfriend's mother, Rhonda (Maeve Quinlan), whose need for sexual pleasure does not stop with her daughter's underage boyfriend. Rhonda, who seemingly has a happy marriage, takes the risk of inviting Shawn to her family dinner, where unresolved tensions rise. Another character, Peaches (Tiffany Limos), who lost her mother long ago, lives with her single father (Julio Oscar Mechoso), a practicing Catholic. When he discovers Peaches in bed with her boyfriend, he beats them, and proceeds to dress the daughter in her mother's wedding dress in a bizarre attempt to restore her purity.

The most disturbed social outcast is Tate (James Ransone), who is abusive of his three-legged dog and his loving grandparents (Patricia Place and Harrison Young). We are not told what happened to his parents. Tate downloads gruesome pictures from the Internet, and then writes the names of people he hates. One of the most disturbing scenes in the film is when Tate masturbates, a dressing gown belt tied around his neck, getting aroused by watching a woman tennis player on TV. In a rage over a scrabble game with his grandparents, Tate kills them while they sleep.

The oppressed teenagers in *Ken Park* seek revenge against their parents and the rules of society through incest, masturbation, and murder. They lean on each other for comfort, using sexual contact to try to gain intimacy. *Ken Park* exhibits strategies similar to those seen before in Clark's work, seducing the viewer to enter an uncomfortable zone of complicit acts of sex, masturbation, incest, even murder, and the troubling reality of suburban American teenagers whose problems are intertwined with those of adults. In his portrayal of the adults, Clark divides

them into three groups—first, as is the case with Claude’s father—the adult occupies a zone of power as a parent, but turns out to lack moral fiber and represents nothing more than an outsized adolescent; second, in the case of Rhonda we find an adult who is complicit with the adolescents’ self-involved, emotional neediness, and who seeks her own comfort and gratification in the adolescents’ world; and third, in the case of the grandparents, we find adults who are clueless about adolescent lives, and who love blindly without confronting their troubled realities.

Using both trained adult actors and untrained teenage actors, *Ken Park* fits somewhere between *Kids* and *Bully*. While the film focuses on conjuring authenticity in its dialogue, and so keeping a documentary tone, it also provides voices of storytellers, unlike any found in Clark’s other movies. Narrated in turn by each of the teen characters, the film suggests that the story is told through the varied points of view of its characters. Yet, the film is in reality a visual spectacle of illicit and self-indulgent activities—smoking, skateboarding, having sex, and masturbating—more than it provides psychological insight into the lives of its characters.

Unlike his earlier photographic projects, Clark’s later films are mostly fictional, although they have factual aspects. There is a script; actors are hired; schedules are made; overall, the films are thoroughly planned as collaborative projects. Everyone involved had to come to Clark for direction and approval.²⁸² The troublesome adolescent who was rejected by his own father has risen to become a father figure to his own teenage kids as well as those would-be bad kids who serve as actors in his films. Unlike established artists of his generation, Clark networks in the world of teenagers, and has risen to the status of a cult figure in some teenage communities.

²⁸² “Coming of Age: The Films of Larry Clark,” *Larry Clark* (New York: International Center of Photography, 2005), 12-17.

Clark's relationship to his subjects shifted from a fully participatory one to a directorial one, from being a peer to being an authority figure to a community of adolescents.

Missing from Clark's projects is a "rite of passage," the theme one might expect to find in a book or film about adolescent protagonists. Coming-of-age has frequently been a theme in literature and films. Such works often employ as a protagonist a male teenager who comes to self-realization through expressions of adolescent angst and sexuality and sensitive observation of his surroundings.²⁸³ The reader or viewer knows that in the end the protagonist will find direction in his life; his struggles constitute a transient process en route toward the maturity of adulthood. For instance, the 1994 documentary film *Hoop Dreams* portrays underprivileged urban teenagers in a way that contrasts sharply with Clark's layabouts in *Kids*. Directed by Steve James, the story follows two African-American inner-city high school students, William Gates and Arthur Agee, who aspire to become professional basketball players. Capturing intimate views of their inner city life, the film depicts their struggle against competition for player positions and dire economic conditions. The results of their heartfelt endeavors are a far cry from their early dreams of becoming NBA stars.

Both *Kids* and *Hoop Dreams* examine teenage life, but the protagonists in Clark's work do not allow us much catharsis. They explore their bodies and minds as experimental territory, without fear, as if it were an end in itself to do so. Rather than experiencing a finite period of delinquency followed by assimilation into larger society, they take pride in their unconventionality and resistance to social integration. They are represented in self-inflicted rituals of hedonistic orgies of sex, drugs, and violence. The self-destructiveness of Clark's adolescents suggests the wretchedness of the body. Sex, as Susan Sontag observed, is "not a

²⁸³ Examples include: Herman Hesse's *Demian: The Story of Emil Sinclair's Youth* (1919), Denton Welch's *In Youth is Pleasure* (1943), and J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951).

project (unlike writing a book, making a career, raising a child)”; it “consumes itself each day. There are no promises, no goals, nothing postponed. It is not an accumulation.”²⁸⁴ The kids portrayed in Clark’s oeuvre represent the excess of such consumption.

Drugs offer instant gratification while damaging body and mind, as the users are “encountering nothingness” in anticipation of their own deaths. One of the gangbang photographs in *Tulsa* (**fig.2.30**) shows three naked teenagers getting ready for more drugs and sex. Above them is a poster illustrating a monster, perhaps from a horror movie that these kids enjoyed. Marshall McLuhan interprets such monsters in his book, *The Mechanical Bride*:

For those from whom the sex act is merely the meeting and manipulation of body parts, there often remains a hunger which can be called metaphysical but is not recognized as such, and which seeks satisfaction in physical danger, or sometimes in torture, suicide or murder. Many of the Frankenstein fantasies depend on the horror of a synthetic robot running amok in revenge for its lack of ‘soul’ ... a dim resentment at being deprived full human status?²⁸⁵

With hair suddenly and alarmingly sprouting from parts of their bodies, teenagers can identify with the werewolves of film. The uncertainty provoked by their physical transformation can lead adolescents to explore their bodies’ limits in the here-and-now, intermixing excess with a sense of danger. In horror movies, adolescents’ recognition of death as well as fear and fascination about their maturing bodies are often addressed. Often the most promiscuous teenage characters were the ones to be murdered first, revealing the underlying presence of an adult morality on the part of the filmmakers.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ Susan Sontag, *Reborn: Journals & Notebooks, 1947-1963*, ed. David Rieff, (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2008), 288.

²⁸⁵ Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, Inc., 2001), 100.

²⁸⁶ Pareles, “They’re Rebels ...,” H1/23.

Clark's incessant recording of the bodies of teenagers in actual situations serves as a stage in his quest to portray "nothingness" and a nihilistic existence lived through a constant course of consumption. For example, Tate in *Ken Park* (2002) masturbates while he is strangling himself and watching a female athlete on television. During ejaculation, the actor's penis is zoomed in on and we see the dripping semen in the film. Clark testifies how difficult it was to shoot the scene, and the actor, James Ranson, who played the role of the teen who masturbates and murders his grandfather, is said to have paid "a tremendous emotional price," and to have been devastated psychologically afterward.²⁸⁷ The scene is psychologically injurious to both actor and viewer. Clark's camera documents the event with a sense of emotional detachment, the same coldness he had toward his subjects in previous photobooks. In the presence of Tate's self-inflicted pain (his strangling himself with a belt attached to a door) and pleasure (his sexual orgasm), the camera operator zooms and scans the scene in a voyeuristic way, as a peeping Tom might see it, without emotional engagement with the object at which he is surreptitiously gazing.

Despite the curse of the early success of *Tulsa*, Clark has striven single-mindedly to create a body of work that contributes to our understanding of American teens whose secret lives had been shared previously only among themselves. Clark has provided an open window into certain aspects of their subculture by applying a method of participant observation, training himself to become a native informant of these "clans." Even after he left the community he initially belonged to, Clark, more than any other adult, gained intimate access to subsequent generations of teens through his knowledge of the byways of their culture. He is an authentic

²⁸⁷ Cuir, "Larry Clark: In the Eye of the Storm," 29.

participant observer who paved the way for younger artists such as Nan Goldin, whose work benefited from the critical stir Clark created in the art world.

Chapter Three

Integrated Mode: Nan Goldin

Participant observer techniques contributed to significant developments in post-1960s art photography. Its “insider” orientation, characterized as “a position of engagement, participation, and privileged knowledge,”²⁸⁸ has come to be regarded as an approach that allows greater insights into particular subcultures than may be gleaned from “outsider” positions.

Unlike Robert Frank, Diane Arbus, and Bruce Davidson, who were able to use participant observation techniques to move from one subject to another with versatility, insider photographers remained attached to their initial subjects of interest. Knowingly or unknowingly, these photographers cloistered themselves within their communities, narrowing and deepening their investigations into their respective subcultures’ habits, lifestyles, customs, and emotions. Deeply rooted in the lives of their subjects, insider participant observer photographers did not aim to see what they photographed from an objective perspective. Accordingly, their fully engaged first-person approaches brought with them highly subjective visions. But within this branch of participant observation photography, I argue, there are distinct variations in approach and in results.

The previous chapter examined the development of works by Larry Clark, whose position shifted from that of a full participant to a voyeuristic mode. This change followed from Clark’s unwillingness to find a community of peers despite his advancing age and social status, and his corresponding insistence on photographing and filming problematic aspects of adolescence. In this chapter, I explore what I call an integrated mode of participant observer

²⁸⁸ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “Inside/Out,” *Public Information: Desire, Disaster, Document*, ed. Gary Garrels (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1995), 49. Solomon-Godeau argues that the insider position is not necessarily candid or honest, in her essay “Inside/Out,” *Public Information*, 49-61.

photography as practiced by Nan Goldin, who borrowed some aspects of Larry Clark's approach. Unlike Clark, who obsessively maintained his interest in the subject of adolescence, even to the point of his being considered exploitative and pedophilic, Goldin's subject has always been her own milieu, populated by her own peers, lovers and friends. She said, "These pictures come out of relationships, not observation," rejecting the objective stance of a distanced observer and emphasizing her intimate relationship to her subjects.²⁸⁹

This chapter will examine the issues addressed by Goldin's work: her different understanding of what may constitute a family, the nature of her particular brand of participant observation, and her method of presenting her images. The chapter will pay particular attention to the cultural context from within which Goldin emerged, both her early period in Boston and the downtown punk subculture of New York City during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The ways her work was manifest in a variety of media will be addressed. Her slide show, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* will be studied in depth, as will the nature of snapshot aesthetics as Goldin utilized them. Her portfolios of friends dying of AIDS will be discussed within the larger context of the period. Some current scholarship on Goldin's work as it relates to the conflict between universality and particularity will also be addressed in this chapter.

I. Goldin's Boston Period

Born on September 12, 1953, Goldin grew up outside Washington D.C., in Silver Spring, Maryland. Her father worked in broadcasting and was the chief economist for the Federal Communications Commission before becoming a professor at Boston University. As a teenager, Goldin felt that she did not fit into a traditional educational system or family context. Despite

²⁸⁹ Nan Goldin, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, ed. Marvin Heiferman, Mark Holborn, and Suzanne Fletcher (New York: Aperture Foundation, 1986), 6.

growing up in a seemingly stable middle-class household, at the age of eleven she sustained the emotional trauma of the suicide of her eighteen-year-old sister, Barbara Holly Goldin (1946-1965). Goldin concluded that her sister's self-destruction resulted from the repression of her ripening sexuality. Teenage suicide was a taboo subject at the time, so Goldin's disclosure of the family secret was a rebellious act against the unspoken rules of society.²⁹⁰ Goldin recently revisited the event by documenting her sister's life in the book *Soeurs, Saintes, et Sibylles* (2005), which includes the record of her sister's treatment at Bellefaire, a psychiatric facility in Cleveland, Ohio, family photographs from 1939 to 1965, and present day color photographs of Bellefaire and the site of the suicide in Silver Spring, Maryland. This memoir serves as an example of soul searching conducted through documentary images and narratives of a painful personal history.²⁹¹

Goldin attended the well-regarded Lexington High School, but was expelled in 1968 for abusing drugs. Her rebellious conduct eventually led to her living with foster families, and she was admitted to an alternative school, the Satya Community School in Lincoln, Massachusetts. Goldin met some of the most important friends of her life during her time at Satya. When an MIT graduate student showed up with a supply of Polaroid cameras, Goldin's interest in photography was sparked. She made small black-and-white photographs and Polaroids, and became the school photographer. During this period, between 1970 and 1971, Goldin and her intimate circle indulged in glamorous displays of fashion and style before the camera,

²⁹⁰ Elisabeth Sussman, "In/Of Her Time: Nan Godlin's Photographs," *I'll Be Your Mirror: Nan Goldin* (New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1996), 27.

²⁹¹ Nan Goldin, *Soeurs, Saintes et Sybilles* (Paris: Editions du Regard, 2005).

developing their sense of identity as they transformed from adolescence to adulthood. Their fashion sources were *Vogue*, *Interview*, and the *East Village Eye*.²⁹²

Goldin memorialized this period by photographing her intimate relationships, including one with Margo Pelletier (Marcy) (**fig.3.1**), a relationship not explicitly discussed by Goldin in public.²⁹³ The tightly cropped portrait of Marcy, made in 1970 by the eighteen-year-old Goldin, suggests their close engagement. In this photograph, the twenty-one-year old Marcy's piercing gaze is directed into the camera lens, while Goldin's left hand touches her chin, suggesting Goldin's construction in making an image of intimacy as well as the emotional bond between subject and artist.

Goldin's friendships were often recorded in unpretentious portraits. Some of her friends from this period, especially David Armstrong and Suzanne Fletcher, became long-time subjects. Goldin's nearly lifelong friend Armstrong, first seen in *David at the Lindemann's House, Lexington, Ma., 1970* (**fig. 3.2**), is captured in his domestic setting, his head turned toward the camera. With his feminine look and long hair falling loosely to his shoulders, his androgynous appearance occupies the center of the photograph. A blurry indoor background looms behind this pretty, melancholic figure whose sexuality transcends ordinary boundaries and who later was to introduce Goldin to the community of drag queens.

Along with portraits of her friends, Goldin made self-portraits, sometimes directing her friends to release the shutter, other times using a timer and a tripod. A self-portrait (**fig.3.3**) made in 1970 presents Goldin in profile revealing her bare upper body with her form occupying

²⁹² Sussman, "In/Of Her Time," 27.

²⁹³ The relationship was discussed during my interview with Margo Pelletier on January 26, 2011. According to Pelletier, she was Goldin's first serious girlfriend. The photographs (fig.3.1, fig.3.3., fig.3.5., fig.3.6, fig.3.7, fig.3.8) were provided by Pelletier to the author.

the left half of the frame; the image appears as a casual declaration of a carefree lifestyle and confident sexuality.

Goldin, Armstrong and his boyfriend Tommy, and Suzanne Fletcher moved into an apartment on the slummy side of Boston's Beacon Hill in 1972. These friends became the subjects of her portraits over an extended period, as did Goldin herself. She appears in a photograph taken by Armstrong, *Nan at Myrtle Street, Boston* (1972) (**fig.3.4**). The young Goldin, in three-quarter profile, gazes away from the camera's eye. Adorned in a shell necklace and large round earrings, Goldin evinces a delicate sexuality as her sleeves fall away to reveal the bare skin of her shoulders and décolletage. The tilt of her chin and her sidelong glance counter any conjecture that the sitter is a mere mannequin; rather, she appears as a self-aware woman immersed in thought.

Goldin's deliberate effort to present a fashionable appearance emerged during this period, as she and her friends posed in various outfits before mirrors. In a photograph of Goldin (**fig.3.5**), made when she was eighteen, her dark silhouette and face are obscured by shadow and what appears to be a pair of opera glasses before her face. The image is actually a reflection in a window. The camera, held by Goldin's left arm, is hidden within the dark area of her silhouette, revealing only two bright dots that correspond to the location of her eyes. The resulting portrait of a mysterious woman evidences Goldin's careful construction of her self-image by disguising a staged photograph as if it were natural. These early self-portraits, both candid and posed, made with the aid of friends or with a self-timer and tripod, were explorations in self-image through the versatility of fashion, expression, and personal relationships. Such exercises continued throughout her life and represent a confessional yet integrated mode of photography.

What may have begun as informal, intimate portraits of lovers and friends, and a personal record of memories, became an ongoing practice, as Goldin followed constructs of glamour found in fashion magazines, in popular culture, and in the art world, such as the underground bohemian life promoted by Andy Warhol and his cohort of celebrities. Goldin and her friends, whose sexual identities flouted the norms of mainstream society, soon formed their own community, creating an alternative family for one another. Goldin's photographic practice at once embraced reality, through indexical scenes of her life, and celebrated fiction, by creating fantasies that imitated others' lives.

On a postcard sent to Marcy Pelletier (dated on April 20, 1973) (**fig.3.6**), Goldin wrote that her doctor said she looked like "Donna Jordan (model)." She signed her name with the initials "D. J.", a deliberate indication of identification with the blonde model who starred in Warhol's underground film, *L'Amour* (1973). Although *L'Amour* was not released until May 10th that year, the film was promoted in an interview with one of its actresses in the April issue of *Interview* magazine.²⁹⁴ Goldin's postcard (**fig.3.7**) shows a nineteenth-century studio photograph of two women wearing hats and dresses *à la mode* while each bares a breast. The photograph likely was produced for heterosexual male consumption. In Goldin's case, the postcard reflected her homoerotic relationship with Margo, its recipient.

The postcard announcing Goldin's first solo exhibition (**fig.3.8**), at Project Gallery Inc, in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1973, displays a contact sheet of three strips of 35mm film, each presenting images of Goldin's close friends. Marcy is on the left, then Pat Ryan and Tommy Chesley (Armstrong's lover at the time and the best friend of Marcy), all of whom attended Hartford Art School together, and Bee, a drag queen often featured in Goldin's photographs,

²⁹⁴ An interview with Patti D'Arbanville by Bob Colacello, *Interview Magazine* (April 1973).

while an unknown man is on the right.²⁹⁵ The small venue presented black-and-white photographs of Goldin's friends in their daily lives. The way in which Goldin's subjects were photographed and their images displayed served to suggest an integrated community. Similar to the way in which a family album might serve an oral history function as memories are shared, Goldin's images brought the spectatorial experience to her primary audience, her community of like-minded urban bohemians, art students, and artists. This function was to evolve and expand throughout the course of Goldin's artistic career.

During the early 1970s, Goldin encountered drag queens while frequenting The Other Side, a drag bar in Park Square that held weekly beauty contests.²⁹⁶ *Colette Modeling in the Beauty Parade, Boston, 1972 (fig.3.9)* provides a glimpse into the beauty contests held at this hotspot of Boston's queer culture. Shot and printed in luscious black and white, the focus is on the glamorous figure of Colette draped in a dark shiny dress while holding her contestant number "11." Colette makes a contrast with an older drag queen behind her who plays the comical role of Master of Ceremonies in blond wig and exaggerated false eyelashes. Goldin's slightly tilted, sharply focused image is reminiscent of Winogrand's spontaneous use of a tilted lens and his witty take on his subjects.

Places like The Other Side became havens for gays and lesbians, bisexuals, and

²⁹⁵ Bee was often introduced as a "roommate" of Nan Goldin in her books. Bee eventually received reassignment surgery and married a professional military man. (Interview with Margo Pelletier, New York City, January 26, 2011).

²⁹⁶ The Other Side (76 Broadway, Boston, 1965-1976) was the first Boston nightclub to allow same-sex dancing, after contact dancing had been abandoned. Park Square, where the club resided during its heyday, swarmed with gay men and lesbians. "Park Square was where all the sissies would go," recalls T.J., a patron of the area's bars and baths in the 1950s and 1960s. "In Boston, during the postwar Truman and Eisenhower era, gays congregated regularly, day and night, within a six-blocks radius of Park Square." Boston had a developed gay subculture by the 1930s, and in the 1950s and 1960s, the gay social scene formed a circle encompassing Beacon Hill, Boston Common, and the Public Garden, with hotspots at Scollay Square, Washington Street, and Park Square. For the history of Boston's gay culture, see Jim D'Entremont, "Pilgrims' Progress: Boston's Gay History," *The Guide: Gay Travel, Entertainment, Politics & Sex* (November 2007), <http://www.guidemag.com/magcontent/invokemagcontent.cfm?ID=211D6820-56B6-41CB-8DF1503C48C70284> (accessed April 10, 2010)

transvestites, as well as for those who were excluded from the economic and psychological benefits of middle-class life. Often the head drag queen of a “house” (gay street-gang-like groups named themselves after European haute couture designers) was called “mother” and functioned as the group’s nurturer. These gay “mothers” created substitute families that stood in for nuclear families that had disintegrated or had abandoned their homosexual sons. The house members provided places to stay, advice, and money for those members who were harassed or thrown into the street by their families.²⁹⁷ Although Goldin came from an affluent middle-class family, she was unable to abide its constraints. She found kindred spirits within the gay subculture of Boston, many of whom also were displaced by conformist rules and traditional family values.

Marlene, Colette, and Naomi on the Street, Boston, 1973 (fig.3.10) depicts three transvestite friends of Goldin dressed in stylish outfits. Their seductive poses and lively expressions suggest their ease with the photographer and her camera. Photographing three subjects in one image was a frequent Diane Arbus strategy, often employed to intensify the abnormal rarity of her “freaks.” Compare Goldin’s image, *Marlene, Colette and Naomi* with Arbus’s *Three Puerto Rican Women, N.Y.C., 1963 (fig.3.11)*. Three presumably heterosexual Puerto Rican women in their neighborhood, obviously intruded upon by Arbus, give mistrustful looks toward the lens. Arbus was interested in their type, marked by their beehive hairdos and heavy eyebrows, but her relationship to them seems more alien than Goldin’s relationship to her drag queens. In *Triplets in their bedroom, N.J., 1963 (fig.3.12)*, the uniformity of appearance amongst the female figures is by birth, not choice. Yet, by wearing the same clothes and hair

²⁹⁷ For a discussion of the “houses,” and the Harlem balls, see Jennie Livingston (an independent filmmaker concerned with Queer subcultures), “The Fairer Sex,” in *The Body in Question*, ed. Melissa Harris (New York: Aperture, Fall 1990), 6-13.

bands, the triplets show their (or their parents') choice to emphasize their status as triplets who are, perhaps, able to confuse even their own parents.

Arbus, whose interest was in people who lived at the margins of society, was always driven to find new things and new places. She said, "My favorite thing is to go where I've never been,"²⁹⁸ and "nothing is ever the same as they said it was. It's what I've never seen before that I recognize."²⁹⁹ Determined to find new territory, Arbus built relationships with many of her subjects as a major part of the process of creating her work, even to the degree of becoming a so-called "freak" herself in order to photograph other freaks. Ranging from one type of freak to another, Arbus's images show a wide scope of subjects marginalized from society. Goldin, on the other hand, occupied a different position. Her subjects, who inhabited an edgy subculture of urban society, already had close relationships with her. There was no seeking out of unfamiliar subjects. Relationships formed and photographs followed.

The people who drew Goldin's interest most intensely, to the point of her living with them, became the center of her artistic focus during her Boston years (between 1972 and 1974). They are depicted in a rich range of appearances, from glamorous on-stage performances to unguarded private moments. These photographs are all in black and white, measuring 3^{1/2}" x 5". In straightforward documents that revel in the beauty of fashion, Goldin's friends display sexual identities that range from pre-op transsexuals to completely malleable gender types who live as both male and female. One of her most striking models was Ivy, who never wanted to become a woman but who was deeply invested in the world of glamour and fashion.³⁰⁰ *Ivy wearing a fall,*

²⁹⁸ Diane Arbus, cited in, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph* (Millerton, N.Y.: Aperture, 1972), 1, published in conjunction with a major exhibition of the photographs of Diane Arbus at The Museum of Modern Art, 1972. See Doon Arbus's comments in "Diane Arbus Photographer," *Ms. Magazine* (November 1972).

²⁹⁹ Diane Arbus, cited in "Five Photographs by Diane Arbus," *Artforum*, (May 1971): 64.

³⁰⁰ Interview with Nan Goldin by Paul Tschinkel, *Nan Goldin: In My life*, VHS, Art/New York No.47, A Video Series on Contemporary Art (New York: Inner-Tube Video, 1997).

Boston, 1973 (fig.3.13) shows Ivy standing while directly gazing into Goldin's camera. The tall drag queen, with his smooth, well-toned body, wears a long blond wig that falls on his slender body. In this domestic setting, where a mirror and a picture frame occupy the background, Ivy's presence is commanding and confident. Noteworthy here is the discordance between the gender codes: we see confusion between the impeccably applied eyelashes, nail polish, and elaborate jewelry, and the muscular body. What Goldin called "the third gender" appears throughout her work.³⁰¹ Goldin gave these subjects abundant exposure, and the most openly emotional of her works emerged from images of these individuals, some of whom were her lovers.

Goldin gained the complete trust of her friends, who became her photographic models. She captured their sometimes dreamlike existence with straightforward recording techniques, albeit somewhat influenced by fashion magazine aesthetics. For drag queens, whose grim reality often entailed an inability to hold ordinary jobs, chronic poverty, and a marginalized sexuality that was disliked even by many in the gay community, Goldin's photographs present an expression and a realization of the fantasy life they aspired to, producing a body of work that may be viewed as constructing a public social identity for members of an otherwise traumatized and psychologically thwarted tribe.³⁰²

One of Goldin's breakthrough influences at this time was Henry Horenstein, a photographer and teacher at the New England School of Photography. Horenstein had studied with Minor White, Harry Callahan, and Aaron Siskind. Goldin took a night course with

³⁰¹ Jonathan Weinberg points out this aspect in Goldin's work in his essay, "Fantastic Tales: The Photography of Nan Goldin," *Fantastic Tale: The Photography of Nan Goldin* (University Park, PA: Palmer Museum of Art and The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 23. See also May Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Penguin, 1970).

³⁰² Stephen Tashjian, known as Tabboo!, a member of the circle of artists later known as the Boston School, described one such alternative family: "It was very much like a gay family. Mark [Mark Morrisroe] was like an orphan, and at the time I wasn't speaking to my family and so this was my new adopted family – Mark and Jack [Jack Pierson] and Pat [Pat Hearn] and a few others." Linda Simpson, "A Queenly Interview with Tabboo!," ed. Lia Gangitano, *Boston School*, exh. cat. (Boston: ICA, 1995), 86.

Herenstein, who saw in Goldin's work something akin to the emotional intensity of Diane Arbus and Larry Clark. He showed her Clark's recently published *Tulsa* (1971). She was shocked by this visual documentation of speed freaks into whose dark world the photographer plunged himself so willingly.³⁰³

Horenstein also introduced Goldin to the tradition of realist photographers of mid-century Europe, such as August Sander and Lisette Model. Model, who had been one of Arbus's teachers, took an interest in Goldin's black-and-white snapshots when Goldin attended a workshop in Cambridge in 1973. This personal contact, and its introduction to the realist tradition of black-and-white documentary aesthetics, enabled Goldin to appreciate the psychologically raw, emotionally expressive qualities of Model's work, made between the wars in Central Europe, and later in the United States. She also perceived a kinship in choice of subject matter and method. Goldin discovered in the photography of Model, Arbus, and Clark not merely a profession, but a way of life.³⁰⁴

Between 1973 and 1978, Goldin was enrolled at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. It was during this period that Goldin learned the use of wide-angle lenses and flash attachments. In addition, the lack of darkrooms at the school indirectly encouraged Goldin to make slide pictures. By 1973, Goldin had begun to shoot in color.³⁰⁵ She studied with a group of other artists that included her friends David Armstrong, Mark Morrisroe, Philip-Lorca Di Corcia, Jack Pierson, Tabboo! (Stephen Tashjian), and Shellburne Thurber. The group was later called the "Boston School," and their artistic practice is now recognized as a distinct form of artistic production, especially after its exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston in

³⁰³ Sussman, 30.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

1995.³⁰⁶ Nan Goldin first used the term around 1993 or '94, referring to the loosely knit group of photographers who established a new aesthetic of personal documentary.³⁰⁷ The everyday life of the artists' friends and families became their subjects as they took a diaristic approach to confronting reality and dealing with matters of gender identity (**fig.3.14, fig.3.15.**). While the formative years of the Boston School were the late 1970s and early 1980s, throughout her career Goldin invested energy into promoting the artistic endeavors of her photographer friends (although Tabboo! was a painter), influencing and shaping the history of the Boston School by writing essays about them and including them in her 1989 curatorial project, *Witness: Against Our Vanishing*, a show that explored issues surrounding the AIDS epidemic. This group of artists deserves study beyond the scope of this dissertation.

II. Goldin's Slide Shows and the *No Wave* art scene: New York in the late 1970s and 1980

Goldin's move to New York in 1978 marked a turning point in her career, when she rented a loft on the Bowery. Downtown New York in the late 1970s—the East Village, Bowery, Little Italy, and Tribeca—was in a state of dilapidation. The seedy, low-rent areas attracted hangers-on from the hippie era and the drug-infused culture wars of the 1960s and early '70s, along with delinquent teens, suburban escapists, and starving artists. Allen Ginsberg lived and worked on 12th Street in the East Village, where his apartment building served as an analogue to the Bateau Lavoir of early twentieth-century Paris. Poets, musicians, and artists occupied many of the Lower East Side's rent-stabilized apartments, which were often roach ridden and

³⁰⁶ The exhibition, *Boston School* took place between October 18 and December 31, 1995. Curated by Lia Gangitano and Milena Kalinovska, it also produced an exhibition catalogue. See Lia Gangitano, *Boston School*, exh. cat. (Boston: The Institute of Contemporary Art, 1995).

³⁰⁷ Milena Kalinovska, "Preface and Acknowledgements," *Boston School*, 6. Collier Schorr, artist and critic, used the term "Boston Branch" in her review of Mark Morrisroe's work (*Frieze*, March/April 1994).

sometimes lacking hot water. Richard Hell, Patty Smyth, Rene Ricard, Richard Prince, Luc Sante, and Michael Brownstein lived and worked there. Luc Sante wrote his 1991 book *Low Life* there. The story of New York's Lower East Side from 1840 to 1920, *Low Life* described the personal histories of Manhattan's underclass of criminals, prostitutes, losers, and swindlers. Numerous, mostly harmless, homeless people were just as much a part of the neighborhood as everybody else.³⁰⁸ Other neighborhoods of downtown New York shared the seedy conditions that provided inexpensive space for musical practice and art studios.

Goldin arrived in the heart of this cultural milieu, the thriving downtown New York scene of the late 1970s, where newly arrived and emerging artists were pushing the limits of traditional categories of art. Opposed to the structured gallery system and the traditional media largely found there, the artistic denizens of downtown New York generally favored alternative media, performance art, installation, and the imaginative use of new found "alternative" spaces such as the Kitchen in SoHo, Artists Space, and Franklin Furnace in TriBeCa,³⁰⁹ where collaborative, sometimes spontaneous, open-ended, and improvisational installations and performances emphasized their "ephemeral" nature as they existed only during their actual exhibitions.³¹⁰

One way in which this generation of artists contested traditional systems was by ignoring the categorical divisions between fields of artistic practice. Fluidity developed between the music scene and the visual arts, as well as between literature and filmmaking. Artists wrote poems; writers performed; musicians directed films; film directors wrote music; artists played

³⁰⁸ Edmund Berrigan, "Growing Up Unrented on the Lower East Side," *New York Calling: From Blackout to Bloomberg*, ed. Marshall Berman and Brian Berger (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2007), 231-238.

³⁰⁹ Artists Space was founded in 1972, and was the site of a weeklong festival in 1978; the Kitchen was founded in 1971; Franklin Furnace was founded in 1976 and was closed in 1990 by the NYC Fire Department.

³¹⁰ Jacki Apple, "Introduction," in *Alternatives in Retrospect*, 5, Lynn Gumpert, "Foreword," in *The Downtown Book: The New York Art Scene 1974-1984* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 10.

music. At that moment, the most vital form of art making in downtown was No Wave music, “a highly theatrical, performance-based approach to music, characterized by rough and often dissonant sounds.”³¹¹ Some of the key bands of the No Wave were the Contortions, DNA, Mars, Theoretical Girls, and Teenage Jesus and the Jerks. No Wave musicians (**fig.3.16**) performed at clubs, notably at CBGB, the Mudd Club, and Max’s Kansas City,³¹² creating their own new bands, absorbing untrained artists as long as they had “the right spirit.” Do-it-yourself productions eschewed commercial methods inviting the art-world crowd to enter the musical fray of the post-punk rock music scene. Artists, dancers, and musicians encountered each other often, bringing each other into their groups.³¹³

Blurring the lines between the genres of performance and music, these punk bands combined experimental noises and performances on stages and in alternative spaces (**fig.3.17 & fig.3.18**). Filmmakers and artists showed their work at these clubs. No Wave filmmakers working outside the mainstream film industry, like their counterpart musicians, found screening venues in small clubs showing their films between band performances or as part of film

³¹¹ Matthew Yokobosky, “Not a Part of Any Wave: No Wave Cinema,” in Marvin J. Taylor ed., *The Downtown Book: The New York Art Scene 1974 – 1984* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 119.

³¹² CBGC and OMFUG (CB’s), the infamous New York City Punk club, was founded in 1973 by Hilly Kristal and closed in 2006. Hilly Kristal died in 2007; the Mudd Club was a Tribeca club founded in October of 1978 by Steve Mass, Diego Cortex, and Anya Philips; it closed in 1983. Max’s Kansas City, the legendary club founded in 1965 by Mickey Ruskin as an artist and writer hangout, closed in 1974 but was reopened by Peter Crowley. It closed for good in 1981. Thurston Moore and Byron Coley, “Index: Venues/Places,” *No Wave: Post-Punk. Underground. New York. 1976-1980* (New York: Abrams Image, 2008), 136.

³¹³ For example, painter-sculptor, Nancy Arlen ended up playing paper bags as a stand-in for drums for Mars. Ikue Mori, a Japanese tourist in New York who had no musical training became a drummer with DNA #2 (Tim Wright and Arto Lindsay). Another outsider, Robin Crutchfield, who had moved to New York to get involved in the performance art scene, became smitten with the idea of playing music and became a keyboardist. Artist Christine Hahn jammed with Barbara Ess for Daily Life.

Regarding the post-punk rock scene in New York, see Moore and Coley’s *No Wave: Post-Punk. Underground. New York. 1976-1980*.

programs in nightclubs, lofts, or in alternative spaces.³¹⁴ Using Super 8mm sound film introduced in 1973, which allowed simultaneous audio and video, No Wave filmmakers incorporated elements of documentary, B-movies, and early avant-garde aesthetics.³¹⁵ Often dealing with the subjects of law enforcement/investigation and pro-sexuality feminism, No Wave films escaped censorship by finding new venues in which to exhibit, and eschewing the theater system, similar to the way in which many downtown visual artists of the time eschewed the gallery system. There was also an alternative gallery system founded, often by the artists themselves in the 80s on the Lower East Side. Filmmakers were free to produce works without restriction of language, sexuality, or violence despite the fact that their stories were often too personal and too explicit for mainstream theatrical release. This freedom from censorship liberated the No Wave filmmakers to take “wild aesthetic and narrative risks with gritty, sometimes seamy and seedy homespun stylistic attributes.”³¹⁶

The fluidity of the No Wave post-punk music scene allowed artists, musicians, and writers without training or experience to become involved in filmmaking, learning by trial and error. They learned filmmaking from and worked in films by key filmmakers such as Vivienne Dick, Beth B and Scott B, James Nares, and Jim Jarmusch.³¹⁷ To an extent, Goldin became one of these “cross-over” artists after arriving in New York, quickly becoming involved in working and socializing with filmmakers such as Dick.³¹⁸

³¹⁴ For No Wave Cinema, see Matthew Yokosbosky, “No Wave Cinema, 1978-87: Not a Part of Any Wave: No Wave,” *Captured: A Film/Video History of the Lower East Side*, ed. Clayton Patterson (New York: Steven Stories Press, 2005), 179-184.

³¹⁵ Yokosbosky, “No Wave Cinema, 1978-87,” 179.

³¹⁶ James Crump, *Variety: Photographs by Nan Goldin, From the Film by Bette Gordon*, (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2009), 117.

³¹⁷ Yokosbosky, 180.

³¹⁸ Goldin recounted, “I think I had been living in New York for about a week when I met Vivienne Dick. We spent New Year’s Eve 1978 at the Mudd Club together. We became really fast friends. Pretty early after I met her she

Goldin screened her early Super-8 films for friends, but her camera soon broke. The technical obstacles and artistic complexities of filmmaking proved too great a challenge to Goldin, so she moved entirely into still photography. Goldin observed, “I’ve never been one to have ideas. You can get away with that in photography but filmmaking sort of lends itself to having ideas.”³¹⁹ Nevertheless, Goldin embraced the collaborative ethos of filmmaking, as her lovers, friends, surrogate family, and close allies, including Dick, commingled in her photographic practice.

As a frustrated filmmaker who recognized her own limitations as a storyteller, Goldin began to compile slide images to show in clubs. Her first projections were shown at Frank Zappa’s birthday party at the Mudd Club in 1979, where she featured images of her circle of friends: Cookie Mueller, David Armstrong, Suzanne Fletcher, Greer Lankton, and others. These same friends constituted her audience. Goldin recounted:

Cookie would be there, Sharon, Suzanne, David. People would yell and scream in relation to themselves on the screen. People would be mad at me because these would be some unflattering pictures or they’d be happy because there’d been a lot of beautiful pictures of them.³²⁰

Her early slide projections were silent, but at Rock Lounge the projections were shown along with live performances by the Del-Byzanteens, a group that included musician and painter James Nares, Jim Jarmusch (who became well known as a filmmaker, especially for his 1984 *Stranger than Paradise*), and writer Luc Sante.³²¹ A year later, Goldin started projecting her slides at Rafik’s OP Screening Room, an alternative space where many independent No Wave filmmakers, including Beth B and Scott B, Vivienne Dick, Amos Poe, and Nick Zedd,

showed me *She Got Her Gun All Ready* (1978).” As cited in “My Number One Medium All My Life: Nan Goldin Talking with J. Hoverman,” in 1996, *I’ll Be Your Mirror*, 138.

³¹⁹ Ibid, 137.

³²⁰ Ibid, 140.

³²¹ Sussman, 33; James Crump, 118.

socialized and showed their films.³²² Its founder, Rafik Azzouni, a Palestinian who grew up in Lebanon, arrived in New York in 1961 at nineteen years old. Severing his connection to his family for nearly ten years and changing his name to Rafik, he co-founded the UP Film Group.³²³ Located at 814 Broadway, UP Film Group was a collective of filmmakers who pooled funding and equipment, with a view to making filmmaking more accessible and affordable. UP also hosted film screenings and performances. Although it disbanded in the mid 1970s, the OP, a more inclusive and democratic association, quickly replaced it. There, Goldin and other filmmakers shared their latest work and introduced one another to avant-garde films of the past. Screenings were held by members of Colab (Beth B and Scott B, Vivienne Dick), Amos Poe, Nick Zedd, and included the work of other experimental filmmakers, such as Sara Driver, James Nares, and Jack Smith. As Jarmusch described it, UP and OP were “not dogmatic, and were open to any artists, to the trained or not, abstract or narrative, performance, dance and slide shows. There were no rules and no criteria.”³²⁴

It was at UP and OP that Goldin developed her slideshow practice. Goldin and her boyfriend, Brian Butch, would read a story to accompany the slides. Goldin’s use of narration shows her desire for explication analogous to the oral history often spoken over a family album. Within the screening room, Goldin would tell of her experience of the bohemian culture she found in New York City. Goldin’s early spontaneous performances, during which the artist would hold the projector in one hand and load slides with the other, attracted an audience of

³²² OP Screening Room began as a film collective named the UP Screening Room in 1967. Between 1979 and 1984, it operated as the OP Screening Room, under the direction of Rafik (Rafik Azzouni). Rafik charged \$15 to use the space, and the filmmakers kept evening’s receipts and paid for the advertising. Screenings were held on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Conversation between Rafik and Matthew Yokosbosky, New York, July 7, 1995. (Yokosbosky, 183, note 4).

³²³ Tom Jarmusch, “Scotch and Kodak; After Hours: A Look at Rafic,” *Captured*, 121-130.

³²⁴ Jarmusch, “Scotch and Kodak,” 122.

friends, many of whom were likewise her core subjects. The shared experience of looking at photographs of themselves made by a member of their clan enhanced the integrated quality of collective memory created by Goldin's participant observer images.

The slideshow occupies a space somewhere between the realms of illusion and of immediate reality, given the constant reminders produced by the technology of the medium. Given the beams of light projected onto a wall in a darkened room, a slideshow mimics the effect of a movie, yet the white noise of the projector and its metronome-like sound as each slide gives way to the next prevents the viewer from losing herself and her surroundings in the way an audience might at a movie theater.³²⁵ Such medium-specific aspects of slideshows have been recognized by curators and critics, and by artists who have utilized them since the 1960s, although an exhibition solely dedicated to the medium was not mounted until quite recently, in an era when slides are an outmoded technology and no longer of interest to industry and commerce.³²⁶ Goldin addressed this drawback of slideshows with a nod to her earlier passion for film by adding a taped soundtrack of music and lyrics to her narratives of the volatile lives of her friends, thereby masking the projector's noises.

In the early 1980s, Goldin showed her slides accompanied by music at Tin Pan Alley, a Times Square bar where she worked as a bartender. The bar's owner, Maggie Smith, was supportive of young, politically oriented musicians and artists, booking their events at her bar. Clubs and bars were fertile grounds for Goldin, who not only earned a salary in such venues but also used them as "stages" for her slideshows. Her approach followed the general trend of

³²⁵ For a discussion on the nature of slides, and a history of Contemporary art slideshows, see Robert Storr, "Next Slide, Please . . ." in *Slide Show: Projected Images in Contemporary Art*, ed. Darsie Alexander, Charles Harrison, and Robert Storr (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 51-69.

³²⁶ Kodak ceased to produce its slide projectors in 2004. The Baltimore Museum of Art mounted a show, *Slide Show*, surveying forty years of the history of slide works by artists from the 1960s to 2002, in 27 February–15 May 2005. This show traveled to the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati and The Brooklyn Museum of Art.

downtown artists who were exhibiting outside the gallery system, with a tendency toward performance and installation, while the narrativity of her work opposed the formalist art that had preceded her a decade or more earlier. Goldin's slideshow revived narrative, realism, description, subject matter, and drama, qualities inimical to the formalist credo advocated by the once-powerful critic Clement Greenberg.

It was at the "Times Square Show" in June 1980 that Goldin established the pattern of her slideshow for the coming years. Organized by Collaborative Projects Inc. (CoLab),³²⁷ a loosely organized artist's group on the Lower East Side, the "Times Square Show" occupied a four-story abandoned massage parlor at Seventh Avenue and 42nd Street, a district of Manhattan known for the prominence of the sex industry (**fig.3.19 & fig.3.20**). The space was jammed with videos, graffiti, posters, installations, and ongoing performances. Art by trained artists mingled with graffiti created by East Village artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring. Seeking to reference popular culture as a way of reaching out to the surrounding communities and to address social and political issues in the poor neighborhoods of New York City, the aim of some of these artists was to encourage members of New York's underclass "to speak for themselves."³²⁸ CoLab member Joseph Nechvatal has noted that the group had a pragmatic purpose rather than having banded together based on aesthetic criteria. For example, at that time

³²⁷ CoLab was responsible for a number of important initiatives, which include the magazines *Bomb* and *X Magazine*, the cable TV show *Potato Wolf*, and the New Cinema on St. Marks Place, but its most important contribution was a series of exhibitions held in the early 1980s. "Times Square Show" was the best known of these exhibitions by CoLab. For information on the Artists' Collectives of the 1980s in New York City and East Village scene, see Dan Cameron, "It Takes a Village," *East Village U.S.A.* exh. cat. (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005), 44-64. See also a recent publication, Alan Moore and Marc Miller, ed., *ABC No Rio Dinero: The Story of a Lower East Side Art Gallery*, (New York: ABC No Rio with Collaborative Projects, 1985); Alan W. Moore, "Artists' Collectives: Focus on New York, 1975-2000," *Collectivism After Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, ed. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 193-222.

³²⁸ Tim Rollins, a founding member of Group Material, one of several neighborhood-based collectives at the time, said, "a political art can't really be made *at* working people or *for* the oppressed. A radical art is one that helps organize people who can speak for themselves." Tim Rollins, cited in William Olander, "Material World," *Art in America* 77, no. 1 (January 1989): 124.

it was easier to obtain grants as a not-for-profit organization than as individual artists. Their inclusiveness and democratic means of accomplishing tasks, especially the ephemeral projects mounted at abandoned neighborhood spaces, gave the group a feeling of community and a deep sense of mutual understanding.³²⁹

Goldin's slideshows reflect the spirit of CoLab and the strong sense of community typical of the bohemian lifestyle of New York City. In 1981, Goldin titled her slideshow the *Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (**fig.3.21**), drawn from a song title in Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*.³³⁰ Goldin used an English language recording by Lotte Lenya (among other selections) as the musical accompaniment to the show. The allusion to Brecht and Weill's work, set in the brothels and slums of London, connected to Goldin's milieu of the urban bohemian punk subculture. The underground world of drug addicts, prostitutes, murderers, thieves, and beggars in Brecht and Weill's opera reflected the decadence of Weimar Germany as well as Brecht's radical politics. Also, there is a stylistic connection between Brecht's experimental staging and Goldin's slideshow, as Jonathan Weinberg observed. In Brecht's drama, projected images were used as an innovative device that tended to interrupt the flow and action of traditional theater. Walter Benjamin compared the innovation to a filmstrip, which, as in Goldin's slideshow, creates a series of tableaux of frozen gestures.³³¹ Music, ranging from rock to opera, heightened the emotional effect of watching the slideshow.

By 1981, Goldin had established her slideshow as a distinct work, and by 1996, the year of her retrospective at the Whitney Museum of Art, the show ran forty-five minutes. Goldin was not always present any longer to show her own slides, so an automatic computerized disk ran

³²⁹ Joseph Nechvatal, interview by author, 143 Ludlow Street, New York City, April 26, 2010.

³³⁰ The title of the song is *Ballade von der sexuellen Hörigkeit* (*Ballad of Sexual Dependency*), from the second act.

³³¹ Jonathan Weinberg, "Fantastic Tales, The Photography of Nan Goldin," 15; Walter Benjamin, "What Is Epic Theatre? [Second Version]," in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1992 [1996]), 21.

the show. However, Goldin changed the images and their order for each presentation. In 1986, a small fragment of the slideshow was published as a book also titled *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*. Printed from 35mm slide strips, the book gives a different experience from the slideshow. Flipping through its pages or, for that matter, looking at prints of its images on a museum wall, is a markedly different experience from being absorbed by slides and music in a darkened room. Goldin's slideshow images present themselves in sequence as a film might, although her narrative is loose and open ended. The viewer passively follows the order of the images as a journey. Unlike most other artists, Goldin has presented her project in a variety of types of venues, from a club, to museums and galleries, to a photobook held in the viewer's hands. Each manifestation demands a different kind of attention and evokes a potentially different response from the viewer.

Goldin's slideshows followed a sequential narrative form, with images grouped together thematically, as did the book version of the project. The book begins with images of couples, including Goldin's parents. The next sequence shows women alone in their bedrooms, bathrooms, and living rooms, and in bars and clubs. They gaze at their own reflections in mirrors, bathe, lie in their beds, sometimes sleeping, their expressions ranging from sadness to loneliness to self-contained pleasure. Then come men, alone in cars, on trains, in hotel rooms, in bedrooms and bathrooms, engaged in everyday activities like driving, lying around, smoking, looking out a window, speaking on the phone, sleeping, masturbating, and shaving.

Active scenes such as tattooing and male couples getting high follow. Two men in each picture dance, fight, urinate, and drink. What follows acts as a punch line, as Goldin shows her boyfriend Brian's disturbed face after their break-up, which is followed by an image of herself after being assaulted by Brian, *Nan after being battered, 1984 (fig.3.22)*. This image is followed

by a series of photos of women in pain, bruised, scarred, and scared (such as *Suzanne crying, New York City, 1985* [fig.3.23]). Unlike the typical subject matter of family photographs, Goldin's images in *The Ballad* presented a wide range of emotion that includes, violence, sorrow, and loneliness, alongside joyful moments. After the various signs of the failure of heterosexual relationships—scars, bruises, and battered faces—several images indicating the bonds of female relationships follow. What comes after the images of female relationships, in the book version, are two still shots from Bette Gordon's fictional film, *Variety* (1983), on pages 94 and 95. *Variety* is a story about a female ticket seller at a porn theater ("*Variety*" booth, *New York City, 1983*) (fig.3.24) who was at first a mere voyeur, but who becomes a fully engaged participant, pursuing her sexual fantasies with one of the theater's customers.³³²

A sequence of images including an empty bedroom, a wedding photo of Goldin's friends Cookie and Vittorio, and photos of children suggest the cycle of life. Photographs of events such as a picnic with Goldin's drag queen friends in Boston, a birthday party in NYC (*Twisting at my birthday party, New York City, 1980* [fig.3.25]), and friends gathering for a Monopoly game, function both as personal souvenirs and as documentation of urban behavior of the time.

Goldin shows the viewer patterns of coupling in the next sequence: heterosexual and homosexual relationships taking place in hotel rooms, clubs and bars, beaches, and private homes. *The Ballad* ends with a sequence of alienated couples, an empty bedroom, an elderly couple, and, finally, a graffiti image of embracing skeletons. The individuals depicted in Goldin's photographs testify to a kind of bodily experience that counters social conformity. The bodies in her work are both battlegrounds and playgrounds—of desire, arousal, conflict, and

³³² Goldin's work in films as a photographer has been gaining more interest recently. For *Variety*, see Crump, *Variety*, 2009.

fashion—to be abused, celebrated, and mythologized. Goldin’s images are often corporeal, showing strengths and vulnerabilities in the most tangible personal experiences of her friends.

Throughout *The Ballad*, Goldin transforms private into public stages. Photographs such as *Roommate, New York City, 1980* (**fig.3.26**) and *Käthe in the tub, West Berlin, 1984* (**fig.3.27**) show nude women alone in their private spaces, apparently oblivious to the presence of the photographer. The “roommate” appears to be pleasuring herself on her dilapidated mattress on the floor of an untidy room. *Käthe in the tub, West Berlin, 1984* shows a woman about to step into a shower, while her reflection in a round mirror, along with the bathroom tiles, creates an accidental cubist mosaic. The device of including a mirror is a recurring theme in Goldin’s work. The self-consciousness of Goldin’s subjects looking at themselves in mirrors suggests self-knowledge or self-love, an important theme throughout the erotic landscape of *The Ballad*.

Goldin’s use of images of women looking at themselves in mirrors is particularly noticeable³³³ and these self-reflexive and self-fashioning photographic images of Goldin and her female subjects suggest the subjects’ awareness of themselves, of how they presented themselves. While a woman may be absorbed by her image in a mirror, how can she forget that another person is shooting her from a different angle? Although Goldin was deeply embedded in her group, she was not invisible: these portraits should be seen as, in a sense, mutually constructed by subject and photographer.

The between-ness of the factual/fictional quality of Goldin’s work goes further in photographs such as *Nan and Dickie in the York Motel, New Jersey, 1980* (**fig.3.28**). Goldin captures herself with her lover of the night at a moment of lovemaking. In a slightly tilted

³³³ Sussman discusses the role of the mirror and of women’s gazes in Goldin’s photographs in her essay, p. 35 in “In/Of Her Time: Nan Goldin’s Photographs”; a general discussion of the use of the mirror and of women in art history is found in Carol Armstrong, “Fracturing Femininity: *Manet’s ‘Before the Mirror’*,” *October* 74 (Fall 1995): 74-104.

picture plane, the couple appears between the wall and a large lamp, with a telephone and a bottle of liquor on a table next to them. Careful examination of the image reveals that the scene is a reflected image in a mirror. Goldin is being groped by the man, exposing her half-naked body while taking a photograph at the same time. Although the man seems oblivious to her picture taking, immersed in his desire for her, Goldin gazes into the mirror, presumably checking the image and composing the frame. Her handheld camera is cut out of the mirror deliberately. Goldin once said:

It's as if my hand were a camera. If it were possible, I'd want no mechanism between me and the moment of photographing. The camera is as much a part of my everyday life as talking or eating or sex. The instant of photographing, instead of creating distance, is a moment of clarity and emotional connection for me.³³⁴

Goldin's photographs generally give a sense of being unpremeditated and unpretentious.

However, within the reality of the personal life she experiences during her shoots, there is a certain degree of *made-ness* or deliberateness to the construction of her images.

Not all of Goldin's friends and subjects were happy about being exposed by her camera. Tabboo! (Stephen Tashjina), whose portrait was on the cover of *The Other Side*, once said that Goldin was an "exploitative rapist with a lens!" The father of a little girl in *The Ballad* pictured with her legs spread showing her underwear, an artist himself, said, "I can't say I was particularly happy with that photograph, but whatever."³³⁵ His response shows a concern for his child's privacy, yet also suggests a resigned awareness that the photographs were part of Goldin's art. Goldin regarded these moments of photographing as entailing "curatorial selection," a process of extracting images from embedded reality. Most of her photographs

³³⁴ Goldin, *The Ballad*, 6.

³³⁵ Simpson, "A Queenly Interview with Tabboo!," 89; Walter Robinson, e-mail message to author, March 30, 2010. Tabboo! also added "Oops, I mean exceptional artist with many friends."

display an artistic concern (which is also the result of editing), even when they might have been made spontaneously.

Goldin's photographic practice is quasi-documentary, as a record of reality co-exists with a kind of fiction. In *The Ballad*, there are still photographs Goldin took on the sets of fictional films directed by her friends. *The Ballad* also includes images from Bette Gordon's *Variety* (1983) and *Empty Suitcases* (1980), Vivienne Dick's *Liberty's Booty* (1980), and Lizzie Borden's *Working Girls* (1986). These filmmakers were making experimental films on low budgets, often addressing the lives of downtown urban bohemians in New York City, such as the school teacher who takes a job as a ticket seller at a porn theater, or the portrayal of the lives of working prostitutes. *Cookie at Tin Pan Alley, New York City, 1983 (fig.3.29)* is a film still from *Variety*. A longtime friend of Goldin, Cookie Mueller was a writer and actress. In the image in question, she sits at a Times Square bar where the red-saturated wall and lighting make her appear introspective and moody.

Goldin partook in a fictional narrative of the sexual lives of women by adding her own images from her involvement in *Variety (fig.3.30)*, in which she performed as an actress. In one such photograph, Goldin appears alongside Cookie Muller and other female protagonists in the film. Even the sculpture of a woman on the wall appears to be an animated part of the image. At the time of a debate within feminism between what were tagged "anti-sex" versus "pro-sex" or "anti-censorship" factions, Bette Gordon's *Variety* assumed a pro-sex position.³³⁶ Feminist scholars such as Ellen Willis protested the intolerance and moralism endemic in the anti-pornography groups Women Against Pornography (WAP) and Women Against Violence

³³⁶ Crump, *Variety*, 121.

Against Women (WAVAW).³³⁷ Films like *Variety* stood also as a protest against mainstream feminism's longtime uneasiness with sexual diversity.³³⁸

Gordon's radical sexual politics in *Variety*, in which a female protagonist seeks out sexual pleasure, shares an obvious affinity with the explicit way in which Goldin portrays sex in *The Ballad*. In this project, Goldin achieved an integrated visual mode in which her subjects appear to feel entirely comfortable due to Goldin's integration into the scene. Goldin also reached the position of being an integrated participant observer in a larger sense, as she blurred the boundaries of her personal work with her professional work for a female filmmaker whose vision she shared and whose lifestyle, along with those of others in the film, evinced a communal spirit.

III. Goldin's Dilemma: Universality vs. Particularity

Numerous of Goldin's photographs had the look of family photography, provoking some critics to label her project the "Family of Nan," a parody of the title of the immensely popular photography exhibition *The Family of Man*, curated by Edward Steichen at MoMA in 1955.³³⁹ Goldin's work addressed commonalities endemic in the experience of love, expressed in gestures sometimes loosely akin to those seen in the images included in *The Family of Man*. The underlying approach of Steichen's exhibition was to embrace all humanity as one, celebrating

³³⁷ See Ellen Willis, *No More Nice Girls: Countercultural Essays* (Hanover, N.H.: University of New England [for] Wesleyan University Press, 1992; Willis, "Who Is a Feminist? A Letter to Robin Morgan," *Village Voice* Literary Supplement (December 1982): 16-17; Carole S. Vance, *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (London and Boston: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1984).

³³⁸ For more on the anti-sex/pro-sex debate within feminism and its relationship to feminist film theory, see Jane Gaines, "Feminist Heterosexuality and Its Politically Incorrect Pleasures," *Critical Theory* (Winter 1995): 382-410.

³³⁹ Max Kozloff's review of *The Ballad* had this title, "Family of Nan" in *Art in America* (November 1987): 39-43; reprinted in Max Kozloff, *Lone Visions, Crowded Frames: Essays on Photography* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994). The title also serves as the caption of one section of J. Hoberman's interview with Goldin in the catalogue of Whitney Museum of Art, *I'll be Your Mirror*, 136. Elizabeth Hess also used the title for her article on Goldin in the *Village Voice* (May 18, 1993).

the universality of human beings and the persistence of the cycle of life, regardless of geographic specificity or cultural particularity. The utopian perspective of “universal humanism” and global community through photography assumed by the *Family of Man* brought criticism, notably by Roland Barthes and Hilton Kramer.³⁴⁰ Goldin’s *Ballad*, on the other hand, went beyond the rigidity of hetero-normative gender relationships displayed in the selection of photographs in *The Family of Man*, which Steichen had purported to represent the full range of human experience. What Steichen excluded, Goldin included: images of urban bohemian subculture, gays and lesbians, drag queens, drug users, and all night partiers. Goldin’s “alternative family” amounted to her “extended family.”³⁴¹

One outsider group of subjects that Goldin recorded were transvestites, whom she called the “third gender.” In 1993, Goldin published a book of photographs of her community of transvestites and transsexuals, entitled *The Other Side*,³⁴² which was also the name of the club in Boston where she had seen transvestites participating in weekly beauty contests. To this book, Goldin brought elements of her body of work over the past two decades, vividly conjuring a vision of the human condition.

In a conversation with the author, Goldin said:

³⁴⁰ Roland Barthes, “The Great Family of Man,” originally published in *Les Lettres nouvelles*: reprinted in *Mythologies*, trans. and selected. Annette Lavers (Frogmore [St.Albans]: Paladin Books, 1973), 101-02; Hilton Kramer, “Exhibiting *The Family of Man*: The World’s Most Talked about Photographs,” *Commentary* 20 (October 1955): 366-67.

John Szarkowski presented in detail the positions of Edward Steichen’s *Family of Man* and the opposing views of Barthes and Kramer in his essay, “The Family of Man,” *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century at Home and Abroad* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 12-37.

See also Louis Kaplan, “Photo Globe: The Family of Man and The Global Rhetoric of Photography,” *American Exposures: Photography and Community in the Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 55-80.

³⁴¹ Kozloff, *Lone Visions*, 104.

³⁴² Nan Goldin, *The Other Side* (Manchester and New York: Pub.Comerhouse Publications and Scalo, 1993).

People always ask me why I've photographed marginalized people. But, they were not marginalized. They were everywhere. They were in Berlin, Tokyo, New York, Boston, everywhere.³⁴³

Her statement rejects the marginalization of her subjects, demanding that they be seen on an equal footing with others and that they be included. On the one hand, Goldin's work is a form of self-admission that she and her subjects did not fit into mainstream society. On the other hand, she advocates for inclusion and for the universality of human experience, as did Steichen. In this way, her work evinces a dilemma between particularity and universality.

Louis Kaplan, in his essay "Photography and the Exposure of Community: Reciting Nan Goldin's *Ballad*," interprets this contradiction between the particular and the universal in terms of an idea of Jean-Luc Nancy.³⁴⁴ Comparing the photographic exposure of the "community of lovers" in Goldin's visual diary to Nancy's concept of "Inoperative Community,"³⁴⁵ Kaplan asserts that there are gaps and difficulties endemic in the romantic illusion of fused identity, observing that the walls between the couples seen in Goldin's photographs persist despite her determination to use her insider position to break through them.³⁴⁶ Kaplan goes on: "Such a practice poses and exposes the space of liminality between the inside and the outside."³⁴⁷ According to his reading, almost none of Goldin's work reaches the state of "operative communication" due to the impossibility of achieving a real unity of identity. In Kaplan's

³⁴³ Conversation between author and Nan Goldin, at Daneyal Mahmood Gallery (511 West 25th St, New York City), May 14, 2009.

³⁴⁴ Louis Kaplan, "Photography and the Exposure of Community: Reciting Nan Goldin's *Ballad*," *American Exposures: Photography and Community in the Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 81-106.

³⁴⁵ The two main essays by Jean-Luc Nancy Kaplan cites in understanding Goldin's work are "The Inoperative Community" and "Shattered Love" in *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 1-42 and 82-109.

³⁴⁶ Kaplan, 82.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

account, Goldin's photographs demonstrate the divide between lovers who strive for a fused identity.

Kaplan also resists Goldin's claims of universality. Referencing a 1986 interview with Goldin, he argues, "Even if the slideshow involves some people who keep nocturnal hours, drink heavily, or do drugs, the issues are universal. How do the margin and the extreme represent us all when people of such subcultural lifestyles are defined as those who have been expressly excluded by the norm in and of itself?"³⁴⁸ He resents Goldin's speaking as if she were presenting images from the point of view of the *Family of Man*. The eventual goal of his essay is to show that it is impossible for her world of outcasts to stand for the rest of us. As a key example, his argument goes on to deal with photographs of AIDS victims by Goldin (discussed in a later section of this chapter).

Nancy's central axiom is that "being is always already being-with." Going beyond the idea of a society of unique individuals, his concept of "singularly plural" beings [*T*'s] surpasses the dialectic of particularity (an Individual) and of universality (All). As Kaplan explained, "for Nancy, there is never any overreaching for a false universality, because every attempt at inclusion necessitates a move toward exclusion. Conversely, there can be no particularist reduction to a unitary subject that is somehow self-contained and self-actualized."³⁴⁹

In the end, despite Goldin's interest in bringing all to one, each individual is distinct from any larger community. Goldin has set her own trap by offering contradictory statements, and her utterances demand examination beyond their face value.

³⁴⁸ Goldin quoted in Mark Holborn, "Nan Goldin's Ballad of Sexual Dependency," *Aperture* 103 (Summer 1986): 43; Kaplan, 93.

³⁴⁹ Kaplan, 96.

IV. Goldin: Snapshot Photographer? Ubiquity vs. Originality

Throughout her career, Goldin's photographs reveal such aesthetic devices as haphazard balance, off-centeredness, and amputated edges, usually considered formal properties of snapshot aesthetics as practiced in fine art photography, which are derived from the vernacular of snapshot photography as practiced by the amateur public. Among amateurs, such flaws are often accidental mechanical errors caused by an inaccurate viewfinder or by a photographer's subjects engaging in exciting acts that distracted the photographer to act in haste.³⁵⁰

The definition of snapshot photography has been scrutinized by historians and pondered by photographers themselves. While a full discussion of the genre would require more space than this dissertation can accommodate, the most recent consensus on the definition of the term is characterized by Catherine Zuromskis's simple description of "an amateur form of image-making, requiring little or no photographic skill on the part of the photographer."³⁵¹ Zuromskis further notes that the snapshot is characterized by "its intimate social function and its simple and straightforward visual style."³⁵²

The quintessential aspect of the snapshot, according to the photographer and influential teacher Lisette Model, is its "innocence," as these images are typically made by ordinary people with only the most basic skill of knowing how to press the shutter release button of a camera. Professional photographers, Model asserts, cannot achieve such innocence, and much of the power of snapshots is derived from "their centering on basic everyday experience."³⁵³ Since snapshots have no goal beyond sharing stories and memories among family and friends, the

³⁵⁰ Tod Papageorge, *The Snapshot*, ed. Jonathan Green (New York: Aperture, 1974), 25.

³⁵¹ Catherine Zuromskis, "On Snapshot Photography: Rethinking Photographic Power in Public and Private Spheres," *Photography: Theoretical Snapshots*, ed. J.J. Long, Andrea Noble, and Edward Welch (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 53.

³⁵² *Ibid.*

³⁵³ Lisette Model, *The Snapshot*, 6.

experience of the snapshot has historically been that of the “family album,” where vernacular photography evolved through the hands and eyes of amateurs ever since Kodak made photography accessible to the general public in 1888.³⁵⁴ The widespread culture surrounding the Kodak camera encouraged women to become the documentarians of family events, associating pictures with memory and loss, while promoting middle-class values and sentiments. Kodak’s ad campaigns suggested that photography was to be regarded as an essential part of everyday life.³⁵⁵ In the snapshot’s economy of aesthetics, as Langford points out, “artlessness equals candor equals truth.”³⁵⁶ Huddled over photographs of family picnics, babies and grandparents, graduation ceremonies and weddings, family members and friends recount stories that aid remembrance of shared moments, fostering the communal narrative of their lives.

Goldin, who has often been called a snapshot photographer, accepts the label, saying:

For me, that’s fine, because snapshot is the only form of photography that is completely inspired by love. It comes from desire to remember people, to remember shared events, to record history, to keep the personal alive. They don’t have any theoretical, intellectual premise like art photography. So that way I am proud to be considered to be a snapshot photographer.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴ On the subject of “family photography” and the “family album,” see the following references: Julia Hirsch, *Family Photographs: Content, Meaning, and Effect* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); Richard Chalfen, *Snapshot Versions of Life: Explorations of Home Made Photography* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987); Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Marianne Hirsch, ed., *The Familial Gaze* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999); Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 1995); Martha Langford, *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001).

This dissertation developed initially from my Independent Study on family photography. From my studies on photographs by Larry Sultan, Tina Barney, and Richard Billingham, photographers whose main subjects were their own family members, I expanded the topic to alternative groups with which photographers closely associated. I was particularly interested in each photographer’s representation of these cultures of excess and decadence.

³⁵⁵ Geoffrey Batchen, “Snapshots: Art History and Ethnographic Turn,” *Photographies* 1:2 (London: Routledge, 2008): 130. For the history of Kodak, see Nancy Martha West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000)

³⁵⁶ Langford, *Suspended Conversations*, 31.

³⁵⁷ Interview with Nan Goldin by Paul Tschinkel, *Nan Goldin in My life*, VHS, ART/new york, A Video Series on Contemporary Art (New York: Inner-Tube Video, 1997).

Goldin's recognition of photography as something common and ordinary fits into the larger context of the shift in the historiography of photography, i.e., the transformation of scholarship from its focus on avant-garde practices to the history of vernacular practices (although this dissertation is a study of artists who adopted vernacular practices). Geoffrey Batchen has noted a change in the development of positions taken by interdisciplinary scholars, who assume that "photography is predominantly a vernacular practice and has always been a global experience."³⁵⁸ Batchen acknowledges that snapshot photographs are "mostly banal, repetitive in pictorial form, and conformist in social aspiration." He asserts that the medium's most abiding visual qualities are actually "boredom and ubiquity," and that "snapshots are odes to conformist individualism."³⁵⁹ What he means by this contradictory sounding phrase is that everyone wants to look like himself or herself while also wanting to look like everyone else. In their rather ordinary narcissism, the subjects of snapshots want to be considered unique, yet also to follow a culturally conformist look shaped by the influence of the many pictures they have seen as well as by their lack of skills, both technical and visual. That is why snapshots by amateur photographers tend to look alike, or to render endless variations on similar poses and compositions.

While Goldin's photographs take on the general appearance of snapshots, inasmuch as they represent a simple record of everyday life, they escape Batchen's characterization of "boredom and ubiquity." Her work has fascinated curators, dealers, fellow artists, younger generations of artists, and even fashion and commercial photographers. Her snapshot-like

³⁵⁸ Batchen, "Snapshots," 126.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 132 and 133. Batchen notes that the majority of museum exhibitions on snapshot photography have sampled unusual shots that stand out from the boring photographs. In other words, the exhibitions construct a form of snapshot "art" photography, which follows art history models, rather than affording an accurate representation of snapshot photography.

photography is too “original” to be seen as vernacular despite its being disguised in the innocent veneer of snapshot photography. The assumption that her snapshot aesthetic is unpremeditated and unpretentious, even naïve, is refuted by its unusual formal qualities. The dichotomy of “ubiquity versus originality” relates to the issue of “universality versus particularity” discussed in the previous section. Goldin identifies herself as a snapshot photographer (accepting its vernacular “ubiquity”), while claiming the ability of a selective eye, as if “curating” the scenes while making them (and thus fitting the notion of “originality”). As such, her position correlates with her clashing wish to reveal the universality of her subculture while nonetheless emphasizing the particularity of its specific groups, such as the “third gender” people in her world—that is, within her alternative family.

In Goldin’s *David and Bruce at home, NYC, 1979* (**fig.3.31**) (published in the exhibition catalog, *I’ll Be Your Mirror*), two male friends (one of them the artist’s long time friend David Armstrong) look affectionately at the photographer, giving her shy smiles. This banal subject of everyday life (two people at home) is perhaps among the most genuinely candid photographs by Goldin, qualifying it as both typical snapshot photography and as aesthetic snapshot photography. The two figures are placed slightly off-center without particularly noticeable features in the background other than the hint that we are in someone’s personal interior space. While the subjects are looking at the camera, the proximity of the two men signals their own male-to-male bond (presumably as lovers, or at least good friends). There is the sense that they are un-posed. A fleeting moment of spontaneity is evident in the over-exposing flash and the abrupt framing of the image. Goldin is aware of the essential nature of her work—its apparent innocence, although her non-amateur status excludes her from that descriptor. The gentle, caring

emotional tone of the two men is not out of the ordinary.³⁶⁰ What makes this banal image of Goldin's interesting to look at? The easy answer might be, its play of colors. Here, different values of green worn by Bruce and David resonate with the painted greenish-white doorframe behind Bruce, partly due to Goldin's flash. The green areas are balanced by the darker space behind them, which signals their private life, in which we are forbidden to participate in this particular photograph. The greenish-white doorframe divides their space and separates it from the viewer's space; David and Bruce straddle the inside and the outside. In this photograph, Goldin respects such a boundary for her subjects and for us, while in many other cases she ignores such boundaries.

Choice of colors became a significant factor in Goldin's photography once she started making color works. In addition, Goldin's images frequently include clashing patterns among interior objects, wallpapers, and fabrics. Goldin's photos are dominated by saturated colors. With the use of a flash, artificial light in indoor settings tends to give a rich, saturated palette. Even when she is shooting outdoors, the effects of artificial light seem to carry over. At first glance, one of Goldin's early color works, *Robin and Kenny at Boston, 1977* (**fig.3.32**), displays an abrupt composition in which a woman in profile in the foreground occupies half the space while a man behind her is dwarfed in plunging recess. The saturated pink of the club adds a vibrant tone to the dramatic frame. While this is a composition of a banal scene in a club in Boston, the placement of color blocks or planes (the orange for the foreground woman, the pink block of a partition wall, the mass of a black cushion or belongings) suggests a studied exercise in color composition featuring tones found in the works of previous generations of

³⁶⁰ For studies on the photographic practice of representing affectionate pairs of men, indicating male friendship or same sex love, see David Deitcher, *Dear Friends: American Photographs of Men Together, 1840-1918* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001). Although this reference deals only with nineteenth-century American photographs, it provides evidence of a tradition of photographs of men together, in many instances with suggestively affectionate physical contact between the men, from holding hands to role-playing with one of the men dressed as a woman.

Expressionists. An analysis of color alone tends to place Goldin's photographs outside the "ubiquity and boredom" of snapshot photography.

Another image, *Vivienne in the Green Dress, NYC, 1980* (**fig.3.33**), features the No Wave filmmaker Vivienne Dick. Here, in a vertical frame, wearing a green dress, Vivienne stands against an intensely green wall near a window. Her shadow indicates Goldin's use of a flash. What appears to be a simple snapshot reveals on closer examination to be a careful arrangement. While Vivienne occupies the left half of the image in a play of green, the other half of the photograph reveals a white window frame where dry orange plants and a blue radio accentuate the intense color scheme.

The rich colors of her photographs, according to Goldin, constitute an "emotional palette."³⁶¹ She consistently uses intense hues of orange, green, red, purple, and blue to accentuate the pulsating emotion in each image. Even scenes of squalor can appear to be glamorous through Goldin's lens. The hues found in her works are not always in correct balance, however, as they are often overexposed, and the focus may be off, causing blurry effects.

Seeing such flaws as may appear in an amateur's photograph, viewers may sense the work to be emotionally authentic, and the informal quality of Goldin's work has rendered it more innocent looking than that of most other professional photographers. These related qualities of innocence and authenticity might be a consequence of the process of her direct interaction with friends and lovers. And while Goldin's work does not convey that it was set up or is in any other way conventionally professional in its production, neither does it appear to be mere photo documentation.

³⁶¹ Interview with Nan Goldin by Paul Tschinkel.

The end result that viewers of Goldin's work are allowed to consider is also the result of her editing process, which has often been a collaboration with others. Goldin has not taken full charge of editing most of her publications nor her later slideshows. For instance, Marvin Heiferman, Mark Holborn, and Suzanne Fletcher were the editors of the book, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1996). Her trusted friends were often brought into the process of editing books. One of her recent major publications, *The Devil's Playground* (2003), was an enormous project that involved a number of editors, including John Jenkinson, Walter Keller of Scalo, Catherine Lampert, et cetera.³⁶² Her most recent slide work, *Scopophilia* (2010), a project commissioned by the Louvre Museum in Paris, was also edited by other people selecting some four hundred photographs from Goldin's enormous personal archive of her own work to couple with the new images of art works at the Louvre that Goldin shot during 2010.³⁶³ These images were then grouped thematically in a slideshow that followed the general structure and narrative technique of her earlier *Ballad* slideshows. Goldin, who believes that she is too close to her work to do the editing herself, has long asked her dealers, curators, and close friends to edit in collaboration with her in a process that begins with personal immersion but ends up concerned with overall narratives and formal issues, a very different moment conceptually and practically from that of shooting the images.

V. From Self-Portraitist to AIDS Witness

The turning point in Goldin's interest in color photography began around the time she admitted herself to a hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts in 1988 to detoxify from drug abuse.

³⁶² Nan Goldin, *The Devil's Playground* (New York: Phaidon, 2003), 504.

³⁶³ In New York, the twenty-five minute slide installation *Scopophilia* was first presented to an audience during her public conversation with Robert Storr at the 92nd Street Y on January 13, 2011. Matthew Marks Gallery presented it during Goldin's solo show, October 29 – December 23, 2011.

Cameras were not permitted on the wards, but along the road to recovery and sobriety, she was allowed to pick up the camera again. She began to make self-portraits, mostly in natural light, such as *Self-portrait with milagro, The Lodge, Belmont, MA, 1988* [fig.3.34]. The somewhat out-of-focus image of herself, perhaps due to the close distance between the camera and herself, is contrasted by the clear focus on a small cross hanging just above the bed on which she sits. The focused cross as opposed to the blurry Goldin suggests a troubled self, striving for aesthetic clarity amidst an emotional fog.³⁶⁴

When Goldin returned to New York City, she found that her cohort had been hit especially hard by the AIDS epidemic. Goldin, who had often spoken of memory as a function of photography, said in response to the AIDS epidemic:

I'd always believed that if I photographed anything or anyone enough I would never lose them. With the death of seven or eight of my closest friends and dozens and dozens of my acquaintances, I realize that there is so much the photograph doesn't preserve. It doesn't replace the person and it doesn't really stave off mortality like I thought it did. It doesn't preserve a life.³⁶⁵

From this point on, Goldin's work shows the devastating aftermath of an era of urban bohemian decadence, and a keen sense of loss permeates her work. She became a chronicler of and witness to the deaths of many friends who suffered the curses of AIDS or drug overdoses. One remarkable series is her record of Cookie Mueller, the star of *Variety*, exhibiting a wide emotional range from the liveliest of moments to the weakest points of illness. *Cookie and Millie in the Girls' room at the Mudd Club, 1979* (fig.3.35) presents two of Goldin's friends urinating in the lavatory of the famed punk rock club during its heyday. The arrangement of the

³⁶⁴ The conflicted nature of the artist has been observed by several critics. Peter Schjeldahl, for one, characterized her as two people, one "a needy sentimentalist" and the other "an adamant aesthetic," in Schjeldahl, "A Fine Rawness: Nan Goldin's Heartbreaking Beauties," *The New Yorker* (November 16, 1998), 110.

³⁶⁵ Nan Goldin, interview by Stephen Westfall, *BOMB magazine* 37 (Fall 1991). <http://bombsite.com/issues/37/articles/1476> (accessed February 13, 2012).

bathroom denies individual privacy by having no divider between the toilets. Cookie Mueller, in her red party club attire, sits next to Millie, who is in a more coy position. Neither one seems to mind exposing herself in this private moment. In some cultures, this is what young girls do—go to the toilet together, urinate together, as a bonding experience of youth. But Goldin brings out a quality of liveliness to the experience through the paired red colors worn by Cookie and Millie, vibrant against the drab backdrop of the tiled public bathroom.

Sharon with Cookie on the bed, Provincetown, September, 1989 (fig.3.36) portrays the pain of illness as the once lively Cookie lies on her bed as her girlfriend sits nearby with evident concern on her face. Even at such tragic moments, Goldin is drawn to colors and designs. Despite the photograph's dark tone, the purple floral patterns on the wall echo the motif of Sharon's purple tee shirt.

Goldin's portrayal of friends suffering from AIDS helped raise awareness of the epidemic throughout the art world. Her diaristic approach brought viewers closer to those who suffered from the illness. When Goldin emerged from rehabilitation, one of her first endeavors was to address the impact of AIDS on her community by curating the exhibition *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing (fig.3.37, fig.3.38)*, November 16, 1989 to January 6, 1990 at Artists' Space in New York City. Among the twenty-three artists participating in the show were David Wojnarowicz (1954-1992), David Armstrong, Kiki Smith, Mark Morrisroe (1959-1989), Peter Hujar (1934-1987), and Philip-Lorca DiCorcia.³⁶⁶ Less well-known names, such as Siobhan Liddel, Greer Lankton, Vittorio Scarpati, and Margo Pelletier, all of whom had intimate relationships with Goldin, were familiar faces from Goldin's works. These artists had lost friends to AIDS, and some of them were HIV-positive themselves. The images were presented

³⁶⁶ Nan Goldin, *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing*, exh. cat. (New York: Artists' Space, 1990).

in a straightforward manner, without theatricality. The exhibition became the basis of a national controversy when John Frohnmayer, chairman of the National Endowment for the Art from 1989 to 1992, attempted to stop the publication of the exhibition catalogue, which had been supported by NEA grants.³⁶⁷

In the same vein as *Witnesses*, Goldin helped organize *The Electric Blanket*, a public art slideshow that paid tribute to the lives of people touched by HIV and AIDS.³⁶⁸ Goldin's efforts to raise awareness of the AIDS epidemic emerged amidst the cultural climate that also produced ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), the advocacy group that sought legislation, medical research, and treatment policies to assist people with AIDS.³⁶⁹ In December 1989, during the run of *Witnesses*, ACT UP organized a protest of 4,500 demonstrators at St. Patrick's Cathedral directed toward the Roman Catholic Archdiocese's stance on AIDS education and condom distribution, as well as the Church's opposition to abortion.³⁷⁰ ACT UP's Youth Brigade began distributing condoms and safe sex/clean needle pamphlets outside New York City schools. They also demonstrated at City Hall, following which Mayor Ed Koch announced a new housing policy for people with AIDS. The effectiveness of the movement may be seen in an action by Anthony Fauci, director of the AIDS program at the National Institutes of Health, announcing the concept of a "parallel track," which would make experimental AIDS drugs

³⁶⁷ Sussman, 38; Linda Yablonskaya, "Nan Goldin Curates Life," *Outweek* (October 3, 1990), 52. Frohnmayer reinstated the NEA funding a few days after revoking it.

³⁶⁸ *Electric Blanket* was a four-hour slide show accompanying live music projected over the entry of The Cooper Union at 7th street and Third Avenue. The projection included images of people who died of AIDS, as well as depictions of care giving and of political protests related to the AIDS crisis. Nan Goldin, along with photographer Allen Frame and artist Paul H-O, assisted with the organization and editing of the slide show. The project was sponsored by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, Cooper Union, and Creative Time. (accessed November 1, 2011, <http://www.creativetime.org/programs/archive/1990/ElectricBlanket/ElectricBlanket.htm>)

³⁶⁹ ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) was formed in March 1987 at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center in New York.

³⁷⁰ ACT UP. 10 Year Anniversary of "Stop the Church", <http://www.actupny.org/YELL/stopchurch99.html> (accessed November 1, 2011)

available to patients outside of formal clinical trials, and in Burroughs Wellcome lowering by twenty per cent the price of the first effective AIDS treatment drug, AZT.³⁷¹

Amidst the grass roots political response to the AIDS epidemic, Goldin's portrayals of her friends dying of AIDS (**fig.3.39**, **fig.3.40**, **fig.3.41**) humanized and personalized the disease's victims. Her chronicles documenting the progression of the illness convey with powerful impact the rapid deterioration endured by her dear friends. A set of photographs of Alf Bold, one of Goldin's closest friends and an early organizer of the Berlin Film Festival (**fig.3.39**), published on pages 364 and 365 of *I'll Be Your Mirror*, presents several stages of Bold's illness while a patient in a Berlin hospital (Goldin moved to Berlin in 1991 to help take care of him). In these powerful images, we see Bold progress from a relatively healthy-looking but worried man to a starkly emaciated figure at the end stage of his life.

In another series of photographs dealing with the personal dramas produced by AIDS, Gilles Dessain (Goldin's Paris photo dealer) and his bodybuilder partner, Gotscho, represent strikingly contrasting physical conditions (**fig.3.40**, **fig.3.41**), one healthy, the other deteriorating over time. *Gilles and Gotscho at home, Paris, 1992* (**fig.3.40**) documented the men in intimate proximity, both looking directly into Goldin's lens. Gilles, already infected with the disease, is closely linked to Gotscho, whose arm is crossed with his partner's. In another photograph, *Gotscho kissing Gilles, Paris, 1993* (**fig.3.41**), Gotscho gives a farewell kiss to Gilles, whose body has deteriorated to an even worse condition, a sickly skeleton draped with skin. The green-hued fluorescent lighting of the hospital room suggests the imminent death. The viewer is brought into this private moment usually reserved for close family members, but Goldin's

³⁷¹ ACT UP New York Records 1969, 1982-1997, n.d. Mss. Col 10. (accessed November 1, 2011 http://www.nypl.org/sites/default/files/archivalcollections/pdf/actupny_0.pdf)

frankness does not allow the viewer to turn away. The semi-voyeuristic result of her close access to her subjects comes at the expense of her dying subject's privacy and dignity.

Goldin's curatorial work, *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing*, is regarded as activism on behalf of AIDS victims as much as an album of the artist's friends dying of AIDS. Cookie Muller, Alf Bold, and Gilles Dessain function as *memento mori* (reminders of death), powerful reminders of human mortality, and more specifically, of the decimation of the gay community.

Goldin said:

I always thought that if I photographed anyone or anything enough, I would never lose the person, I would never lose the memory, I would never lose the place. But the pictures show me how much I have lost.³⁷²

A conspicuous sense of loss pervades Goldin's circle. Louis Kaplan observed in his essay, "Photography and the Exposure of Community: Reciting Nan Goldin's *Ballad*," that the causes of this loss (drug abuse and AIDS) emphasize the outsider nature of the group. Borrowing philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's statement, Kaplan relates the loss of the community to reinforcement of the community. "What this community has 'lost'—the immanence and intimacy of a communion—is lost only in the sense that such a 'loss' is constitutive of 'community' itself."³⁷³ Kaplan describes Goldin's work as "community-exposed photography," in light of Nancy's idea that "it is through death that the community reveals itself and constitutes itself."³⁷⁴ Here, the death is "the death of others" and Nancy's concept of the "others" consists of the plural of the singular *I's*.³⁷⁵

³⁷² Goldin, *Ballad*, 145.

³⁷³ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 12.

³⁷⁴ Kaplan, 103-4.

³⁷⁵ Kaplan, 104.

Goldin's images of AIDS victims have been criticized for equating AIDS with death, and Goldin's photographs of AIDS victims emphasize the outcome of the epidemic, in its earlier stages especially, by juxtaposing images of her once-lively friends with those of their disease-ravaged bodies.³⁷⁶ While Kaplan's reading of Goldin's AIDS-victim images may be useful to the discourse about her community, this positioning makes the victims' illness *their* problem, not *our* problem, perpetuating the once-predominant view held by the heterosexual mainstream establishment, which would too often maintain a safe distance from the troubling condition of a particular community. The result may be to reduce the viewing of these images to nothing more than an ontological exercise.

Goldin's would-be "speaking-for-themselves" projects began as communal experiences. One might imagine her first exhibition at an alternative gallery space in Cambridge, where the audience was not so different from the crowd that flocked to a party at Goldin's home. Her early slideshows at the Mudd Club or Tin Pan Alley were accompanied by a narration spoken by the artist in the way that family members might narrate a family album. Goldin's audience would have shared the collective experience through her "show-and-tell." Over time, a soundtrack replaced these live oral narratives. Then the presence of the artist was removed. The show moved from clubs to galleries, to museums. From an ephemeral projection onto a wall, the images progressed to large high-quality prints, and to a portable book that may be viewed anywhere, from one's living room to a library. Lost in this progression is the mutually shared experience of urban bohemian punk culture represented by the very subjects of Goldin's work.

³⁷⁶ For references on the representation of AIDS victims, see Thomas Avena, *Life Sentences: Writers, Artists, and AIDS* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1994); Nicholas and Bebe Nixon, *People with AIDS* (Boston: D.R. Godine, 1991); Simon Watney, "Photography and AIDS," *Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, ed. Carol Squiers (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990), 173-92; Douglas Crimp, *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002); Avital Ronell, *Finitude's Score: Essays for the End of the Millennium* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); Alexander Garcia Düttmann, *At Odds with AIDS: Thinking and Talking about a Virus* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

A group of people viewing themselves in their own domain is a participant observation experience in the deepest sense, but once the work leaves its native environment, it is bound to appear to outsiders as a social study of marginalized people, regardless of Goldin's resistance to labeling her subjects as such. Due to the wide circulation of her images and their commercial success, Goldin's once-marginalized community attained recognizability, and even a kind of celebrity, albeit without any of the benefits of such status.

The traditional subjects of an ordinary family album are replaced in Goldin's project by an alternative family consisting of friends and lovers—heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and transsexual—whose activities take place not only in domestic environments, but also on sidewalks and beaches, in clubs and bars, and in hotel rooms.

In the way that Larry Clark's subjects gave themselves to his camera without evident reservation or doubt, Goldin's sitters generally appear to be comfortable sharing their private activities with her lens. Goldin's active participatory role within her extended family of friends gave her access to the private conduct of her subjects. In nearly every situation, she joined the activity, allowing her camera the position of a privileged insider. But while Clark and Goldin both photograph their own tribes, Clark fixated on the same adolescent subject matter despite his aging and other changes in his life circumstances, which eventually necessitated that he assume a voyeuristic position. Goldin, on the other hand, has retained her circle of friends and subjects for more than twenty-five years, growing older with them. In this regard, Goldin assumes a position of integration with her subjects commensurate with the passage of time and her own aging.

Chapter Four

Dissociated Mode: Richard Billingham

I. Toward Subjective Documentary Photography in Great Britain

Prior to the advent of participant observer photography in Great Britain in the mid-1990s—as represented by Richard Billingham, the third case study in this dissertation—numerous noteworthy precedents emerged that were to influence the development and critical reception of Billingham’s highly personal images of his underclass family. This chapter begins with a survey of photography of the working class made by professional photographers. I will discuss how each photographer acquired elements of the participant observer method and to what extent the resultant images reflect that method. I argue that there was a gradual shift in the position of professional photographers, most of whom came from middle- and upper middle-class backgrounds. By aiming their cameras at the socially underprivileged and their living conditions, these photographers became crusaders on behalf of those who lacked the wherewithal to advocate for themselves. But, as technological developments produced more affordable cameras and film developing services, working-class individuals could turn to photographing their own social milieu from an intimate vantage point. Photographic practice within the working-class family fell naturally into the category of family photography, reshaping the history of photographic representation of the working class, especially as public financing of higher education increasingly allowed professional art photographers to emerge from the working class. Eventually, professional photographers from middle- and upper-class backgrounds themselves adopted this insider position of self-representation. But in my discussion of the chief subject of this chapter, Richard Billingham, I present a culmination of the development of working-class family photography as produced by an artist whose family

membership afforded him the opportunity to create images so candid that they would otherwise have been impossible to make.

Britain has a strong tradition of social documentary photography. Documentarist-Realist sensibility generally emerged there during the 1930s. In 1937, a significant moment in the history of that tradition, photographers working for Mass Observation, or M-O, a pioneering research organization, targeted false mass media images of working- and middle-class people, as well as images published by self-serving government officials and out-of-touch academic sociologists.³⁷⁷ Mass Observation, organized by journalist and poet Charles Madge and the Team Work at Northtown, under the direction of anthropologist Tom Harrisson, had the goal of producing an observational ethnography of modern Britain. Information was gathered by volunteer observers drawn from all walks of life, diverse in representation of class, occupation, geographical region, and gender.³⁷⁸ The observers acquired many nicknames, including: Groupey, Beaver Players, Mass-Mystics, Nosey Parkers, Peeping Toms, and Envelope Steamers, and they were also described as spies or snoopers, as maniacs or organisers of a cult, and as cranky, beastly doodlers or lopers.³⁷⁹ As Batchen pointed out, Charles Badge called for surreptitious “mass observations” by a cross-section of the population in order to create a “mass science” of the British unconscious.³⁸⁰ While the observers sought to deliver objectively a social science of behaviors of contemporary British society, the use of untrained volunteers also added a “subjective” quality. As Madge and Harrisson noted, “Mass Observation has always assumed that its untrained Observers would be *subjective* cameras, each with his or her own individual

³⁷⁷ Marien, 295.

³⁷⁸ See Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson, eds., *First Year's Work 1937-38 by Mass Observation* (London: Lindsay Drummond, 1938). Geoffrey Batchen also provides a short synopsis of Mass Observation in his essay, “Guilty Pleasures,” 454-57.

³⁷⁹ Madge and Harrisson, 63.

³⁸⁰ Batchen, 458.

distortion. They tell us not what society is like, but what it looks like to them. An Observer's social point of view is decided in the first place by himself, in the second place by other people."³⁸¹

At least one professional photographer was asked by Harrison to join this venture. Humphrey Spender (1910-2005), born in Hampstead in north London into a privileged background, became a central figure in the M-O movement, producing images of working-class culture in northwest Britain of a type rarely seen in the press.³⁸² Spender documented life, local customs, and habits during this early period, primarily in Bolton, Blackpool, and the Blackheath district of London. Under the general direction of Harrison, Spender hid under his coat either a Leica or a Zeiss Contax 35mm camera fitted with a wide-angle lens to take surreptitious pictures of people going about their lives in public places. Spender's photographs were characterized as "candid," a term invented for Erich Saloman's photographs of dignitaries in *The Graphic* (1921).³⁸³ Spender, who had a liberal upbringing under his left wing journalist father, committed himself to giving voice to the concerns of the working class, citizens who had been excluded from decision making positions and who were invisible in the press except as caricatures.

³⁸¹ Madge and Harrison, 66.

³⁸² Amanda Hopkinson, "Obituary: Humphrey Spender: Pioneering Photographer Who chronicled the State of Britain in the 1930s," *The Guardian* (Tuesday, 15 March 2005). A witness to the rise of Nazism in Berlin, as well as to the subversive cultural movements of New Objectivity and the emergence of publications for workers such as the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* and the *Münchner Illustrierte Presse* during the period of social upheaval in Europe, Spender began to photograph housing conditions in the East End of London and political events such as the Jarrow March and the British Union of Fascists rally at the Albert Hall prior to taking up an opportunity with M-O. Deborah Frizzell, "Humphrey Spender's Early Years, 1927-1933," *Humphrey Spender's Humanist Landscapes: Photo-Documents, 1932-1942* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 1997), 14-15.

³⁸³ David Mellor, "Humphrey Spender and the Visual Imagination of Mass Observation: A Descriptive Chronology," *Humphrey Spender, WorkTown: Photographs of Bolton and Blackpool Taken for Mass Observation 1937/38* (Brighton, U.K.: Gardner Centre Gallery, University of Sussex, 1977), unpaginated.

Coming from the upper middle class, Spender described his sympathy for the working class as representing “an idealized version of Communism.”³⁸⁴

As a class outsider, Spender needed a method to approach his subjects. “I had to be an invisible spy—an impossibility which I didn’t particularly enjoy trying to achieve.”³⁸⁵ Spender’s work centered on capturing the everyday experience of the lower classes. *Working Man’s Hair Specialist, Bolton, 1937 (fig.4.1)*, for example, depicts a scene at a makeshift outdoor barber shop where a sign reads “WORKING MANS HAIR SPECIALIST PREVENTS ALOPECIA, RINGWORM, SCRUFF, DANDRUFF,” providing a literal account of the barber treating an apparently filthy seated customer. M-O lacked sufficient resources to publish all nine hundred images, most of which did not come to light until the 1970s, although Harrison studied Spender’s photographs as visual data. Some were published in *Picture Post*, but those were often cropped and accompanied by captions inconsistent with Spender’s intentions. Spender’s sense of intruding and his need to confront the class distinction between himself and his working-class subjects speak to the difficulties of becoming invisible as an outsider in a given context.

Bill Brandt (b. Hamburg, Germany, 1904-1983), the son of affluent parents, settled in London in 1932, where he pursued an anthropological form of documentary photography similar to that of M-O photographers. Brandt always avoided self-disclosure, preferring to remain a mysterious figure, partly due to his sensitivity to having German origins while living in Britain during World War II. Ian Jeffrey described Brandt as “unusually promiscuous apropos of genres and subjects,” saying that he was good at using photography as “the means of

³⁸⁴ Humphrey Spender interviewed by Jeremy Mulford in *Worktown People: Photographs from Northern England, 1937-1938*, by Humphrey Spender (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1982), 13; Frizzell, 15.

³⁸⁵ Interview by Jeremy Mulford, *Worktown People*, 16.

restaging and reimagining others' inventions and projections."³⁸⁶ This ambiguous position of keeping secret his continental identity and adopting British culture as his own allowed Brandt to be more versatile in approaching his subjects than any of his contemporaries in Britain. In particular, he pioneered the use of indoor documentary and became a master of staged shots.

Brandt's photographs of miners, some of which were published in his first photo book, *The British at Home* (1936), are noteworthy for scenes that draw viewers into the subjects' domestic lives. The pair of rather theatrical photographs "The Home" (**fig.4.2**) and "The Work" (**fig.4.3**), both published in *The English at Home*, is an example of his depiction of the realities of a miner's domestic life, if in a way that reinforced social differences. In "The Home," which was reprinted on the back of the book jacket as a theme picture, an interior image of a mother and her three children portrays a hungry cluster for whom the solitary miner in "The Work" must provide. The repeated motif of a wool flat cap—the ubiquitous headgear and virtual symbol of the British working class in the nineteenth and early twentieth century—lies on the table in "The Home" and is worn by the miner in "The Work."

In Brandt's pictures, strict assignment of gender roles is evident. Through his staging of the scene, this gender division endemic in the working class of northern England is manifest in *Northumbrian miner at his evening meal* (1937) (**fig.4.4**), a photograph in which a miner darkened by coal soot eats his dinner while his wife sits beside him wearing an apprehensive expression, neither figure engaged with the other. Brandt's depictions of these families intended to speak to hardships and day-to-day worries about providing for basic needs among the economically deprived, but, arguably, they served to solidify class distinctions.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 9.

In contrast to the M-O associated documentary photography of the 1930s, British photographers of the late 1970s and 1980s shifted from the public realm of social and political documentary to using photography as a means of exploring subjective experience and individual identity when documenting social and economic deprivation. Photographers such as Chris Killip, Graham Smith, Ron McCormick, and John Davis depicted in harsh black-and-white photographs the effects of de-industrialization, unemployment, and the overall debilitation of Northern communities

Chris Killip (b.1946) comes from the Isle of Man, a semi-autonomous region of Great Britain in the Irish Sea, and later lived in and photographed the North of England. In his first book, *The Isle of Man* (1980), a photo book documenting the largely rural communities of his home country, Killip utilized the strategy of juxtaposing portraits with landscapes, as seen in an image of solemn faces nearby graves.³⁸⁷ Influenced by Paul Strand's studies of similar communities, he illustrated the cultural environmental forces that shaped the lives of its subjects.³⁸⁸

In a collection of photographs titled *In Flagrante* (1988), Killip documented the decline of industry in north and northeast England from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s. In this work, Killip again employed the portrait-landscape strategy, but this time, he more closely intertwined his subjects within their surroundings. Gerry Badger observed that Killip was especially drawn to communities on the fringes of the working class, people whose aspirations and needs were entirely ignored much of the time “as a result of the Darwinist” approach of the Thatcher

³⁸⁷ Chris Killip, *The Isle of Man*, text by John Berger (London: Zwemmer/The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1980).

³⁸⁸ Gerry Badger, “Dispatches from a War Zone,” *In Flagrante* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2008), unpaginated. Errata Editions' Books on Books series republished the out-of-print book in 2008 with an additional text by Gerry Badger.

government.³⁸⁹ Shot mostly around Newcastle-upon-Tyne in northeast England—a region that once prospered from ironworks, manufacturing of locomotives and ships, and exporting coal, iron, and steel—Killip depicts people who carry on in the aftermath of de-industrialization amidst dormant shipyards, closed mines, shuttered factories, and furnaces gone cold.

Some of the most striking shots in *In Flagrante* were made in two marginal communities, the North Yorkshire fishing village of Skinningrove, just north of the tourist attraction port of Whitby, and Lynemouth, a former mining village on the edge of the sea north of Newcastle where sea coal gatherers lived in travelers' camps collecting waste coal that had washed up on the beach. A sense of reverence for these people infuses Killip's depictions of his subjects, akin to the way in which nineteenth-century French Barbizon painter Jean-François Millet depicted peasants who lived on the edge of the working class of his time. The cover image (**fig.4.5**) shows a woman with a boy sitting on a cart on a sea coal beach taking home their spoils as they push toward the edge of the frame against the adversity of the wind. Another photograph (**fig.4.6**) is a portrait of a father and child who appear to be caught during their walk, an electric pole standing fuzzily in the background. Killip focused on those individuals whose conditions are signaled by the father's dirty fingertips, rough hands, and worn out clothes, yet rather than conveying despair, the pair embodies perseverance.

³⁸⁹ Ibid. Northern de-industrialization started before Margaret Thatcher's premiership, but under her leadership became more pronounced. Not so much the new technology of post-industrialism, but Thatcher's political system has been denounced for neglecting the poor, especially in the industrial north. Poverty doubled and the gap between the poor and the wealthy increased exponentially. Between 1984 and 1988, there were 1,500 deaths in northeast England due to starvation or exposure. John Berger and Sylvia Grant's original text for *In Flagrante* reinforced the bitter, dark tone of Killip's pictures. It describes the abandoned community as "those born into zones where it is no longer possible to earn a living, and where the idea of any future has been ruptured," while the wealthy are "safeguarded." There were "those, elsewhere, who believe that the future belongs only to the profit motive"; "there are the people who aspire, and the people who can't or won't aspire." Thatcher's "individualism" was irrelevant to the impoverished that resided in an indifferent world where no money or power were available. See John Berger and Sylvia Grant, "Walking Home," *In Flagrante*, 85-93.

Killip was influenced by his discovery of the works of Paul Strand and Walker Evans, especially during his 1969 visit to New York City. The experience helped to confirm his instincts. “In the sophistication of the MoMA’s permanent collection I discovered the context for their work. The fact that photography had a relevant, pertinent history.”³⁹⁰ Killip’s sympathy for his subjects and his solidarity with the underclass are clearly expressed despite his deliberate distance from his subjects.³⁹¹ In *In Flagante*, Killip stated, “This is a subjective book about my time in England. I take what isn’t mine and I convert other people’s lives. The photographs can tell you more about me than about what they describe.”³⁹²

While the book’s purpose was to document the realities of the declining communities in the north of England, Killip stated, “the book is a fiction about metaphor.” The artist inserts himself into his photos as a shadow. The image on the first page of *In Flagante* (**fig.4.7**) and the last image of the book (**fig.4.8**) include the shadow of a man passing a destitute woman at a bus shelter. The shadow appears to be a man in profile holding a camera with a long lens. In the final image (**fig.4.8**), the woman has collapsed, while the shadow man is now going in the opposite direction and another man and a dog are approaching the woman. This visual strategy is similar to the tactic employed a hundred years earlier by U.S. anthropologist James Mooney, who inserted shadows of himself and his tripod into the frames of his photographs. The graffiti in the second shot shows that the first shot (**fig.4.7**) was printed in reverse, evidencing Killip’s deliberate plan to suggest that the shadowy observer has passed once in each direction.

³⁹⁰ Chris Killip’s e-mail to Gerry Badger, May 27, 2008, in Badger, “Dispatches from a War Zone,” unpaginated.

³⁹¹ After Killip had earned some money by selling photographs of his destitute subjects, he visited them to give them part of his profits. (Martin Parr, interview by author, Bristol, U.K. June 22, 2010.)

³⁹² Chris Killip, “Foreword,” *In Flagante* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1988; New York: Errata Editions, 2008 reprinted), unpaginated.

Later in his career, Killip was to become a founder and the director of the Side Gallery in Newcastle, one of a number of publicly funded galleries established during the 1970s when the Arts Council of Great Britain had a strongly proactive policy of encouraging British Photography.³⁹³ Since its opening in 1977, Side Gallery has been an important venue for exhibiting documentary photography.

A project by northeastern English photographer Tish Murtha (b. 1956, South Shields, U.K.), *Youth Unemployment in the West End of Newcastle*, documented a narrower aspect of the economic decline of her region. Familiar with the surroundings, Murtha depicted enervated, alienated youth amidst an environment of derelict houses and eroded estates (**fig.4.9, fig.4.10**) in the once heavily industrialized area of northeast England at the end of the 1970s. Murtha adopted a participant observer method for her eighteen-month project, which began in 1979 and culminated in an exhibition at the Side Gallery in Newcastle in 1981.

While producing her project, Murtha lived in the Cruddas Park Estate, in Elswick, West Newcastle, where the pictures were taken.³⁹⁴ Murtha had “been with them (the youth) inside the offices of the DHSS,” and “found them hanging listlessly around outside so-called ‘Careers’ offices, sitting on benches in new shopping precincts, or lounging on abandoned furniture on waste ground or in derelict houses.”³⁹⁵ Murtha captured the youths’ expressions, ranging from boredom to confusion to suppressed rage. Addressing the social apocalypse evinced by these unemployed youths, who appear to have been school truants, Murtha explored the relationship

³⁹³ Badger, “Dispatches from a War Zone,” unpaginated.

³⁹⁴ For discussions of Tish Murtha’s *Youth Unemployment* project, see David Alan Mellor, “Tish Murtha: Youth Unemployment in the West End of Newcastle,” *Photoworks* (Spring/Summer May-October 2008): 58-67 and David Alan Mellor, “Picturing the Civic Crisis 1976-1981,” *No Such Thing as Society: Photography in Britain 1967-87* (London: Hayward 2007), 83-106.

³⁹⁵ Rob Powell, “Tish Murtha and Russell Lee at The Side Gallery,” *The British Journal of Photography* 10 (December 1981): 237.

between their lives and the darkening world that globalizing capitalism and deindustrialization imposed on the former heartland of British heavy industry. In Murtha's vision, these teenagers emerge as economic victims of Thatcherism.³⁹⁶

Murtha's show at the Side Gallery was presented alongside photographs by the U.S. photographer Russell Lee (1903–1986), drawn from his collection of pictures from 1946 and 1947 documenting Appalachian mining communities in West Virginia and Harlan County, Kentucky. Two moments of economic failure and social disaster were exhibited side by side. To the eyes of a reviewer from *The Guardian*, Murtha's pictures seemed disorderly in contrast to the better-composed images by Lee.³⁹⁷ David Mellor considered the disorderly scenes in Murtha's work "metaphors of decomposition and anarchic punk flotsam" in the United Kingdom.³⁹⁸ Murtha managed to "incorporate the visual rhetorics of punk and New Wave promotion" into the images she shot.³⁹⁹ Mellor believed that Murtha's work followed the long tradition of "sentimental Left Humanism" in British social documentary photography, although to what degree these works had a subjective or personal component remains questionable.

After Murtha, several notable British photographers responded to the culture that had emerged in Britain under Thatcher's regime in tones that are more explicitly subjective. In 1986, Graham Smith (b. 1947, Middlesbrough, U.K.) claimed that his photographs of the sites and

³⁹⁶ The youths depicted in Murtha's project were enrolled in the government's Youth Opportunity Programme (YOP), which was introduced in 1978 and ran until 1983. These British teenagers were familiar with a dissenting popular music subculture through that program (Mellor, "Tish Murta," 59). Murtha also was involved in documenting the deplorable living conditions of homeless children in Britain as part of a project led by Tyneside Housing Aid Center in an effort to provide relief, the results of which endeavor were published in a book, Karina Jamieson and Tish Murtha, *Home Truths in the Year of the Child* (London: Shelter, 1979). In the same year, the U.N. General Assembly proclaimed 1979 the International Year of the Child.

³⁹⁷ William Varley, "Tish Murtha Photography," *The Guardian* (29 September 1981).

³⁹⁸ Mellor, "Tish Murta," 59. Murtha also photographed juvenile jazz bands in this region; the images were presented at Side Gallery prior to the Youth Unemployment show.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

people of Newcastle were “not really ... documentary... (but) something else, something to do with my own background, with my father. And trying to explore myself.”⁴⁰⁰ While Smith’s black-and-white photographs of industrial landscapes, urban sites, and interior spaces (**fig.4.11**, **fig.4.12**) do not reveal any particular participant observer characteristics, his motivation for the work is relevant to the history discussed in this chapter. That is, Smith’s personal history suggests a deep empathy for and insight into the lives of his subjects.

In 2006, Smith published a photographic essay in *Granta*, a literary journal known for pioneering contemporary realistic fiction and nonfiction since its inception in 1889.⁴⁰¹ Blending memoir and photojournalism, the stories featured in *Granta* conveyed a sense of realism and urgency. In its 2006 issue, Smith told the story of his father, Albert Smith (b. South Bank, 1916 – 1989).⁴⁰² In order to illustrate the story, the author included photographs taken by his father during the happy early years of the family. Albert Smith’s life was a relatively secure one in the first years of his marriage. He held a steady job at the ironworks in Middlesbrough and had a wife and three children. His earnings were not sufficient to sustain the family’s modest lifestyle. Recurrent poverty and lack of leisure time together turned the marriage bitter and contentious, eventually resulting in a county court’s Order of Legal Separation against the senior Smith. He was evicted from his home when he was forty-four years old. Over the disturbing eight years that followed, the son did not see his father. Albert Smith lived the quiet existence of a loner for

⁴⁰⁰ Smith cited in Rob Powell, “Another Country,” *British Journal of Photography* 19 (April 1986): 68; re-quoted in Mellor, *No Such Thing as Society*, 109.

⁴⁰¹ *Granta* magazine was founded in 1889 by a group of students at Cambridge University as *The Granta*, after an older form of what is today called the Cam, the river that runs through the town. The magazine has a history of publishing the early work of many writers who later became well known, including A. A. Milne, Michael Frayn, Ted Hughes, and Sylvia Plath. Following a rebirth in 1979 due to financial difficulties during the 1970s, *Granta*, has published many writers’ works dealing with a broad range of subjects from intimate human experiences to public and political events.

⁴⁰² Graham Smith, “Albert Smith,” *Granta: Loved Ones, The Magazine of New Writing* 95 (London: Fall 2006): 127-159.

the rest of his life, work being the only way he could tolerate his loneliness and the loss of his family.⁴⁰³

When Albert Smith departed the household, Graham Smith found a cardboard shoebox filled with his father's carefully cut single negatives. The shoebox became a place for the son to return for lost memories of his family. The pictures taken by his father were typical snapshots (**fig.4.13**, **fig.4.14**), such as photos of the children and their father at the dinner table or on the beach. While these banal photographs by or of Albert Smith became a means by which his son remembered the joyful family times, they also put into relief the painful experience of a shattered family.

Graham Smith's photographs of the bleak industrial landscape of northern England (**fig.4.11**, **fig.4.12**) suggest his nostalgia. Although his photographs are not of particularly personal subjects, they are a quest for identity. For example, a young boy set against an atmospheric backdrop of furnaces (**fig.4.11**) may stand for Graham's lost childhood. *King Edward Bridge, Newcastle* (**fig.4.12**) captures a person swinging suspended from a rope against the silhouettes of latticed Redheugh Bridge in the background, dividing the composition into two parts. The photograph documents the old bridge before a reinforced concrete bridge replaced it in 1983. Smith pursued disappearing industrial structures, usually including a human figure or several figures in his images. While maintaining a sense of a distance as an observer, Graham's black-and-white photographs present a pictorial reverie that reflects the artist's melancholy.

Produced in the late 1970s and 1980s, Smith's intensely nostalgic photographs were considered passé when compared to the rising trend in color photography among post-modernists. The cutting-edge impulse in documentary photography emerged from artists such as

⁴⁰³ Smith, 127-159.

Martin Parr, Paul Graham, and Anna Fox, who adopted color photography as their vehicle for scrutinizing British society and government. Paul Graham (Stafford, England, b. 1956) was a graduate of Bristol University. He earned critical attention for documenting conditions in the waiting rooms of unemployment offices in Britain by using a handheld Plaubel Makina 6 x 7 cm camera in 1984 and 1985. Having experienced unemployment personally, Graham proved a sympathetic observer of the frustrating daylong waits for assistance in the crowded offices where few opportunities were to be had. His record of this bureaucratic wasteland was published in 1986 as *Beyond Caring* (fig.4.15, fig.4.16). Graham said in an interview, “*Beyond Caring* was fighting talk ... confronting the economic violence being done to a large section of the population by early 1980s Thatcherism; it wasn’t some theoretical principle it was my personal situation. I was unemployed, so giros, UB40s, waiting rooms and endless interviews were a part of my life.”⁴⁰⁴

The Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS) refused Graham permission to photograph in their buildings, a factor that helped to shape his approach. Graham adopted a surreptitious means of photographing scenes.

All the photographs were taken without looking through the lens. ... I had to work in a secretive manner, with literally every photograph taken with a camera on a seat, around my neck or on the floor. This also meant that I could work at extremely slow shutter speeds without a tripod, but more importantly each image had a haphazard composition with tilted verticals, intrusions and often an excess of floor or ceiling.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁴ Paul Graham, from a conversation with Gillian Wearing in *Paul Graham* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), 8 [reprinted in David Chandler, “Time After Time: Paul Graham’s *Beyond Caring*,” *Beyond Caring, Photographs by Paul Graham* (New York: Errata Editions, 2011), unpaginated.] *Giro* was the slang term for a welfare payment issued through the British Post Office’s *National Giro*, a quasi-banking institution. *UB40s* were benefits application forms.

⁴⁰⁵ Paul Graham cited in David Brittain ed., “Past Caring, An Interview with Paul Graham (February 1986),” *Creative Camera: 30 Years of Writing* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1999), 134.

Liberated from conventional eye level, Graham's camera captured his discomfort and awkwardness while conveying his presence. His subjects apparently were unaware of Graham's camera as they went about their business with bored and blank faces. *Man with Crutches, Poplar DHSS, East London, 1985 (fig.4.15)* reveals Graham's typical strategy of surreptitiously capturing his subjects from a slightly tilted plane, the low vantage point resulting in an image dominated by a disproportionate expanse of floor. None of the figures is engaged with another as they gaze at the floor or into the vacant air. Graham respects the physical and emotional distance from his subjects by making the image from a distance. In contrast, *Crouched Man, DHSS Waiting Room, Bristol, 1984 (fig.4.16)*, crops the composition very tightly, as the viewer uncomfortably confronts a man crouched in a misery of lost self-esteem. Shot at close range, Graham captures the cramped office's feel of stale air and ghastly fluorescent lighting, conveying the unfriendliness and discomfort to which the unemployed were subjected.

Graham's haphazardly composed photographs were in color, a slap at the black-and-white documentary mode usually seen in more conventionally composed works. Having worked in color since 1976, Graham regarded photographers who shot in black and white as "deliberately reducing the world to a grey scale."⁴⁰⁶ Graham's work is not about individual circumstances, but about the callous treatment of the unemployed, and his un-colorful color photographs reflect the poverty of the place. The drabness of these interiors, with their limited spectrum of fluorescent lighting and dour color schemes of government design punctuated by garish orange seating and warning notices, bears down on the disheartened members of this ad hoc community who must adhere to strict rules despite the long hours of desperate waiting.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁶ Graham interview, "Past Caring," 131.

⁴⁰⁷ Graham interview, 131-2.

In the mid-1980s, numerous British photographers introduced color as a vehicle for depicting the realities of the systemic oppression of the poor and working class. The British were already aware of color photography in the United States. U.S. photography historian and editor Sally Eauclore provided introductory studies of pioneering color photography in *The New Color Photography* (1981) and *New Color New York: 18 Photographic Essays* (1984).⁴⁰⁸ The adoption of color film by art photographers was still in its infancy in the late 1960s despite its having been available since 1936.⁴⁰⁹ Eauclore attributes the time lag to “an aura of vulgarity” surrounding color film’s exaggeration of hues and the simultaneous difficulty of formally organizing the real world’s raucous color combinations.⁴¹⁰ The “vivid” photographs promised by the first Kodak advertisement for color film were a far cry from the true colors of the real world. Pioneers of photography such as Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and Walker Evans lamented the limitations of color photography. Moholy-Nagy observed that color photographers attempting naturalism were “back where realistic painters started in the Renaissance—the limitation of nature with inadequate means.” Walker Evans considered color film a “vulgar” medium, complaining that many “color photographers confuse color with noise.”⁴¹¹ The renewed interest in color photography in the mid 1980s, coupled with more advanced technology, gave confidence to some British photographers who had been working in color by

⁴⁰⁸ Sally Eauclore, *The New Color Photography* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1981); Sally Eauclore, *American Independents: Eighteen Color Photographers* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984).

⁴⁰⁹ Hand-colored monochrome images came much earlier, but the practice did not allow mechanical mass reproduction, so it failed to become a widespread practice. John Szarkowski said that most earlier color photography was “puerile” (John Szarkowski, *William Eggleston’s Guide*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1976, 8); Max Kozloff suggested that color photography “came of age” around 1970 in “The Coming of Age of Color,” *Artforum* (January 1975) [reprinted in *Photography and Fascination* (Danbury, N.H.: Addison House, 1978), 183-196.]

⁴¹⁰ Eauclore, *The New Color Photography*, 9.

⁴¹¹ Laszlo Moholy-Nagy as quoted in Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, *Experiment in Totality* (New York: Harper, 1950), 105; Walker Evans, “Text Exposures,” *Fortune* (July 1954): 80. (quoted in Eauclore, *The New Color Photography*, 9)

legitimizing their choice of medium. These same British photographers began to expand their range of subject matter and artistic expression.

Another notable photographer, Martin Parr, began to capture his subjects in color, starting with *The Last Resort: Photographs of New Brighton* (1986) (**fig.4.17**, **fig.4.18**). From 1983 to 1985, Parr frequented New Brighton, a seaside resort a few miles from his new home in Wallasey, often in the company of fellow photographer Tom Wood. Using a recently purchased Plaubel Makina 6 x 7cm range finder camera, which records finer detail than a 35 mm camera, Parr observed, “if the seaside is tatty, and more than a little run-down, it was also vibrant.”⁴¹² The summers of 1983 and 1984 were unusually hot, so the seaside resort drew large crowds on weekends and British bank holidays.

In *The Last Resort*, families, often including toddlers and young children, are sunning, eating and drinking, and enjoying their leisure time oblivious to the litter surrounding them. Often, garbage occupies space in Parr’s images. The overflowing litter baskets (**fig.4.17**) are no one’s concern. As the families go about eating their afternoon snacks, the trash becomes part of the landscape. Parr captured these scenes with formal rigor, employing intense local colors played against each other within a long depth of field. In **fig.4.17**, the red paint on the bench and pole against the blue jeans and blue stroller create a vibrant rhythm, while the white trash makes an odd presence. A mother and baby are shown (**fig.4.18**) at an unappealing open-air concrete pool, dark water and garbage by their side. Nearby, a man with a stroller is decapitated by Parr’s camera frame. With couples strolling in the background this scene should have been an ordinary one, but instead we feel that something has gone wrong.

⁴¹² Martin Parr in Gerry Badger, “A Good Day Out: Reflecting Upon the Last Resort,” *The Last Resort: Photographs of New Brighton* (Stockport: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2009), 6. [This is a republication of the original edition by Promenade Press in 1986.]

When *The Last Resort* was published in 1986 and exhibited at the Serpentine Gallery in London that same year, responses were rather extreme. Critic Robert Morris reacted, “This is a clammy, claustrophobic nightmare world where people lie knee-deep in chip papers, swim in polluted black pools, and stare at a bleak horizon of urban dereliction.”⁴¹³ In an angry critique, David Lee wrote, “Parr, a Southerner . . . has habitually discovered visitors at their worst, greedily eating and drinking junk Our historic working class, normally dealt with generously by documentary photographers, becomes a sitting duck for a more sophisticated audience. They appear fat, simple, and styleless.”⁴¹⁴ However, as David Alan Mellor has pointed out:

What (David) Lee was reluctant to recognise was the power of this brazen new colour art photography to destroy past frameworks, in this case the Left humanist consensus around conventional documentary. The photographs came before the reader in a hot, estranging glare. In *The Last Resort*, colour took on a violence and insolence never seen before in British photography, sensations produced by the use of daylight flash on already electric colours and fabrics worn by the sunburned visitors to New Brighton, Liverpool, during the heat waves of 1984 and 1986.⁴¹⁵

As leisure and consumerism became increasingly important unifying cultural factors while manufacturing and heavy industry waned during the Thatcher years, Parr, keeping his distance as an observer of his subjects, photographed them with penetrating eyes, like a visual sociologist with a sense of humor and satirical bite. I argue that Parr adopted aspects of both insider and outsider positions as a photographer. Most criticisms of his work describe him as an aloof outsider who established a cold distance through his parodic treatment of his subjects. Yet Parr is viewing his fellow citizens as an insider inasmuch as he possesses intimate knowledge of their particular middle-class culture because it is his own. By aiming his camera at the customs

⁴¹³ Robert Morris, “End of the Pier,” *The British Journal of Photography* (15 August 1986).

⁴¹⁴ David Lee, “Photography,” *Arts Review* (15 and 29 August 1986): 440.

⁴¹⁵ Mellor, *No Such Thing as a Society*, 130.

and cultural codes he knew best, Parr assumed a place in this genealogy of British insider photographers to whom Billingham became a successor.

Those British photographers who adopted color film in the mid-1980s generally evidenced a sense of distance from their subjects, even when those subjects were patently sympathetic ones. This is due, in part, to the context of the photographs. When recording images of the socially disadvantaged, often so despondent that they were unconcerned about their privacy, the photographers assumed a traditional relationship of superiority to their subjects. Parr's satirical approach toward his subjects may be compared to Graham's less cynical approach. Graham's criticism is directed toward an invisible social system outside the frame. Both Graham and Parr were incognito visitors who blended in, but Graham observed from an insider point of view (he was unemployed at the time of *Beyond Caring*, so may have felt that he, too, was a victim of Thatcherism), which kept him on the same plane as his subjects, while Parr was a social and economic outsider engaged in picture making, so may have felt alien from his subjects, like an explorer coming upon a scene of exotic others.

Another shift within the trend of color photography may be seen in the work of a younger photographer, Anna Fox (b.1961, Hampshire, U.K.), a student of Paul Graham and Martin Parr at the West Surrey College of Art and Design at Farnham. Fox came to critical attention with her documentary *Work Stations* (1986-1988), which was published in *Camerawork*. She adopted a more autobiographical mode than her teachers, but with an ambiguous attitude that straddled the uncomfortable line between close involvement and maintaining a distance, even distaste, for one's subject. Frequently, her projects dealt with her personal life and community. Fox belongs to a generation influenced by Nan Goldin, yet her images usually depict the ordinary rural lives

of English citizens, not the faces of urban bohemia.⁴¹⁶ In *Work Stations*, Fox revealed a sense of emotional detachment and alienation similar to Parr's. For example, one image (**fig.4.19**), taken from behind a man in an executive position, shows a woman taking down on paper what the man is saying. Here, an accompanying quotation, "Having a secretary is a status symbol," conveys a sardonic cynicism about the obvious gender-laden power relationship—men in superior positions and women in subordinate roles. In another image (**fig.4.20**), Fox captures a man mindlessly eating greasy ham or bacon, depicting the character rather grotesquely and with an air of indifference. The colors used in the pictures intensify (often through the use of a flash) the effects of the cramped spaces of the office interiors that the subjects occupy. In this manner, Fox shows a lack of empathy for her subjects, and there is no feeling of generosity. The accompanying captions for each photograph reinforce this tendency as the quotes are taken from business magazines, newspapers, and interviews.⁴¹⁷

Family Photography in Britain

During the 1990s, along with the growing emphasis on the personal realm in British photography, an interest in family photography developed. British photographers (in addition to Graham Smith) revisited photographs found in their family albums and reinvigorated the genre of personal documentary photography. Several noteworthy exhibitions and publications explored such personal terrain in the 1990s. In 1990, an exhibition at Side Gallery, *The Untrained Eye*, presented working-class amateur photographers documenting their own communities, featuring works by Laurie Wheatley, Jimmy Forsyth, and Mary Gillens, as well as

⁴¹⁶ For a general survey on Anna Fox, see Val Williams, *Anna Fox: Photographs 1983-2007* (Brighton: Photoworks and Bradford: Impressions Gallery, 2007).

⁴¹⁷ David Chandler, "Vile Bodies," in Williams, ed., *Anna Fox: Photographs*, 19-20.

Albert Smith, who had died in 1989. In 1993, Side Gallery mounted an exhibition called *Unclear Family*, the result of a workshop in South West Durham where photographers lived and worked with local families and documented their contemporary family experiences.⁴¹⁸

Peter Bialobrzkeski (b. 1961, Wolfsburg, Germany), one of the photographers who participated in the workshop, recalled spending a week recording the daily activities of the Clough family (**fig.4.21**).⁴¹⁹ The project focused on the diversity of family structures, reflecting the expanding diversity of household and childcare arrangements—from single parent families to unmarried parents to complex family structures arrived at through divorce and remarriage, as was the case in most Western societies. The exhibition showed photographs of children at home amidst their caregivers or without parents (**fig.4.21**, **fig.4.22**). While many entries in this exhibition suggest that the photographers were working under the influence of the 1980s new color photography, others continued to work in black and white.

When *Unclear Family* was exhibited in 1993, the family was becoming a major issue on the national political agenda in Britain. At the 1993 Conservative Party Conference, Prime Minister John Major introduced the “Back to Basics” campaign, which was interpreted by many to be a moral crusade in support of traditional family values. A government minister accused the church of failing to teach moral values; single parents were attacked as the cause of the antisocial behavior in their children; and divorced fathers were criticized for not paying enough child support. The aim of social and fiscal policies, derived from the “Back to Basics” rhetoric of government ministers, was to support the “ideal” model of the nuclear family and to

⁴¹⁸ The title of the show, “Unclear Family,” employed an anagram of the term “Nuclear Family.” The photographers who participated in this project were: Peter Bialobrzkeski, Steve Conlan, Tim Curtis, Mik Critchlow, Richard Cross, Stefan Dolfen, Richard Grassick, Veronique L’Esperat-Hequet, Michelle Johnson, Dana Kydrova, Miriam Reik, Dayanita Singh, and Jindrich Streit.

⁴¹⁹ Peter Bialobrzkeski, e-mail message to author, August 25, 2010.

discourage “deviant” or “abnormal” family structures. This ideology threatened sanctions against unmarried mothers by, for example, reducing public financial support and denying access to public housing.⁴²⁰ *Unclear Family* reflected certain realities of Great Britain, with its diverse contemporary family structures opposing the “ideal” morality professed by a conservative government that hypocritically hid its own moral lapses.⁴²¹ The show was filled with pictures that employ casually cropped compositions and spontaneous-looking shots (**fig.4.23**, **fig.4.24**), as if to reflect the varied family lives of working-class and middle-class households.

The representation of British families two decades before *Unclear Family* had been quite different. For example, a set of portraits of British families was included in the exhibition catalogue for *British Image 1*, organized by the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1975.⁴²² Taken by U.S. photographer Roslyn Banish, images of families in Pimlico included working-, middle-,

⁴²⁰ Pete McCarthy, Original Side Gallery exhibition text, 1994. (accessed August 20, 2010); available from <http://www.amber-online.com/exhibitions/unclear-family-crook-workshop-1993/detail>.

⁴²¹ “Back to Basics” became synonymous with scandals reported in lurid and embarrassing detail by tabloid newspapers. For example, Cabinet Minister David Mellor was exposed in 1992 as having an extramarital affair and for accepting hospitality from the daughter of a leading member of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. The wife of the Earl of Caithness committed suicide amidst rumors that the Earl had committed adultery. Stephen Milligan, a British conservative politician and journalist, was found dead in bizarre circumstances, apparently asphyxiating himself during an autoerotic act. David Ashby, conservative Member of Parliament for North West Leicestershire, was “outed” by his wife after she discovered that he was having sex with men. A string of other Conservative MPs, including Alan Amos, Tim Yeo and Michael Brown, were involved in sex scandals.

⁴²² In 1973, the Arts Council initiated a grants scheme to provide photographers with financial support for non-commercial projects, as a means of distributing art photographs to the wider public. The photographers chose the themes of the projects. At the time, there were relatively few places for British photographers to show their work. One magazine, *Creative Camera*, and six galleries devoted their space exclusively to photographs. Four of the galleries were located in London: The Photographers’ Gallery, the Half Moon Gallery, the Kodak Photographic Gallery, and The Royal Photographic Society; the remaining two galleries were the Impressions Gallery, in York, and the Photographic Gallery, in Southampton. *British Image* was to be published semi-annually, showing a selection of images by the selected photographers. For the first publication, *British Image 1*, photographs by Homer Sykes, Claire Schwob, John Myers, Daniel Meadows, Bryn Campbell, Roslyn Banish, Ian Dobbie, and Paul Carter were selected. *British Image 1* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1975).

and upper-class families mostly shown in semi-posed formality.⁴²³ Citing the names of each family member and the occupation of the household breadwinner, Banish's portraits (**fig.4.25**, **fig.4.26**) of the mid-1970s British family offer up a vision of the conformist, heterosexual (married father and mother), happy, ideal "nuclear" family, which two decades later the British government sought to restore. Few "broken" families were chosen for Banish's project. Based largely on her interviews and the short-term relationships Banish built with her subjects, she produced a collection of images in which the families presented themselves in the best possible light.⁴²⁴ Reminiscent of conventional family snapshot portraits, Banish worked in a casual manner, revealing the apparent orderliness and decorum of these middle- and upper-class families. Even when she photographed working-class families, there is little evidence of disarray in the household. The viewer encounters happy families, proudly and properly presented, absent any embarrassing scenes that might have lurked behind the congenial façade.⁴²⁵

Vernacular family photography typically avoids presenting unhappy family affairs, but the shift from portraying polite, genteel, orderly British families in the mid-1970s to showing rude, unrefined, disorderly home lives in the mid-1990s signifies an expansion to include domestic realities previously inaccessible to outsiders. Do we ever see snapshots made

⁴²³ Roslyn Banish, born in Chicago, came to England and became a lecturer in photography at Harrow College in England. In 1972, she was awarded a grant by the Arts Council of Great Britain to photograph London families. Eventually she returned to the United States, where she has been living in San Francisco.

⁴²⁴ However, interviews with the subjects were not included in *British Image 1*. The interviews were later included in a book of comparative studies of family portraits from Chicago and London, Roslyn Banish, *City Families: Chicago and London* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974).

⁴²⁵ Banish continued to make portraits of impeccably happy families, accompanied by texts written by Banish herself. *Let Me Tell You About My Baby* (1982) was a story written from the borrowed point of view of a child whose family consists of a heterosexual married couple who are anticipating the birth of another child. Banish went on to document other projects related to the family, such as *A Forever Family: A Book About Adoption* (1992). However, her work took a dramatic turn in 1997 when she began documenting victims of H.I.V., interviewing more than forty people from diverse ethnic, geographic, racial, and economic backgrounds. The result of her efforts is the book *Focus on Living* (2003).

during domestic conflict or violence? No family member would pick up a camera to record the domestic disputes of siblings or parents. The act of recording such moments would be considered grossly inappropriate. One is expected to participate in resolving an urgent matter as it occurs. How does art permit this liberty when the circumstances themselves prohibit it? If photographers as observers are capable of recording the scene, does the act itself render them artists? What makes them different from casual observers if the participants cannot take up a camera? In Britain, the growing freedom to document unpleasant and unseemly subject matter, as seen in venues like Side Gallery, paved the way for a visual culture that encompassed topics previously hidden.

A similar shift took place in publishing. For example, *Telegraph Magazine*, a publication founded to attract a younger audience for the conservative *Daily Telegraph* and its sister newspaper *The Sunday Telegraph*, both of whose readerships were aging, hired the picture editor of *Telegraph Magazine*, Michael Collins, to resolve the problem of lost readers. Furnished with a big budget and given license to explore new ideas editorially, Collins used photography from alternative sources to replace conventional photojournalistic images. Beginning in 1990, rather than employing editorial photographers from photo agencies such as Magnum, which had been providing the majority of images, Collins commissioned work from so-called art photographers such as Steven Shore, Larry Sultan, Tina Barney, and Martin Parr. In addition, unknown photographers, child photographers, and found photography earned a place in the magazine's pages to push its visual boundaries.⁴²⁶ Even gorillas got into the act: photographs of zoo visitors taken by apes at the London Zoo (**fig. 4.27**) in 1992 offered a fresh take on the mechanical function of a camera and provided an opportunity to contemplate

⁴²⁶ Michael Collins, interview by author, London, U.K., June 18, 2010.

“looking” through the eyes of an animal, as well as to reconsider the power relationship between subject and observer, in this case subverted by placing the gorilla behind the camera.

Another project at *Telegraph Magazine* that turned the observer/observed relationship if not on its head, at least sideways, provided a suburban family in Middlesex with a large supply of film to photograph their daily lives over fifteen months. The Boormans—parents and three young children—took nearly twenty-thousand photographs of their “ordinary” family’s daily life.⁴²⁷ Everyone, including the youngest child in a pram, got into the act. Selected images were published in the *Telegraph Magazine* in October 1992 (**fig.4.28, fig.4.29**), creating a sensation and leaving a strong impression on Collins, as he recalled:

Nothing like that had ever been published in a British magazine. It was really comprehensive. It was a good thing to do. I think it was the first big thing that taught me a lot about what photography does when you photograph a private set of people, because it is quite intrusive. And I came into it from a very under-informed experience. I’d never done this before. I didn’t really know what to expect. I was surprised how intense the relationship to consequences was. Journalistically, things are always beyond, down the road. Its victim—a criminal, a celebrity, a famous chef—you know, they are on a public stage, not private people who are on public stage. It’s a lot more, as you say, embarrassing at least. It’s more like someone reads your diary, invasive, it’s pushing through the boundary.⁴²⁸

The Boorman family’s self-documentation went beyond an editorial project to represent the self-revelation—and some might say the self-obsession—of the 1990s.⁴²⁹ Photographs taken by a suburban family entered the public arena, providing an opportunity for others to observe, judge, and compare with their own lives. Raising the issue of exposing private moments in the public sphere, the Boorman family pictures anticipated the social network era of the Internet, on

⁴²⁷ The members of Boorman family are the parents, Nick Boorman (b.1953) and Terry Boorman (b. 1954), and the three children, Astrid (b. 1985), Austin (b. 1987), and Maxwell (b. 1989).

⁴²⁸ Collins, interview by author, June 18, 2010.

⁴²⁹ A selection of their photographs was exhibited in 1993 at Venus: Impressions Gallery, York, and toured to Maidstone Art Gallery, Kent in 1994.

which ordinary people increasingly share their private pictures—and descriptions of their personal activities—on virtual spaces like Facebook.

Both “Portraits by Gorillas” and “Boorman Family Photographs” were included in *Who’s Looking at the Family?* at the Barbican Art Gallery in London in 1994. Organized by Val Williams, the exhibition presented varied examples of family portraits, mostly from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, by both professional art photographers and amateurs. The show included non-traditional materials for art exhibitions of this sort, including found snapshots and various period practices such as post-mortem photography.

Great Britain’s long tradition of family portraits—the introductory essay of “Who’s Looking at the Family?” discusses a Thomas Gainsborough painting from c. 1784—proceeded through many stages in the representation of families. With the advent of photography, the family increasingly became a focus of attention. Snapshot photography introduced the *de rigueur* smile to replace the stiff gaze of Victorian subjects. Val Williams’s essay noted certain milestones in the representation of the family in the history of photography, including Dorothea Lange’s *Migrant Mother* of 1936 and the *Family of Man* exhibition at MoMA in 1955, which traveled internationally. She pointed out that the universalizing and patronizing view of the family advanced by the *Family of Man* was counterbalanced by the works of such artists as Diane Arbus, whose images of families and freaks were far from the mainstream idea of ordinary families. As discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation, Arbus’s “Two American Families,” published in November 1968 in the London *Sunday Times*, marked a departure point, opening up “a Pandora’s box of imagery.”⁴³⁰ Her images of “abnormal” families, published in Britain, paved the way for later projects such as *Unclear Family*. Britain in the 1970s saw

⁴³⁰ Val Williams, “Who is Looking at the Family?” *Who’s Looking at the Family?* (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1994), 13-14.

photographers probing social ills and addressing anxiety rooted in nostalgia for the passing of tradition, as seen in works by Murtha and Smith. Britain in the 1980s was deeply affected by economic decline, and families faced new challenges that became the subject of passionate debate in public and private realms.⁴³¹ As Williams concluded, “In family photography, there were no more rules.”⁴³²

As closed doors were opened for viewing and the private realm became less private, old snapshots were re-evaluated. To prove the point, *Who's Looking at the Family?* included pictures of a sort rarely shown in Britain. Thomas Struth, Martin Parr, Tina Barney, Larry Sultan, and Sally Mann were shown alongside less well-known names and vernacular photographers. The exhibition received considerable critical response to its atypical selection of images and provocative examples by known artists. Viewers encountered images of humans in cages, drunken parties, victims of Alzheimer’s, people dying, a still life of a dinner table, and so on. A small fraction of the exhibition was taken from family albums. Works that brought controversy included Tommy Thompson’s family snapshots (**fig.4.30**), apparently conventional family photographs that exposed a hidden story of sexual abuse and murder by way of accompanying text.⁴³³ Another set of works that provoked the critics was U.S. photographer Sally Mann’s sexually charged photographs of her children. Had the same images been taken by a male artist, or had Mann taken photographs of children not her own, these images of children

⁴³¹ Ibid., 14-15.

⁴³² Ibid., 15.

⁴³³ “It was the family photographs, particularly those taken during June and Hilda Thompson’s primary-school days, that became some of the most painful things to examine in the history of this family. . . . For a long time, I did not want to go near those photographs and the reason was this—the children in them not only looked perfectly normal, they could have been me or my friends at that age. . . . To me, always dubious about visual appearances as a way of ever knowing the truth, these conventional family photographs confirmed that one may smile and be a victim.” Alexandra Artley, *Murder in the Heart* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1993), 139-140. (Williams, 30) The function of these snapshots is similar to the way in which Smith utilized his father’s family photographs, both as proof of loss and as evidence of a once-normal family life.

aware of their own sexuality may well have met with even more outrage and possible criminal prosecution.⁴³⁴

Another set of photographs to depart from conventional ideas of the happy family was *Triptych of Ray* (1991) (**fig. 4.31**), three large black-and-white prints of the photographer Richard Billingham's father, made by the artist while a student at the University of Sunderland. These solemn but unheroic images reveal the father's alcoholism. Billingham's portraits display an intra-familial perspective assumed by an insider.

During the 1990s, images of private lives in family photography were no longer about presenting each family member posed in his or her Sunday best in the family living room. Rather, they were meant to be revelatory and confessional. Dirty secrets came out and the emotional intimacy of private life was increasingly shared with the viewing public. This new obsession with representing "the real" also found outlets in formats like "reality" television shows, soap operas, gossip columns, and tell-all memoirs that proliferated in the wider culture. Outside the field of photography, numerous artists were using this phenomenon to their advantage and making their success by disclosing details from their own lives. For example, British artist Tracey Emin (b. 1963, London, England) displayed the bed in which she slept and binge drank with her lovers, thereby becoming a celebrity for the unsparing self-disclosure of her sexual experience and psychological turmoil.

II. Publication and Impact of *Ray's a Laugh*

Richard Billingham's initial purpose for the black-and white-photographs of his father Ray was to use them as studies for paintings. As a painting student at University of Sunderland,

⁴³⁴ Andrew Palmer, "Photography: One Big Dysfunctional Family: Andrew Palmer on 'Who's Looking at the Family?,' A Show Giving Star Billing to the Controversial Pictures of Sally Mann," *The Independent*, June 15, 1994.

Billingham used photography as an aid to what he considered the more serious artistic medium of paint. Some of the artist's color sketches and charcoal drawings remain (**fig.4.32 ~ fig.4.35**).

Billingham lacked the money to buy canvases, so he painted on a bed sheet with acrylic paint. His loose brushstrokes and focus on domestic scenes were influenced by Walter Sickert (1860-1942), whose strong Realist tradition had inspired other English painters, such as Francis Bacon and Lucien Freud. The sense of intimacy in Sickert's domestic spaces (**fig.4.36**) resonates in Billingham's early acrylic works. Interestingly, Sickert was influenced strongly by Edgar Degas (1834-1917), whose practice also was informed by photography.⁴³⁵

Billingham's choice of subject for the black-and-white series emerged while he was living with his father in a tower block in Cradley Heath, West Midlands. His mother, Elizabeth (Liz), who became a subject in later projects, was living apart in a neighboring tower block in order to avoid her husband's incessant drinking. Billingham recalled:

I saw this scene everyday—he would be in his bedroom, lying on the bed or sitting on the edge of the bed, looking in the mirror and drinking. I thought that I would like to make some paintings about this tragic situation and the way he appeared to me in the bedroom. ... but the trouble was that my Dad wouldn't sit still for long enough—he'd want a drink or he would go to the toilet. Later I managed to get a 35mm Zenith camera. I thought that I could use the photographs as source material for the paintings. He was held still by the photographs and I could paint from them, taking more time.⁴³⁶

⁴³⁵ The asymmetrical compositions and abrupt angles in Sickert's work derived from his seeing paintings by Degas, who had used photography to discover new ways of looking at modern Parisian society. See Malcolm Daniel, *Edgar Degas, Photographer* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999). For more on Degas's influence on Sickert, see Anna Gruetzner Robins and Richard Thomson, *Degas, Sickert and Toulouse-Lautrec: London and Paris 1870-1910* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005). According to David Alan Mellor, there are all kinds of links for British photographers within the Sickertian tradition (Mellor, interview by author, Brighton, U.K. June 21, 2010).

⁴³⁶ Gordon MacDonald, "Interview with Richard Billingham," *Photoworks* (Spring/Summer, May/October 2007): 20.

Triptych of Ray, exhibited at Barbican in 1994, was originally source material for paintings.⁴³⁷ These small black-and-white prints spattered with blotches of paint (**fig.4.37**) were eventually reprinted in an enlarged format following the suggestion of Julian Germain, photography professor at Sunderland University. Having received Germain's attention for his black-and-white photography, initially produced as secondary material, Billingham focused increasingly on photography during his student years.

Billingham's formation as an artist goes back to 1992 when Germain invited Michael Collins, the picture editor of *Telegraph Magazine*, to give a lecture at Sunderland University. Collins, who was lecturing occasionally on the university circuit, was always looking for interesting photographers for his magazine. Collins recalled:

Julian recommended when I was there to see a student named Richard Billingham, not in a photography course, but in painting. I found his studio and Richard wasn't in it. On the floor of the studio, by his painting easel, loads of very poorly under-exposed black and white photographs stuck together with blobs of paint, scattered all over the floor. That's when I was looking at them, pictures of a sort of moon-faced old man, who looked a bit like he had a learning disability. He was eating a hotdog, mustard smeared over his face. And then, there were other pictures of a thin man drinking, which turned out to be Ray, Richard's father. The other man with the hotdog was his uncle. I asked one of the students to find Richard for me. They went to his house and found him. ... I was curious, they were slightly crazy, slightly angry, and there was some sort of intensity to them.⁴³⁸

He went on:

Richard brought a portfolio. Within it, there were more photos of Ray and his uncle. Within them, some kind of searching was going on in a weird way, some kind of dialogue, two old men drinking and eating, some kind of enactment, process, some kind of engaging, dialogue, photography of art.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁷ However, Billingham's finished painted works are scarcely known to the public, even though some of his sketches and charcoal drawings have been shown. According to Michael Collins, who visited Billingham's studio during his student years, "there were no paintings there for me to see. I asked him about paintings, but he wasn't interested in showing them." (Michael Collins, interview by author, London, U.K., June 18, 2010.)

⁴³⁸ Collins, interview by author, June 18, 2010.

⁴³⁹ Collins, interview.

When Collins asked him whether he had photographed his parents in color, Billingham went to his apartment and came back with two shopping bags filled with wallet-size color photographs.

Collins brought them to London. He recalled the moment of going through the pictures:

Two carrier bags, and I was amazed. I go through them, rolls and rolls and rolls. Kind of reminded me of the suburban (Boorman) family, except that Richard's was much crazier. Inside the flat in the picture, the interior was all bitten up. Floor was bad, filthy, walls were warped, crazy furnishings. Crazy in many ways. Whole roll of Ray drinking, whole roll of him lying in bed with a hangover or by the toilet, or his parents were arguing. You know, it was sort of just loads and loads of things. The big difference between, there were different things were going on. Julian was far more interested in the form of the pictures. How décor and the pattern of the sofa clash with this and that, and how maybe the photographic flash lit something up—that kind of formal property of photograph—whereas I was much more interested in the emotional narrative that was unfolding.⁴⁴⁰

The narrative possibilities evident in Billingham's voluminous work gave Collins the idea of making a book. Billingham did not exhibit enthusiasm at such a suggestion, but never said, "Don't." The 2007/8 Autumn/Winter issue of *Photoworks* published a letter that Collins wrote in a reaction to an interview with Richard Billingham that had been published in the previous issue of *Photoworks*. Alongside the letter, *Photoworks* printed a reproduction of the original dummy cover of *Ray's a Laugh* (**fig.4.38, fig.4.39**) side by side with the final version of the cover. In the disgruntled picture editor's letter, as well as during my interview of him, Collins revealed his uncredited role, often omitted from the story of the publication of the book.

Collins used his office copy machine to make multiple color copies of the photographs, laying them out on the floor of the office during weekends when no one was around. The editing process required that Germain and Billingham respond to what Collins selected, then Collins went back to edit more photographs. This unequal committee eventually rented a church hall in Sunderland for a semi-final edit, where they employed a short list of pictures, laid them out, and

⁴⁴⁰ Collins, interview.

discussed the content of the book. While disagreement occurred among the three, sixty images were selected at this meeting. To Germain and Billingham's dismay, Collins made further changes when he returned to London. After more corrections, and with the eventual agreement of the other two participants, the final dummy comprised sixty images, for which the cover is a quiet black-and-white photograph of Ray (**fig.4.38**).⁴⁴¹ Billingham suggested the title of the book.⁴⁴²

The publication of *Ray's a Laugh* turned out much different from the final dummy. Walter Keller from Scalo publishers changed the cover image to Ray's face laughing against red color, and the size was much bigger than what was agreed upon (**fig.4.39**). The printing quality, chosen by Paul Graham, was much cooler and rougher than originally conceived. In addition, mistakes made in the final dummy, such as white margins around the photographs, were exactly replicated. The quote by Robert Frank on the back cover—"Flash into the face of Mom and Dad. A British family album so cool that I can see and hear what goes on between the frames. No room for judgment or morality ... Reality and no pretence. Richard Billingham is the son and he knows his family"—was the publisher's addition as well.⁴⁴³ Planned as introspective and quiet, the book turned into a publication with sensational overtones. The editors' names, Germain and Collins, were supposed to be on the spine of the book, but instead appeared in tiny print on the inside flap of the dust jacket. Their names were deleted altogether from the second edition. Collins was furious over the publisher's changes and the friction between Collins and Keller, and between Collins and Anthony Reynolds, the gallerist, and eventually between Collins and Billingham himself, led to estrangement

⁴⁴¹ Five dummies were made, two of which, the penultimate and final dummies, are in Martin Parr's collection. Michael Collins, disillusioned and resentful, sold them cheaply to Parr when he wanted to be rid of them. (Collins, Interview)

⁴⁴² The title, *Ray's A Laugh*, entails an ironic word play. It sounds like the phrase "raise a laugh," although the effect of the images in the book is more than mere comical entertainment. In some cases, the scenes were deplorable. The phrase is a little British insider joke, as gallery visitors and viewers of the book were, on the whole, unlikely to be working class. (Kris Belden, e-mail message to author, May 4, 2005)

⁴⁴³ Robert Frank's evaluation of *Ray's a Laugh* remains valid, as Frank's endorsement of it was confirmed during an interview with the author, October 5, 2010.

between Collins and the others. Nonetheless, the publication of *Ray's a Laugh* brought instant success to Billingham, who was supporting himself at the time with money he earned stocking shelves at a grocery store.

More importantly, what Collins revealed in his letter is the way the book is structured. Said Collins:

Although I edited it as a novel, there is no “narrative” to the book. The boundaries between editing and authorship can become blurred in a book as unique as this (consider the sheer volume of photographs that it was distilled from, the significance of the choice, the sequencing and structure) and I realise that, to some extent, I was using his work as an extension of my own. Not a mistake to repeat.⁴⁴⁴

The end product that brought Billingham's snapshot photographs instant fame is attributed to the way the photographs are presented in the book. Much of it, as Collins recounted, shares the essential ethos of the *Gonzo* writer's tactics. (As explained in Chapter One, the fictional quality of a novel was what the *Gonzo* New Journalists adapted to their work.) The photographs themselves were already products of the merging of an author (Billingham) and his subjects (the family). What occurred with the book was another layer of blurring, this time “between editing and authorship.” *Ray's a Laugh* is the complex product of the influence of a picture editor on an author's raw materials, along with an added twist, a mistake by the publisher. The book entailed lengthy contemplation over the sequence of images. The realities depicted by the images, one by one, may represent a valid documentation of Billingham's family life, but the sequence in which they are presented was fabricated, leaving gaps for the viewer to fill with her or his imagination.

The three principal characters in *Ray's a Laugh* (**fig.4.40 ~fig.4.45**) are the artist's chain-smoking, obese, thunderous mother, Liz; his alcoholic, chronically unemployed father, Ray; and Jason, the artist's younger brother, who had lived for a time in foster care. Other figures who enter

⁴⁴⁴ Michael Collins, “Letters,” *Photoworks* (Autumn/Winter, November/April 2007-8): 6.

the book's frame, either in the company of the human actors or on their own, include cats, dogs, and pet mice. The backdrop of the drama displays assorted knickknacks, furniture, patterned wallpaper, and worn-out carpeting. Innumerable glasses or jugs containing a suspicious-looking liquid labeled *homebrew* occupy the gaps between more recognizable household objects. Meanwhile, the force of gravity continually affects the explosive family drama: gravy spills, crumbs drop, pets are thrown, wall decorations tilt, and Ray falls to the floor, collapsing into the chaos that dominates the family's apartment and, presumably, their lives.⁴⁴⁵

Billingham's position evolved into something akin to that of photojournalist W. Eugene Smith (1918 – 1978), who famously assumed the role of a fly-on-the-wall observer, unobtrusively recording whatever his subjects did. This position demands disciplined detachment from events, whether it entailed following a village physician on rounds, in Smith's case, or recording the photographer's own parents inhabiting their domestic space, in Bilingham's case. The profusion of details in Bilingham's photographs shows us the chaotic environment that produced him, yet the images fail to convey the frustration and pain he surely must have endured. He recorded his family members as he found them, appearing to accept them as they were, only minimally intruding into their daily lives, displaying no contempt for their destructive behavior.⁴⁴⁶

Critics responded to the originality of Bilingham's work, praising it as “vérité photography” of “a parlor drama of sorts.” They saw his transgressive tactics as a successful effort to convey realities of modern family dynamics. Jim Lewis noted:

⁴⁴⁵ Gilda Williams, “Richard Bilingham” *Art Monthly* 199 (September 1996): 32.

⁴⁴⁶ Jason Bilingham described his parents as follows:

“I know that our parents wasn't [sic] bad people. They wasn't [sic] bad people at all, but very simple. They would believe everything they were told.” (Jason Bilingham, interview by author, Cradley Heath, West Midlands, U.K., June 19, 2010).

Almost every rule of photography is badly broken: pictures are out of focus, over-exposed, printed with a grain so visible that the image beneath is almost completely obscured. Half of them are absurdly framed.⁴⁴⁷

Because he used a 35mm camera, and printed the negatives at his local drugstore, Billingham's color photographs are markedly grainier and rougher than images by contemporary color photographers such as Graham and Fox. At least in part, this is due to the use of a cheap camera and a low quality print service. While this was all Billingham could afford, it happened to suit the portrayal of his dysfunctional underclass family. The technical limitations of Billingham's camera served to deliver a sense of compression in his images due to its lack of control of depth of field. Throughout the book, various designs of curtains, fabrics, bed sheets, and wallpapers clash with each other, while the visual space is flattened by a shallow depth of field.

Billingham's raw record of his family's daily life quickly captured the notice of the art world. His work was collected by British advertising tycoon Charles Saatchi, and included in the controversial exhibition "Sensation" at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. Characterized as an unofficial group, Sensation's participants, the Young British Artists (YBA), made work that held shock and sensationalism in high esteem. The group included Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, and Jake and Dinos Chapman, amongst many others.⁴⁴⁸ The YBA were invested in exploring intellectually the world they inhabited. Generally, their tendency was to create media-friendly work that did not

⁴⁴⁷ Jim Lewis, "No Place Like Home: The Photographs of Richard Billingham," *Artforum International* (January 1997): 62.

⁴⁴⁸ "Young British Artists" was the title of a 1997 exhibition of works drawn from the collection of Charles Saatchi, but it was never an official group or movement. Although a few of the artists went to Goldsmiths' College, many of them did not know each other personally. For a discussion on YBA, see Sarah Kent, *Shark Infested Waters: The Saatchi Collection of British Art in the 90s* (London: Zwemmer, 1994); Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* (London: Verson, 1999); Matthew Collings, *Art Crazy Nations: The Post-Blimey! Art World* (Cambridge: 21 Publishing, 2001); and Collings, *Blimey!: From Bohemia to Britpop, the London Artworld from Francis Bacon to Damien Hirst* (Cambridge: 21 Publishing, 1997).

assume a moralistic stance.⁴⁴⁹ Billingham was not a member of the YBA circle of artists, but his unconventional presentation of a working-class family gave him license to join this controversial exhibition.

Some critics were troubled by Billingham's photography appearing at the Royal Academy due to its intrusive disclosure of the intimate lives of his parents. The novelist Nick Hornby reacted:

The first thing to think about is the rights and wrongs of these pictures, because anyone who has ever had parents of any kind, let alone parents like Billingham's, would wonder whether it were possible to justify snapping their moments of distress and plastering them all over the walls of the Royal Academy. ... the immediacy of his medium seems to expose people in a way that writing never can.⁴⁵⁰

Part of what troubled critics was that the viewers of these pictures were generally gallery goers, cultured people who had not likely experienced poverty or its attendant family dysfunction.

Visitors were confronted by larger-than-life images of Ray drinking homebrewed beer and the chaotic domestic life of Billingham's parents (**fig.4.46~fig.4.48**). As one critic observed, "there is the offense caused by images taken from a harsh reality which ... we might prefer to ignore. ... the onlookers probably felt relieved for not being like the Billinghams."⁴⁵¹

Billingham's parents seemed not to care how they looked: raw, unlovable, or ridiculous. They were evidently oblivious to the potentially exploitative potential of photography. To their eyes, reportedly, the pictures were simply a non-judgmental record of their reality, and they were reportedly quite happy to gain some attention, as if they were celebrities on the art

⁴⁴⁹ To a degree, their attitude evokes one associated with New Journalism, with its unconventional reportage, as exemplified by 1960's and 70's writers Tom Wolfe, Hunter S. Thompson, and Norman Mailer, as well as New Documents Photography as represented by Diane Arbus, Garry Winogrand, and others, who likewise emerged in the 1960s, and who eschewed a moral position in favor of a relatively unprocessed observation of their subjects.

⁴⁵⁰ Nick Hornby, "Life Goes On," *Modern Painters* (Winter 1997): 32.

Other critics raised similar ethical issues: Joko Moyes, "Son's Stark Portrait of a Family at War," *The Independent* (25 August 1997); Lynn Cochrane, "If It Were Your Mother and Father, Would You Put Their Pictures in Your First Book," *The Scotsman* (12 December 1998).

⁴⁵¹ Caroline Corbetta, "Billingham's TV Fishtank," *Flash Art (International)* (March – April 1999): 49.

circuit.⁴⁵² Their casualness, based in part in ignorance or lack of awareness about the significance of this public exposure, is evidence of their passive roles as subjects in the participant observer relationship. Exploiting the Billingham's naïveté, domestic and international media representatives flocked to Cradley Heath to document their lives, creating a form of reality TV show with unwitting participants.⁴⁵³ The individuals in *Ray's Laugh* became celebrities of a kind, recognized in the British art world and beyond. Though the family did not complain, Billingham's success came at the expense of their privacy.

Billingham's work soon gained recognition in the international art world. Roberta Smith, in her review of an exhibition at MoMA in 1996, compared Billingham to various antecedents, including: Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, Diane Arbus, Eric Fischl, and Nan Goldin.⁴⁵⁴ Billingham's parents, alcoholic Ray and obese Liz, were compared to "amateur actors in a low-budget film."⁴⁵⁵ Other critics interpreted Billingham's work as an expression of underclass desperation, while some critics warned that commentary construing Billingham's work as a form of class based expression could lapse into disdainful, bourgeois voyeurism. Billingham reacted, "I don't like it when they write stuff like that. It shows they're not looking hard enough. There's emotional meaning to them."⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵² Jason Billingham, the artist's younger brother, said in an interview:

"The thing is, Richard has been doing well for himself from where we've come from. It makes no difference to me [what viewers think]. ... It doesn't make any difference to me. Nobody is going to criticize where I come from." (Jason Billingham, interview by author, Cradley Heath, West Midlands, U.K., June 19, 2010.)

⁴⁵³ Jason Billingham told the author that a Dutch television crew approached them shortly after the publication of *Ray's a Laugh* and shot many hours of their home life. The promised copy of a tape was never given to the Billingham family. (Jason Billingham interview, June 19, 2010.)

⁴⁵⁴ Roberta Smith, "Around the World, Life and Artifice," *New York Times*, November 8, 1996, a review of "New Photography 12" at Museum of Modern Art (October 24, 1996 – February 4, 1997) New York, an annual series devoted to young and emerging photographers.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Cited in Jib Fowles, "What Stars Do for the Public," *Starstruck: Celebrity Performers and the American Public* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 164.

III. *Fishtank*, British Social Realism, and *An American Family*

Fishtank

Billingham's work reached beyond the gallery system with his film *Fishtank* (**fig.4.49**, **fig.4.50**), based on fifty hours of video footage shot over a period of two years. The film was commissioned by Artangel,⁴⁵⁷ and aired on BBC2 on December 13, 1998. The forty-eight minute video of Billingham's family offered a peek into their daily lives that proved even more vivid, raw, immediate, and crude than the still images his book.

Although *Fishtank* was presented within the artistic framework of the *Tx. Series*,⁴⁵⁸ viewers and critics alike reacted in confusion as to whether the depiction of the Billinghams in their domestic setting amounted to art. Critics reacted harshly, seeing in the work the "pornography of poverty" and branding Billingham as "a clinical exploiter of the miserable living conditions of his own family."⁴⁵⁹ His filmed portrayal of his underclass family drew far more fire than his still images, and evidently made many viewers uncomfortable. It is not difficult to imagine how a public access program airing the film without reference to his prior photography would make Billingham seem quite perverse to an uninitiated audience. The still images offered static views of the Billingham's daily life, allowing close inspection of details. But the viewers' understanding is limited by their lack of access to what the subjects are saying among themselves and in what tones of voice. *Fishtank*, however, through its recording of actual conversation, offered a fuller, more powerful sense of reality.

⁴⁵⁷ Based in London but working across Britain and beyond, since 1992 Artangel has commissioned and produced over seventy projects by contemporary artists.

⁴⁵⁸ Produced by John Wyver, who also produced a number of television series and films on British Contemporary Art, the *Tx. Series* was presented as part of television art programming.

⁴⁵⁹ Matthew Sweet, *The Independent on Sunday*; Caroline Corbetta, "Billingham's TV *Fishtank*," *Flash Art (International)* (March- April 1999): 45.

Fishtank opens with upside-down close-ups of Ray, apparently oblivious to Billingham's presence, drinking and lighting a cigarette. In the next scene, Jason tries to swat flies, while upbeat music plays. Here, the artist is somewhat engaged in the activity, conversing with his brother and encouraging him in his attempts to kill the flies. Meanwhile, Ray feeds fish while he drinks continuously. In time, the fish tank in the Billingham home becomes a metaphor for their confined living situation.⁴⁶⁰

The at once brutal and comical wretchedness of the Billinghams' lives plays out in domestic settings only—bedrooms, living room, kitchen, and foyer. This “comedy of abjection” provided a means of escape for Billingham, a means of “getting out of the fishbowl,” as it were. And though he was himself initially trapped inside this situation, eventually he was able to escape, by means of photography and film, while leaving his family of origin to carry on in their enmeshed confinement.

Following the fish tank scene, Liz's mind-numbing video game comes next, while the camera pans over Ray's presence peripherally. Preferring close camera work, Billingham also aims at Jason staring at the ceiling, allowing the viewers a voyeuristic view of his brother as the camera scans his body. In the background, the walls are decorated oddly with faux Venetian masks.

A scene follows in which Liz washes mussels, eats, and argues with Ray, giving viewers some insight into their relationship and the causes of their fights. Liz, who runs the household, says that she must pay “rent, electric, gas” bills. In another scene, she tells her husband to leave the apartment and live somewhere else, “preferably not on the same block.” As with his still images, Billingham's view of his family seems free of judgment, but the extreme close-up shots of, for instance, Liz's smoke-stained teeth may make an audience uneasy. We do not know

⁴⁶⁰ Jason referred to the rectangular shape of the flat in relation to the title of the video. (Jason Billingham, interview with author, Cradley Heath, U.K., June 19, 2010)

whether Billingham was drawn to such details or merely accustomed, and therefore effectively oblivious, to them.

In one scene, assorted toys, dolls, and pets—like the small snake that Liz allows to crawl over her body—occupy the screen. Liz’s apparent love of these objects and her video game playing, Jason’s fly killing, and Ray’s fish feeding and chronic drinking together represent the spiritual poverty and tedium of their daily lives. Each character has his or her own idle domestic pleasures and preoccupations. Billingham’s camera scans Liz applying cheap brown eye make-up with her finger, then blue eyeliner and orange lipstick. Discordant colors appear whenever Liz is present. She has a taste for colorful things, whether cosmetics, clothes, or her toys. After the make-up scene, we see Ray behaving cheerfully in the kitchen upon finding ten-percent alcohol beer in the fridge. A muted palette is reserved for Ray, like the brown color of the homebrewed beer he prefers, and his generally low-key responses to the simple activities of daily life. Throughout the video, Liz’s fierce persona contrasts with that of the soft-voiced, usually affable Ray. Billingham has access to a nighttime argument between husband and wife in their bedroom, which reveals Liz’s profanity and Ray’s mocking of Liz. Neither of them can escape the other.

Certain material that *Ray’s a Laugh* omitted, such as which programs the family watches on TV, is revealed in *Fishtank*, providing further clues to the influence on the family of mass media. Jason watches a TV program showing fish in the sea. Jason is more aware of the presence of the camera and his brother, so through Jason we are clued in to the presence of the artist. Jason is not a condition that Billingham has had to overcome, but is instead a fellow victim of the personal and class issues imposed upon the brothers by Liz, Ray and, in a sense, the British class system.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁶¹ Jason was placed in foster care when he was ten and Richard was sixteen. The foster parents did not allow them to see one another during the following six years, although Richard attempted to visit Jason. By the time Jason was old enough no longer to require mandated foster care, Billingham had returned home from college to photograph his father. The brothers have a close relationship now. (From author’s interview of Jason Billingham.)

The last part of *Fishtank* focuses on Ray sitting. We encountered a disturbingly close-up view of Ray's wrinkled skin while Liz, lying on the bed next to him, eats a sandwich. For a moment, there is relative peace between them. They embrace. Liz belches. Meanwhile, Jason plays a video game while rock and roll is heard in the background. *Fishtank* ends.

In *Fishtank*, Billingham generally aimed at body parts—eyes, mouths, heads—rather than taking in the overall appearance of the environment. Because it was shot with a camcorder, the grainy quality of the film, in tandem with the often uneven focus, is similar to the rawness of his photographs, which are often unfocused and aimed at the margins of scenes. He said, “The best footage was when I'd been just looking and not really thinking (trance-like) so that the camcorder was more an extension of the eye.”⁴⁶² Billingham's nearly invisible presence as a documenting observer in *Fishtank* was well noted by Michael Tarantino:

The *Fishtank* is an artificially constructed space, one which is built to keep the inhabitants inside and to facilitate the viewing of them from outside. Its primary feature is its transparency. . . . By the virtue of his presence, and through the facility of his camera, we become the voyeurs, watching with the understanding that the protagonists will not return the gaze. . . . By identifying with the artist, the son, we have the ideal situation. We can look at, and we can be a part of, what is happening in this space which is so closed off from ours.⁴⁶³

Furthermore, as the title of the film suggests, *Fishtank* displays domestic spectacles in a way that sets the characters apart from the viewers. As Paul Dave elaborated, it is “a secure containment that promises an unobstructed, exotic class spectacle” to viewers who are not part of it.⁴⁶⁴ Some critics viewed the film as reinforcing what Billingham's earlier photographs presented—a “lumpen

⁴⁶² Richard Billingham, “A Head, A Mouth, The Sky,” Richard Billingham on *Fishtank*, Artangel (April 2002). http://www.artangel.org.uk/projects/1998/fishtank/richard_billingham_on_fishtank/richard_billingham_on_fishtank (accessed on April 14, 2011).

⁴⁶³ Michael Tarantino, “Richard Billingham: a Short, by No Means Exhaustive, Glossary,” *Richard Billingham* (Birmingham: Ikon Gallery, 2000), 85.

⁴⁶⁴ Paul Dave, “Problem of England: Aesthetics of the Everyday,” *Visions of England: Class and Culture in Contemporary Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 131.

underclass” that appears to “subsist on welfare and home brew.” The domestic spectacle of “violence and degradation” in the Billingham household is static; their lives appear “without the possibility of change.”⁴⁶⁵ The exception, the one who changed, is the artist, whose personal qualities and determination allowed him to move outside the stasis of the spectacle.⁴⁶⁶

The binary distinction, drawn by critics such as Tarantino and Dave, between Ray and Liz and the middle- and upper-class audiences who voyeuristically view them as exotic objects, can verge on becoming a polemic against the very existence and expression of the underclass subject—the kind of reading warned against by Gilda Williams. The perception of such a division between the status of subjects and that of viewers has been a focus of critics analyzing *Fishtank*. Such a stark, presumed division between viewer and subject may potentially entail the risk discussed in the previous chapter, where critics defined AIDS victims as *them* while constituting the rest of society as a comfortable, safe zone of *us*. There exists an implicit assumption, that is, that viewers will be initiated into a world exotic to their eyes—whether it is a bohemian urban subculture or the realm of the British underclass. However, the position of viewers is surely more varied and complicated than the British critics of Billingham’s works have suggested, and some viewers may, after all, have an empathetic response to such images, however momentarily. Tarantino and Dave falsely assume that the art public is a homogenous group, ignoring the plurality of personal experiences and sensibilities that must be considered.

⁴⁶⁵ Stallabrass, 252 -253.

⁴⁶⁶ Billingham today lives a comfortable middle-class life in Wales with a domestic partner (a social worker), two children, and a dog, and he holds a teaching position at the University of Gloucestershire. His younger brother, Jason, works as a construction worker, and feels his chances for improving his situation are slim.

British Social Realism

The drab urban surroundings of Billingham's subject matter—the underclass depicted in *Fishtank*—provide ample content to discuss this work in the context of the tradition of British social realism in cinema and television.⁴⁶⁷ Key filmmakers of this genre were Chris Bernard, Stephen Frears, Mike Leigh, and Ken Loach. During the 1980s, the theme of family dysfunction, or more specifically, the absence of family, was portrayed in such films as *Made in Britain* (1982) and *Rhino* (1988), while interpersonal relationships and expressions of sexuality were played out in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985); *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987); *Rita, Sue and Bob, Too* (1986); *Career Girls* (1997); *Meantime* (1983); *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985), and *Scrubbers* (1983). The theme of youth unemployment was represented in *Looks and Smiles* (1981), *Made in Britain*, and *Letter to Brezhnev*.⁴⁶⁸ The most frequently cited social realist film from the 1990s is Gary Oldman's *Nil By Mouth* (1997), while films like *The War Zone* (1999), *My Name is Joe* (1998), *Brassed Off* (1996), *TwentyFourSeven* (1998), and *The Full Monty* (1997) have been discussed as well. Social realist films in Britain during the 1990s shifted to more personal concerns revealing the distinctive realistic styles of each director, often addressing poverty, substance abuse, violence, and the conflicts inherent in inter-gender relationships.⁴⁶⁹

Mainstream British cinema may have neglected the subject of the working class, but independent filmmakers, who had more freedom in their choice of subjects, assumed the task. Using local actors and producing realistic renderings of living conditions are strategies characteristic of the social realist films that emerged in the 1950s. The loss of cinema audiences in the 1980s led social realist filmmakers to seek exposure on television. Channel 4 became a

⁴⁶⁷ For discussion of British Social Realism in film, see Samantha Lay, *British Social Realism: From Documentary to Brit Grit* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2002).

⁴⁶⁸ Samantha Lay, *British Social Realism*, 82-86.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 99-115.

major exhibitor of such films. *Fishtank* was shown first on television. Although the film lacks a definite narrative, Billingham's approach toward his subjects seems to owe a debt to the tradition of social realist filmmaking in Britain. By channeling his invasiveness through the handheld camcorder, freeing him from the intrusive presence of a crew, and by using his family members as actors, Billingham achieved the maximum extent of realistic reportage.

The wretched lives of Billingham's family as depicted in *Ray's a Laugh* and *Fishtank* may be compared to the way the characters live in *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996), a film that marketed underclass Scottish heroin addicts as living a fashionable lifestyle. In a photograph in *Ray's a Laugh*, Ray, looking despondent and feeble, is crammed into the narrow space of his bathroom, sitting helplessly on the floor between the door and a toilet whose broken cover bears traces of feces (**fig.4.40**). *Trainspotting's* protagonist, Renton (Ewan McGregor) (**fig. 4.52**), dives into "The Worst Toilet in Scotland" in pursuit of two opium suppositories. Once inside the sewage system, Renton discovers a paradisaical lagoon where he retrieves the suppositories as if they were pearls. As Murray Smith put it, this scene is typical of the way the film seeks to transform "the most impoverished real existence into one of sensual richness."⁴⁷⁰ The entrapment of working-class Scottish youth as a "garbage culture," however, is relieved by "an insistence that destitution need not stifle all imagination and will."⁴⁷¹

The grotesquely soiled toilets in question are situated in different places, one in the domestic space of an elderly alcoholic, the other in the larger, working-class world of the betting shop, but they are kindred symbols.⁴⁷² In Billingham's work, the non-fabricated reality of his family's entrapment within the domestic terrain created by the social conditions endemic in a "lumpen

⁴⁷⁰ Murray Smith, *Trainspotting* (London: BFI, 2002), 79.

⁴⁷¹ Smith, 33.

⁴⁷² Paul Dave, *Visions of England*, 91.

underclass” dependent on government subsidies feels intimate, even personal. In the case of the working-class youths of *Trainspotting*, we see a peer group hanging out in settings that represent the limited scope that confines the possibilities of their lives to society’s toilet, though not without some imagined escape.

Ray’s alcohol abuse was a major element in Billingham’s work. Alcohol is a disinhibiting drug, so there was a lot of acting out in the household, and alcohol abuse was the cause of many fights between Ray and Liz. Jason recalled:

He (Ray) was alcoholic since as long as I can remember. It was a way of escaping. Looking back, I wouldn’t encourage him to stop drinking alcohol. When he was 55 years old, he used to love drinking absolutely and he would drink all day. He would look forward to it all day. In his later years, he got drunk all day. Tons of beers, every single night.⁴⁷³

When Billingham turned to photographing the new family he formed with his girlfriend and their children, he remarked on the difference from his early work with the parents: “There is no alcohol in it.”⁴⁷⁴

Gritty dramas about unemployment and raw tales of families spiraling out of control due to alcohol and drug abuse were nothing new in the portrayal of the underclass. The British social realist films of the 1980s and 1990s offer such examples as *Rita, Sue, and Bob Too* (1986), *Ladybird Ladybird* (1994), *Nil By Mouth* (1997), and *My Name is Joe* (1998). Billingham’s depictions of his family could be said to symbolize the changing roles of the British working class, from an emphasis on production to a focus on self-indulgent consumption, as represented by Ray’s drinking, as well as by the struggles of other non-working underclass male characters in *Nil By Mouth* and *My Name is Joe*.⁴⁷⁵ As Paul Dave puts it, “The only difference between the working

⁴⁷³ Jason Billingham, interview.

⁴⁷⁴ Richard Billingham, interview by the author, London, U.K. June 24, 2008.

⁴⁷⁵ Lay, *British Social Realism*, 14.

class that works and the one which has stopped working is that the (alcohol) consumption of the latter achieves an intensity absent in the experience of the former.”⁴⁷⁶

By making the domestic space in *Fishtank* central to the way its characters' lives are explored, the film restricts their apparent sphere of action to home and family. This quality of Billingham's work may be seen in a trend that became pronounced in the realist films of the 1980s and 1990s, which also narrowed the social space in which the working class is increasingly identified in domestic and familial terms.⁴⁷⁷ The drunken, unemployed father, Ray, who cannot or would not go elsewhere, occupies the domestic space, representing the diminished reality of underclass life, and underlines a shifting of gender roles. Typically, an unemployed stay-at-home male can dominate domestic space, confining women to the margins, as in Gary Oldman's *Nil By Mouth* (1997), a semi-autobiographical tale of a working-class family doomed to repeat the cycles of abuse and violence over generations.⁴⁷⁸ In contrast, Billingham's *Fishtank* devotes equal attention to the details of Liz's activities as to those of the alcoholic father. The tensions and conflicts between the spouses are portrayed comically, although at times their emotional problems seem serious. However, Billingham provides no narrative guide to the issues that arise; he merely offers apparently random samples of everyday moments in their lives. The repetitive cycles of the condition that the protagonists cannot escape in British Social Realist films are also represented in *Fishtank*. Similarly, the comedy of abjection enacted by the parents in Billingham's video suggests the impossibility of escape.

⁴⁷⁶ Dave, *Visions of England*, 91.

⁴⁷⁷ John Hill, "From the New Wave to 'Brit-Grit': Continuity and Difference in Working-Class Realism," *British Cinema, Past and Present*, ed. Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 249-260.

⁴⁷⁸ Hill, *British Cinema, Past and Present*, 252.

An American Family

Billingham's *Fishtank*, along with several other videos that feature his family members as actors,⁴⁷⁹ lies somewhere between unscripted documentary and directorial film, harking back to the tradition of reality television shows. The best-known example of the genre is *An American Family (The Louds)* (fig.4.53), a series of films made by a crew of participant observers who spent whole days in the Loud home, an upper-middle-class family whose lifestyle reverberated with images of families seen in situation comedies such as *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-63) and *The Adventures of Ozzie & Harriet* (1952-63). *An American Family* was filmed in 1971 and presented in twelve hour-long episodes that were broadcast by PBS in the United States in 1973. The crew followed the parents, Bill and Pat Loud, and their five children, ages fourteen to twenty, in their home in Santa Barbara, California for seven months between May and December, 1971, producing three-hundred hours of 16-millimeter footage. Applying a voyeuristic approach to the unscripted real life of the family, the film pioneered the genre of reality television.

On a usual filming day, the sound recordist, Susan Raymond, and the cinematographer, Alan Raymond, were on location from morning until evening (fig.4.54). The completed episodes represented only a small portion of the total footage acquired. In keeping with the film's observational style, the crew tried to downplay their activities. Susan Raymond recalled "we really believed rigidly in 'fly on the wall' observation. ... It's a very Zen exercise to try to diminish your presence as best you can. We were totally dedicated to that for every single day of the shooting."⁴⁸⁰ However, during the hours that the camera was not rolling, a friendship

⁴⁷⁹ Besides *FishTank* (1998), Billingham made many other videos, such as *Ray in Bed* (1999), *Tony Smoking Backwards* (1998), *Liz Smoking* (1998), *Playstation* (1999), and *Bradford Trip* (1996).

⁴⁸⁰ Jeffrey Ruoff, "Introduction," *An American Family: A Televised Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xxi.

developed between the Loud family and the Raymonds, and Pat was sorry to see them to go when filming ended.⁴⁸¹

When the program was broadcast, reactions varied. Anthropologist Margaret Mead proclaimed the show “as new and significant as the invention of drama or the novel,”⁴⁸² and the philosopher Jean Baudrillard described the show as a symptom of our altered relationship with reality, characterized by “dissolution of TV in life, dissolution of life in TV.”⁴⁸³ Controversy surrounded the notion that the presence of a camera in the family environment might have influenced the “performances” of each family member, thus altering the accuracy of the reality presented. The media’s response tended to focus on the family members, analyzing them as if they were next-door neighbors, often characterizing the Louds as exhibitionistic. Critics failed to recognize the groundbreaking filmmaking aspects of *An American Family*, seeing the series merely as a conduit for the melodrama played out before home viewers’ eyes.⁴⁸⁴ Instead, they used the opportunity to criticize the medium of television itself, calling for a reassessment of the “basic premises of observational cinema.”⁴⁸⁵

The parents engaged in a marital separation before the cameras. The eldest son, Lance Loud, spoke openly of his homosexuality. The show brought a kind of celebrity status to the family, making them famous for being themselves. This voyeuristic view into the unscripted life of the Louds, along with the celebrity status the show brought to the family, was based on a Warholian way of filmmaking. Interestingly, the gay eldest son Lance became a teenage pen pal of Andy Warhol. Producer Craig Gilbert, who had conceived the program and oversaw its

⁴⁸¹ Pat Loud with Nora Johnson, *Pat Loud: A Woman’s Story* (New York: Bantam, 1974), 123.

⁴⁸² Margaret Mead, “As Significant as the Invention of Drama or the Novel,” *TV Guide*, January 6, 1973, A61.

⁴⁸³ Re-quoted in Dennis Lim, “Reality TV Originals, in Drama’s Lens,” *New York Times* (April 17, 2011, AR22).

⁴⁸⁴ Ruoff, xxiv-xxv.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid*, xxv.

editing said, “Going in there with a camera, of course it affected the family, and of course it affected those of us who made it. But no one can know for sure exactly how.”⁴⁸⁶

The depiction of the Louds as materially wealthy, living in a spacious suburban house in California in the early 70s, and as an attractive looking, highly functional family—if not one without problems, as the marital relationship declined—contrasted with the documentary images of the Billingham family in *Fishtank*, who lived an impoverished and marginally functional existence in a cramped council flat in the West Midlands in the mid 1990s. Yet, the two films share many similarities in the exposure of the families’ privacy and a style of filmmaking that was at once, paradoxically, involved and detached toward its subjects. In the way that the Loud family became celebrities, the Billingham family became a familiar presence to those who saw *Fishtank* or who visited Billingham’s exhibitions. Audiences identified the Billinghams by their first names, as if they were intimates of the family. While Craig Gilbert admitted that the presence of the camera had an impact on the Loud family, as well as on the film crew, such an influence is more of an unknown in Billingham’s case, where his parents were already quite familiar with the presence of their son’s camcorder and still camera.

IV. Photographer as Dissociated Observer

Billingham’s insider position brought more advantages to portraying the reality of his own family than did Craig Gilbert’s approach to *An American Family*. One reason for Billingham’s

⁴⁸⁶ Quoted in Lim, *New York Times*.

An American Family has been revisited several times. Recently, a dramatic film about the making of *An American Family* was presented on HBO under the title *Cinema Verite*. Subsequent to *An American Family* (1971), the series continued with *An American Family Revisited* (1983), and *Death in an American Family* (2001), which featured Lance Loud’s death from AIDS.

parents seeming unawareness of his actions was that they were accustomed to their son's habitual art making around the house. As Jason Billingham recalled:

Richard was always drawing, sketching. And my parents got used to him doing that around them, so they didn't really care whether he was photographing them or not.⁴⁸⁷

However, for many critics, Billingham's approach was that of a cold exploiter of the pitiful living conditions of his underclass family. Some noted that he never included himself in the pictures. As Nancy Roth said:

Billingham seems unable, for all his valiant effort, to assert his presence in this group. It is not that he is invisible. Quite often, someone will address the camera—questioning, laughing or bored by turns. But, there is no real contact, no exchange. ... The Billinghams' indifference to the camera—and inevitably to the photographer behind it—is chilling.⁴⁸⁸

His objectification of the family in the public realm troubled gallery visitors, leading to speculation over Billingham's motives. Jim Lewis wrote in 1997:

It seems Billingham simply sat in his living room and waited, camera in hand, for something to happen, and while it says something about his parents' oblivion that they act like he's not there, it says something even stronger about his own self-imposed emotional distance. ... Still, one might notice that Billingham chose to photograph the old man and then publish the photograph, rather than immediately picking him up and cleaning him off. One might ask why he chose to do that, and what it implies.⁴⁸⁹

Billingham's apparent emotional coolness and remove determined the character of his visual mode of participant observation, for which I borrow a term from psychology.

Dissociation is a mental process by which we remove ourselves from the stressful effects of a situation without removing ourselves from reality. In its mildest and most benign form, we might be lost in thought while driving home from work: we have dealt with the boredom of

⁴⁸⁷ Jason Billingham, interview with author, Cradley Heath, West Midlands, June 19, 2010.

⁴⁸⁸ Nancy Roth, "Closeness as Metaphor," *Afterimage* 28, no.2 (2000): 14.

⁴⁸⁹ Lewis, "No Place Like Home," 67.

routine while maintaining sufficient connection to reality to reach our destination without crashing the car. In more stressful situations, a firefighter will enter a burning building despite the obvious threat to his wellbeing; a trauma surgeon will repair a devastating gun shot wound to a vulnerable child, temporarily setting aside his pity and horror in order to perform his lifesaving task. It is a matter of compartmentalization, not indifference. Dissociation becomes *disorder* only when it leads to dysfunction: amnesia that extends beyond the memory of a traumatic event or somatic conversion that results in functional blindness or paralysis.⁴⁹⁰

One might be tempted to psychoanalyze the deeper childhood roots of Billingham's approach to his family—after all, he could have become a drug addict, or just run away—but to do so lies beyond the purview of this dissertation. We can observe that he became the highest functioning member of his family, creating a successful career and, by all accounts, a stable family home of his own, but the use of the term *dissociation* here is meant only to convey how he operated with apparent objectivity within an environment that most viewers would find repugnant, consuming, and, almost certainly, overwhelming.

Billingham developed the habit of drawing and reading in his room, withdrawing into imagined worlds. Nurturing a childhood dream of becoming an artist, he did not invite friends to his home; he developed a quiet, reserved, reticent personality. Billingham's brother Jason recalled:

He kept to himself. No friends. He couldn't invite people back to the house because you know the council flat was dirty. My parents didn't know what the house was like. If someone gives you a house and a hundred pounds a week, you pay the bills with 30 pounds and they would live like a king for a day and live poor for the rest of the week. So Richard was really poor and he didn't bring his friends back. He educated himself in his bedroom. In the bedroom all by himself.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁹⁰ For more details on dissociation, see Deborah Bray Haddock, *The Dissociative Identity Disorder Sourcebook* (New York: Contemporary Books, 2001).

⁴⁹¹ Jason Billingham, interview.

One of Billingham's Sunderland classmates described him as "odd" for not being part of a social group at school. Badly dressed, socially awkward, Billingham was a loner. Unlike his fellow middle-class students, Billingham was from a psychologically damaged, culturally and educationally deprived background.⁴⁹² Thus, Billingham pursued a way of life that separated him from his chaotic underclass household.

When Billingham was sixteen-years-old and his younger brother Jason was ten, Jason was placed in the care of foster parents who were reportedly more interested in receiving income from the social welfare office than in rearing Jason. While in foster care, Jason received meals and clothing, though not much freedom was allowed, not even visits with his family. The foster parents obstructed contact with his older brother, Richard. For the next six years, Jason was out of contact with his own family.⁴⁹³ Although Richard Billingham did not explicitly express his pain over the separation from his brother, it is credible that poverty, dysfunctional parents, and severed contact with his own brother may have traumatized the teenage Billingham, who sought a haven in isolating himself from family and peers.

The separation Billingham maintained between himself as observer and his family as his subjects is in itself informative. His withdrawal from the family serves to emphasize the deviancy of their behavior, as does his holding himself apart from the squalor he recorded. His non-normative camera work and seemingly dispassionate position highlighted this separateness.

⁴⁹² Collins, interview.

⁴⁹³ Jason recalled this experience with pain: "They prevented me from seeing my dad, my grand dad. They would feed me with the information, which I would feed the social services, telling the social worker that you don't want to see your nan, things like that. ... You know, once, Richard came to see me in the foster home. When he left, the foster parents said, "we don't want him to be around here any more." I was trying to keep these people happy, so I said, "I won't." ... So I didn't know Richard was trying to see me. He phoned and said, "I want to see Jason." But, that information was never passed to me, because I said it one time that I won't see him again. I didn't know he phoned and tried to see me. I thought that he forgot about me." (Jason Billingham, interview.)

Billingham could experience actual abjectness while simultaneously holding onto the illusion that he, even though he was right there in the room, was somehow apart from it.

The trajectory of Billingham's career as an educated art student aware of his potential to rise above his upbringing, sharply contrasts with the lives of Ray, Liz, and Jason, whose unrelieved underclass environment trapped them, leading ultimately to a disparate relationship between a superior observer and inferior victims. His early participant position, acquired over years as a member of the family, shifted over time to a position of dissociated observer, granting him the advantage of recording scenes from the perspective of a sociological insider who could remain psychologically removed. Historically, another example of an artist distancing himself emotionally from a stressful family situation while remaining in the reality of the moment may be found in a well-known episode from the life of French Impressionist Claude Monet. Sitting at the deathbed of his young wife Camille Doncieux (who appears in many of his canvases) as she drew her last breaths, Monet was mesmerized by the spectacle of the dying beauty. He recalled years later in conversation with his friend Georges Clemenceau: "I caught myself watching her tragic forehead, almost mechanically observing the sequence of colors which death was imposing on her rigid face."⁴⁹⁴ His emotional detachment from the traumatic event suggests again the psychological phenomenon that is now called *dissociation*. His fascination compelled Monet to take action, rushing to record what he saw in quick, feathery brush strokes, filling the canvas with blue, yellow, grey, rose, and white pigments. This painting, *Camille Monet on Her Deathbed* (1879) (**fig.4.55**) displays Monet's compulsion to paint at that moment, prompted by his need to capture her, to defy death by preserving her image, and by his need to numb himself against the pain of imminent and horrifying loss.

⁴⁹⁴ Quoted in Ruth Butler, *Hidden in the Shadow of the Master: The Model-Wives of Cézanne, Monet, and Rodin* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 201.

Billingham assumed a comparable approach to domestic affairs in his parents' apartment. There is a sense of morbidity attached to his recording the self-destructive lives of his parents. Bingham's emotional detachment and unobtrusive observational mode form the basis of his attitude toward his picture making. Bingham's dissociation may also be seen as a cultural defense mechanism, deployed to help him rise beyond his living conditions, whereas the class system underlying British society restricts opportunities to move beyond the station of one's birth.

Later, Bingham reflected on his resentment toward his parents for the poverty he experienced while in their care and for the separation from his brother. He also said:

I don't owe them anything and I didn't think they would be shown in a gallery at that stage anyway. I thought they would be in a book and it would have a specialist market and not really a wide audience.⁴⁹⁵

Earlier, Bingham told another interviewer:

Photography is about recognition and you recognize what he [the photographer] recognizes through his viewfinder ... Yes, certainly, trying to recognize my family's situation and mine—my having gone into education and becoming, in a way, more distanced has been central.⁴⁹⁶

As Bingham himself understood and acknowledged this position of becoming "more distanced," his emotional and psychological removal from his subject afforded him a kind of clarity of vision that undercut the potential impact of the moment. Such stillness amidst chaos, emblematic of the defense mechanism of dissociation, describes Bingham's distinct position.

Traditionally, family photographs taken by members of one's own family tend to fall into the integrated mode of photography due to the evident emotional closeness of those involved. However, as surveyed in the previous section on family photography in Britain, the diversity of

⁴⁹⁵ Gordon MacDonald, "Interview with Richard Bingham," *Photoworks* (Spring/Summer, May/October 2007): 21.

⁴⁹⁶ James Lingwood, "Family Values," *Tate: the Art Magazine* (Summer 1998): 56

family structures and values infiltrated the field of art photography, so naturally some photographers reflected non-normative family structures that included hints of chaotic or hidden dramas, especially amongst working-class families. Billingham pushed the squalid drama further through the use of his insider position. In *Ray's a Laugh*, Liz and Ray appear to get into fights often (you can almost *hear* Liz roar in these photos). Judging from their wearing different clothing in many shots, these fights were frequent events at the Billingham household. We are confronted with scenes of domestic affairs as if we are reading a personal diary, and, just as when reading a diary, we may feel too embarrassed or repulsed to continue.

Billingham's consideration of the formal elements in his camera frame modified his position in the family to that of a removed observer whose interest lies in capturing the perfect composition of accidental scenes as they unfold before his eyes. His unmediated access to the domestic world of his parents and brother gave him the opportunity to render a realistic impression of the household, conveying to the viewer the lived experience through the distinct rhythm of everyday life. Colors, shapes, and spatial relationships are captured. In *Fishtank*, we hear intonation, inflection, and accent that give each a character that distinguishes him or her from others. The presence of an "on the scene" camera in Billingham's household delivers a vivid form of present-tense representation, while the fixity of Billingham's camera suggests his commitment to the immediate, the intimate, and the personal, comparable to that of a participant observer.

While Billingham constructed a particular image of his family, that family might also be said to represent the "typicality" of a lower-class family living in the Black Country of the West Midlands of England in the 1990s. The sequences of *Ray's a Laugh* and *Fishtank* present individual moments in the life of each protagonist, but we sense there are also recurrent themes,

such as the arguments between Ray and Liz, or, for that matter, the recurrent patterns of their interior spaces. The repetitive aspect of these patterns strengthens the “reality effect,” anchoring Billingham’s work to the factuality of a time and place that revolves around the home, which Ray almost never leaves, which Liz occupies fully when she is present, and from which Jason comes and goes at whim.

Billingham’s nonjudgmental, participatory mode of observation of his own family offers an unobstructed view of his subjects. The resultant images, consisting of clashing patterns and extreme snapshot aesthetics, undercut some of the stronger criticism of Billingham’s work. It is not Billingham who views the inappropriate conduct of his family—his drunken father and monster-like mother—with contempt, but the privileged viewers (invoked by critics, as discussed earlier) who may bring their personal judgment to bear.

Billingham’s delivery of a form of “truth” through an unobstructed and non-interventional presence is close to the “observational mode” that Bill Nichols framed as characteristic of documentary films in his groundbreaking work, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*.⁴⁹⁷ Erik Barnouw characterized the difference in modes between so-called direct cinema or observational filmmaking and Jean Rouch’s style of cinema vérité as follows:

The direct cinema documentarist took his camera to a situation of tension and waited hopefully for a crisis; the Rouch version of cinema vérité tried to precipitate one. The direct cinema artist aspired to invisibility; the Rouch cinema vérité artist was often an avowed participant. The direct cinema artist played the role of uninvolved bystander; the cinema vérité artist espoused that of provocateur.⁴⁹⁸

As Nichols posits, the observation mode emphasizes the nonintervention of the artist.

More than films in the expository, interactive, or reflective mode, these films surrender control

⁴⁹⁷ Bill Nichols, “Documentary Modes of Representation,” *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 32-75.

⁴⁹⁸ Erik Barnouw, *Docuemntary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 254-55; quoted in Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 39.

over events as they occur, although observational films often rely upon editing to convey the impression of lived or real time.⁴⁹⁹ The observational film assumes a paradigm around the exhaustive (and often exhausting) depiction of the everyday, each cut or edit serving mainly to sustain the spatial and temporal continuity of observation rather than the logical continuity of an argument or case.⁵⁰⁰

Viewers of Billingham's photographs and videos may imagine a screen or frame being pulled away to reveal a direct encounter with the subjects. One element of the viewer's engagement, then, is less an imaginative identification with character or situation than it is a practical test of subjective responses, which equalizes the viewer as an eligible participant in, as well as observer of, the world represented in such an observational work. This testing depends on the success of the realism conveyed, a sense of the historical world as we experience it. The effect hinges on the presence of the filmmaker or authoring agent as to what might be termed an absent presence whose effect is noted (it provides the sounds and images before us), but whose physical presence remains unseen and unacknowledged. This documentary mode leads to the position of an ideal observer, moving among people and places to discover revealing views.⁵⁰¹ An unacknowledged, non-responsive presence clears the way for the dynamics of empathetic identification by the viewer, whether as poetic immersion or voyeuristic pleasure.⁵⁰²

⁴⁹⁹ Nichols, 38.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, 44.

Chapter Five

Reflexive/Performative Mode: Nobuyoshi Araki

I. The Rise of Personal Photography in Postwar Japan

The final case study of this dissertation examines the work of Nobuyoshi Araki. One of the most influential photographers in Japan, his status is rivaled perhaps only by Daido Moriyama. Known today by the mononym Araki, he may be the world's most prolific art photographer, having published more than four hundred books to date, as well as mounting countless public exhibitions of his photographs. This prodigious body of work includes not only photography books, but also extends to personal essays, interviews, and diaries, including a revealing report on his personal sex life (whether the report is accurate is impossible to verify). Araki is known principally for personal photography in which he discloses the intimate details of his life. Subjects include his wife, his cat, and his relationships with women, the streets of Tokyo, food, and flowers. In the West, he is best known for provocative sexually charged images of kimono-clad women, sometimes in bondage, often revealing their genitalia. Araki's lengthy and prolific career affords ample material for research, despite his having been recognized in the West only since the early 1990s.

Chapter Five concentrates on several canonical projects in which Araki employed conspicuous participant observer methods worthy of consideration as constituting a seminal approach. This chapter will focus on Araki's early formative works that established his importance in Japanese photography, as well as on those subsequent projects that have been most influential. It is noteworthy that Araki's status in Japan is that of a popular celebrity or cult figure. The "Araki Industry" is prodigious, and any disparaging criticism, including that of

feminists, within Japan has been minimal, with the notable exception of a recent article by Hiroko Hagiwara.⁵⁰³

Before discussing the evolution of Araki's work, it is useful to examine the development of the photography community in postwar Japan. As presented in Chapter One, there were several significant factors that influenced the Japanese photography world during the 1960s and 1970s, when Araki was developing his work. In particular, *Kompōra* photography emerged as a direct result of the influence of Social Landscape photography in the United States. *Kompōra* (the name is an elided pronunciation of the English word "contemporary," derived from the Japanese transliteration of the title of the December 1966 exhibition *Contemporary Photographers: Toward a Social Landscape*, shown at the George Eastman House International Museum of Photography in Rochester, New York)⁵⁰⁴ was fully established by the late 1960s.⁵⁰⁵ Always eager to learn what was happening in the West, Japanese photographers followed the latest trends in international art and photography magazines such as *Camera Minichi* and *Asahi Camera*. Books such as William Klein's 1957 *New York* and Ed van der Elsken's 1968 *Sweet Life* had a significant impact on young Japanese photographers. *Provoke*, a short-lived Japanese avant-garde photography journal, encouraged a rebellious spirit and iconoclastic practice within the photography community.

By the mid-1960s, Japan had seen rapid economic growth, largely having overcome the devastation of the Second World War. The success of the Tokyo Olympics in 1965 heralded

⁵⁰³ Hiroko Hagiwara, "Representation, Distribution, and Formation of Sexuality in the Photography of Araki Nobuyoshi," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 1 (Spring 2010): 231–52. I will discuss Hagiwara's ideas later in the chapter (see the section, *Tokyo Lucky Hole*).

⁵⁰⁴ Iizawa, "The Evolution of Postwar Photography," *The History of Japanese Photography*, 221.

⁵⁰⁵ For the origin of the term "Kompōra," its history and implications, see Yoshiaki Kai, "Sunappu and the Everyday," in "Street Snap: Photography in Japan, 1950 – 1990" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2012), 202-28.

advances in cultural and social development. The student led political movement of 1968 energized leftist critics and intellectuals, and gave rise to a culture of anti-establishment sentiment, manifested in the formation of underground rock-and-roll venues and other expressions of a desire for a less restrictive society.

Economic growth in postwar Japan allowed ordinary people to own cameras for the first time. Mass culture had fully developed and the camera had become a part of people's everyday lives, invigorating the photography scene. The democratization of the medium led to the emergence of amateur photography influenced by popular professional art photographers, such as Ihei Kimura, Ken Domon, Shomei Tomatsu, and Daido Moriyama. The status of professional photographers sometimes rose to the level of popular celebrities who appeared on television shows. Professional photographers needed a new language to differentiate their work from snapshots made by ordinary people as amateur photographers had become familiar with the concepts of candid photography associated with Ken Domon and the *sunappu* (snapshot) tradition.⁵⁰⁶

As a means of expressing their inner selves, photographers of this period looked more deeply into subjects that lent themselves to personal vision. Many Japanese photographers undertook quests for personal identity, some by traveling across regions of Japan, others by exploring subjects within close range of their daily lives.

In the meantime, the rise of the self as a subject of artistic consideration in Japan coincided with international trends. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Japan was no longer an isolated country, as it rose to global interconnectedness through its burgeoning economic

⁵⁰⁶ Ken Domon promoted candid photography. The term *Sunappu* originated from the English word "Snapshot." According to Yoshiaki Kai, the concept of *sunappu* developed along with the advancement of technology of photographic apparatuses. The development of the *sunappu* tradition was closely related to the emergence of amateur photography, which was characterized by technical and aesthetic elements and banality. [Kai, 203.]

growth. Scholarly interest in the Western idea of autobiography arose, although autobiography had not been recognized previously as a distinct genre or serious area of literature in Japan. The period also saw a sharp rise in confessional films and videos.⁵⁰⁷

The shift in traditional values in the West ushered in by the second wave of feminism in the early 1970s coincided with the emergence of a politics of everyday life with its emphasis on individual identity. The elevation of subjectivity was increasingly framed as central to personal satisfaction. The growing democratization of media—particularly literature and video—gave ordinary people more ways of producing expressive work. At the core of autobiography was the concept that one could discover truth residing in the self. But factual history, so critical to legitimate biography, did not necessarily carry the same weight in the new autobiographical forms.⁵⁰⁸ The author, protagonist, and narrator were the same person, and he or she might depend on personal memories in the pursuit of truth, an unreliable method for presenting facts. In time, “autobiography” came to be viewed as “self-portraiture.”⁵⁰⁹ As the writer or artist examined the self with retrospective awareness, the self became the object—“Je est un autre,” in the words of Rimbaud—correlating with the Lacanian model of subjectivity, as scholars at the time recognized.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁷ Terms like “self-biography” were first used in the late 18th century in Europe, but the genre was not considered legitimate until much later. For the subject of autobiography, I found the following references useful: Robert Folkenflik, ed. *The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self-Representation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993); James Olney ed., *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980); Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. Paul John Eakin, tran. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson, eds., *Getting A Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). For the subject of confessional videos and films, see Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

⁵⁰⁸ For instance, the autobiography of Edmund Backhouse (1873-1944), known from the account of Hugh Trevor-Roper (1914-2003) in his biography *The Hermit of Peking* (1977), is revealing of its subject’s sexual fantasies or lies, presented as if authentic. Folkenflik, *The Culture of Autobiography*, 14.

⁵⁰⁹ William L. Howarth, “Some Principle of Autobiography,” *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, 84-114.

⁵¹⁰ Robert Folkenflik, “The Self as Other,” *The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self-Presentation*, 215-236.

By the early 1970s, autobiography was flourishing in Japan. In 1972, Kiyoshi Suzuki (1943 – 2000) self published *Nagare no uta (Soul and Soul)*.⁵¹¹ Known for its strongly autobiographical qualities, the book displayed a sequence of disparate black-and-white images with enigmatic and somewhat mystical aspects (**fig.5.1**). Objects such as an umbrella or a mask obscure the identities of the individuals in the photos, and, while the emotional overtones may seem at times sentimental or nostalgic, the viewer cannot discern the recording of any specific event or person.

Self and Others (1971) by Shigeo Gocho (1945 – 1983) is another signal example.⁵¹² It projects the artist's identity through those of others: sixty portraits of family, friends, and passersby. The book includes one actual self-portrait, although it lacks dramatic composition (**fig.5.5**). Gocho shot mostly frontal views with his subjects centered in the frames.⁵¹³ Borrowing the formal device of a conventional family album, Gocho's images give the illusion that they commemorate a family occasion, for example, the pregnancy in **fig.5.2**. But the images do not celebrate specific events. Rather, they seem to portray the general wellbeing of a nuclear family or an individual sitter. By focusing on the normalcy of families, Gocho emphasized the distance between himself and his subjects, as he had suffered from a severe physical disability since childhood. Through his portrayal of various types of families, Gocho may have been expressing what his mentor Kiyoji Otsuji called "the heterogeneous self and another existence."⁵¹⁴

⁵¹¹ The literal translation of "Nagare no uta" from the Japanese is "Song of Currents" or "A Floating Song."

⁵¹² Shigeo Gocho, *Self and Others* (Tokyo: Hakuakan, 1977).

⁵¹³ Yoshiaki Kai points out the differences between typical family snapshots and Gocho's project *Self and Others*. Whereas family snapshots commemorate particular moments and events, Gocho's works do not. He borrowed his formal language as a visual device to explore "the existential distance between himself and his subject." (Yoshiaki Kai, "Snappu and the Everyday," 242-43)

⁵¹⁴ Kiyoji Otsuji, "Jo" (Preface), Gocho Shigeo, *Self and Others* (Tokyo: Hakuakan, 1977), re-quoted in Iizawa, *The History of Japanese Photography*, 222.

There is a respectful distance between Gocho and his sitters, yet his subjects seem engaged with him. The portraits are organized by type: single portraits, couple portraits, group portraits of children, and family portraits. These seemingly diverse portraits might recall the collective portraits of German people by August Sander, made in the 1910s and 1920s, and the British family portraits made by U.S. photographer Roslyn Banish in the mid-1970s (**fig.4.25 & fig.4.26**). But Gocho's portraits do not strike one as sociological studies of human types or classes of Japanese people. Rather, despite their conventional formal language, the purpose of the project recalls more closely the work of British photographers Graham Smith and Chris Killip, who sought to explore personal identity and a lost past through the study of others. Similar to the approach of British subjective photographers, Gocho took what was not his and made it his own in a quest for what he hoped to possess. The evidence may be seen in Gocho's self-conscious inclusion of his own family's picture in the photo book. One spread shows a family standing and another seated (**fig.5.3**). Compare these images to Gocho's family photographs in a family album made in 1952 (**fig.5.4**), showing Gocho as a child of six.

Gocho's attention to children (who appear in thirty-seven of the sixty images in *Self and Others*) was viewed by one critic as a "self-portrait of [his] longing to be a child."⁵¹⁵ His "self-portrait" (**fig.5.5**), a self-conscious image of Gocho standing near a window, reveals an unusually short man with some kind of significant physical deformity, possessing an intelligent gaze. Gocho suffered from caries of the thoracic vertebrae, and this painful, crippling disability separated him from the rest of the society. His vision revolved around questions of the self, the familiar, the family, the smallest units of society. Using conventional formal language, Gocho

⁵¹⁵ Otsuji, *Ibid*; Kotaro Iizawa ed., "Gocho Shigeo: Recovering a Memory," *Déjà-vu*, no.8 (April 1992).

embraced his self-image of abnormality by treating with equal emphasis his self-portrait and the images of “others”, thus blending himself into society and normalcy. Gocho himself noted:

One way of describing what is occurring inside me is that it is a concern with the existence of the Self, that is inextricable from one’s person; Family, the smallest unit that ensnares this Self; and Society, which is an extension of the Family. ... What is this I? What is this Self? Such a journey into *inner space* is so long that simply asking these questions is enough to leave one feeling slightly dizzy. Yet at the same time, this *familiar place* is a crucible overflowing.⁵¹⁶

Exposing one’s personal life to public view had long been taboo in Japan, and while photographers such as Suzuki and Gocho brought their personal visions to their subjects, they maintained a safe distance in order to avoid violating their subjects’ privacy. Masahisa Fukase (b.1936) broke with this tradition when he revealed his personal life in the books *Yugi (Game)* (1971) and *Yuhko* (1978). His wife Yuko is “the other” over whom Masahisa had obsessed for decades. He captured candid moments with Yuko and made images during a formal wedding group portrait (**fig.5.6** and **fig. 5.7**). His wife’s mother was also a subject, often shown alongside Yuko, indicating a strong intergenerational bond. In an unguarded moment that Masahisa could have captured only as an insider, a photograph (**fig.5.8**) shows his wife and mother-in-law together in their bathroom, providing the viewer with a voyeuristic experience. Masahisa’s photographs are far more specific and personal than those of any other Japanese photographers at the time.

Some Japanese photographers explored their relationship to larger contemporary social conditions through travel and ethnography. A major figure who followed this approach was Masatoshi Naito (b.1938). Deeply affected by his 1963 viewing of mummified remains of priests who had starved themselves in order to attain enlightenment at the sacred mountain

⁵¹⁶ Shigeo Gocho, “Photography as Another Reality,” *Setting Sun: Writings by Japanese Photographers*, ed. Ivan Vartanian, Akihiro Hatanaka, and Yutaka Kambayashi (New York: Aperture, 2006), 52; originally published in *Nippon Camera* (Tokyo, February 1980).

Dewa Yudono-san in northeast Japan, he explored the historical background of this phenomenon through an ethnographic study.⁵¹⁷ Naito made a series of photographs illustrating popular religious beliefs in Tohoku in northeast Japan and, employing a powerful strobe light, captured participants (mostly elderly women) gathered at sacred sites in Aomori and at Mount Koya in central Japan. The results were published in *Baba: Tohoku no minkan shinko* (*Baba: Folk Religion of the Tohoku*, 1979). (**fig.5.9, fig.5.10**)⁵¹⁸ *Baba* means “old women” or “grannies.” These elderly women traveled on pilgrimages to Buddhist temples at holy places.⁵¹⁹ Naito’s black-and-white photographs show the women with decaying teeth and poor eyesight going about their daily lives—eating, drinking, dancing, singing, socializing with one another, and attending rituals—and looking unguarded as their communal life was captured. The women appear to be enjoying their remaining years, and the pilgrimages seem to be a form of recreation for them. The use of the strobe light emphasizes the darkly theatrical aspect of their lives, which appear at once weird, untainted, and unpretentious. The subjects’ bizarre, ritual bound life is further elucidated by photos of temple decorations that include images of snakes, horses, deities, and punishments in hell. Naito’s photographs began as an anthropological study, but over time the project acquired a powerful symbolic value through his astute photographic and participant observer methods.

Hiromi Tsuchida (b.1939) was another photographer who took an interest in documenting the lives of ordinary people. His first publication, *Zokushin* (*Gods on Earth*) (1976), portrayed indigenous rural people left out of Japan's postwar economic boom (**fig.5.11**). Tsuchida gained intimate access to make portraits that emphasized individual

⁵¹⁷ Iizawa, *The History of Japanese Photography*, 225.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Akira Hasegawa, “Baba, Folk Religion of the Tohoku—Masatoshi Naito,” *Baba: Tohoku no minkan shinko: Naito Masatoshi shashinshu* (Tokyo: Asahi Sonorama, 1979), unpaginated.

identities despite the fact that his subjects were engaged in traditional rites while wearing folk dress. He later published *Hiroshima, 1974-1978* (1979), a compilation of photographs of survivors of the atomic bombings, along with text excerpted from *Children of the A-Bomb* (1951).

No single identifiable style characterizes the photography produced during the 1970s in Japan. Nevertheless, photographers during this era may be said to have turned to diverse, personal forms of expression in the face of the erosion of the traditional family system. Some focused on the darker aspects of life, others on native religious rituals, eroticism, or everyday life. But the political and social upheaval of the late 1960s and the early 1970s also precipitated a flood of personal photography, reflecting the growing interest in the self. Masahisa Fukase and Nobuyoshi Araki, who both challenged social taboos against revealing one's private life, created the most personal works of all.

II. The "Self" in Araki's Early Work

Araki was born in 1940 to parents who sold *geta* (traditional wooden sandals) in a shop in Minowa, on the outskirts of Shitamachi, the old quarter of Tokyo. Araki learned to use a camera as an elementary school pupil while assisting his father in amateur photography. A frequent winner of photography magazine competitions while in high school and college, his primary interest was in portraits of women and snapshots of traditional life in the old quarter, subjects that were to command his attention also in his adult life.

Araki attended an elite high school in Tokyo, and in 1959 enrolled in the department of photography and printing at Chiba University. Araki was bored by technology and chemistry; he was more interested in pursuing a literary career. After graduation, Araki worked as a camera

operator at Dentsu (today one of the largest advertising agencies in the world) in Tokyo from 1963 until 1972, learning a range of techniques as a commercial photographer, although the conservatism of the company frustrated his desire for creativity.

During these formative years, Araki became interested in cinema, particularly Italian neo-realist films. For his graduation project, he submitted a 16-millimeter film entitled *Children in Apartment Blocks* (1963), featuring children of the working class neighborhood of Shitamachi, where poverty persisted after the war. While making the film, Araki produced a companion collection of photographs titled *Satchin*, for which he won the Taiyo photo first prize.

Satchin

As a twenty-three year-old photographer, Araki made images of a boy named Satchin, his brother Mabo, and the boys' friends, whose vitality shone amidst the destitution that surrounded them (**fig.5.12 - fig.5.14**).⁵²⁰ Satchin (the nickname of Sachio Hoshino), a sweaty, energetic fourth-grader whom Araki befriended on the streets of Mikawashima, his own neighborhood, is the protagonist of the yearlong project. Araki approached his subject and the run-down setting of his apartment block in the style of Italian neo-realistic films.⁵²¹ Araki acknowledged the self-revelation in the work as well as its potential for sentimentality.⁵²² In order to create lively photos of the children, he employed a participant observer method—playing with Satchin and his friends frequently (**fig.5.15**), transforming himself from an adult

⁵²⁰ Akiko Miki, "The Photographic Life of Nobuyoshi Araki," *Nobuyoshi Araki: Self, Life, Death* (London/New York: Phaidon Press, 2005), 14-15.

⁵²¹ The films that inspired Araki were Roberto Rossellini's *Open City* (1945), and *Paisan* (1946), Vittorio de Sica's *Shoeshine* (1946) and *Bicycle Thieves* (1948).

⁵²² Nobuyoshi Araki, "Satchin is All About Self-Timer Photos," originally published in *Photo Art* (October 1969), translated text in *Nobuyoshi Araki: Self, Life, Death*, 31-32.

stranger with a camera into a playmate, and thereby earning their trust. Some of these photographs suggest Araki's closeness to the children, whose actions were often caught from dramatically low or high angles, by zooming in tightly on their facial expressions (**fig.5.12**, **fig.5.13**), although the constant movement and mischievous expressions of the children seemed to catch Araki's interest even when he shot from a distance.

Satchin is somewhat reminiscent of the images of children made by Ken Domon (1909 – 1990) (**fig.5.16**), a leader in the Photo-Realism movement during the 1950s in Japan. Domon, who served as a judge of monthly contests for the Japanese magazine *Camera*, used the venue to establish a critical foundation for Photo-Realism in amateur photography.⁵²³ Through his passionate writing, Domon advocated for the objective qualities of documentary photography, epitomized in such phrases as “the direct connection between the camera and the subject,” and “the absolutely pure snapshot, absolutely unstaged.”⁵²⁴ Araki's understanding of the drama existing in the most ordinary moments of life illustrates Domon's influence on him. As Araki said, “it was about using ordinary people who weren't actors as actors.”⁵²⁵ Domon, as the foremost authority on Photo-Realism, brought a narrow focus to social realism—one of which he himself eventually became critical.⁵²⁶ Photo-Realism brought a plethora of images of poor

⁵²³ Photo-Realism, one of the most important movements in postwar Japanese photography, was promoted mainly by the magazine *Camera* around 1950. Its editor-in-chief Kineo Kuwabara hired Ken Domon to judge the magazine's monthly photography contest. Between 1952 and 1954, photo-realism reached its peak with the aid of Domon's writings. Iizawa, *The History of Japanese Photography*, 211-212.

⁵²⁴ Ken Domon, *Camera* (March 1950); re-quoted in Iizawa, *The History of Japanese Photography*, 211.

⁵²⁵ Nobuyoshi Araki, interview with Harumi Fukuyshima, at Rouge in Shinjuku on March 12, 2003. (translated by Giles Murray), published in *Araki by Araki: The Photographer's Personal Selection 1963-2002* (Kyoto, Japan: Kodansha Intl. Ltd., 2003), 406.

⁵²⁶ In a lecture given at the Bridgestone Museum of Art in Tokyo in September 1954, Domon said, “As of spring 1954, the first stage of realism has ended . . . We are now struggling mightily to advance toward a second stage of realism.” Domon Ken, “Gendai Kokyu shashin sakuga koza: Riarizumu shashin no susumu beki michi” (Lecture on the Production of Quality Contemporary Photographs: The Road Photo-Realism Should Take), *Camera*, (June 1955); Iizawa, 212.

children and crippled veterans, earning the somewhat derisive nickname “beggar photography.”⁵²⁷

Araki’s work employed the popular subject matter characteristic of Photo-Realism, namely the children of poor neighborhoods, and his documentary style reveals the obvious influence of Domon’s ideas. But while Domon’s relatively static and occasionally emotional view of the children (**fig.5.16**) tends to emphasize their destitute living conditions, evoking the shadow of defeat and postwar poverty, Araki’s pictures capture the children’s irrepressible optimism and enthusiasm expressed by their constant movement and playfulness.

Domon’s insistence on “unstagedness” to achieve objectivity in photography required the “undisturbedness” of his subjects. Photographers were supposed to capture candid moments without interfering with their subjects through their presence. Araki, to some extent, violates this rule of Photo-Realism, as he appears to have been a catalyst for the children’s play, allowing him to capture dramatic shots of these non-actors turned actors. Araki became emotionally involved with the children, even identifying with Satchin. He said:

A documentary is objective, right? Being subjective is when you get involved with the subject, and that’s how I took this picture. I ended up sticking with this style because I felt that this kid, Satchin, and I had a lot in common—the same slightly desperate optimism, the same kind of loneliness. That’s why I stuck with that style.⁵²⁸

In one photograph (**fig.5.5**), Araki is apparently posing a boy against a wall while the boy cheerfully lifts his shirt to show his ribs, showing evidence of malnutrition. Araki’s direction is indicated by the boy’s playful engagement with the camera, while Araki’s shadow signals the presence and participation of the photographer.

⁵²⁷ Iizawa, 212.

⁵²⁸ Nobuyoshi Araki, Interview with Harumi Fukuyshima, *Araki by Araki*, 406.

In some of Araki's images, the cropped figures of children, achieved through close-ups, evidence Araki's intimacy with them. He might at times have told the children what actions to perform, effectively staging the scenes. But the images show us what children typically do when they are playing, so in that respect they can be viewed as truthful photographs, and perhaps even more candid ones than those produced according to the criteria of Photo-Realism of the earlier generation.

Araki's gravitation toward the personal coincided with the general direction of Japanese photography at the time, as was discussed in the previous section of this chapter. *Satchin* brought some recognition and status to Araki's early career when it won a prize from *Sun* magazine in 1964, but it was his activities and the experimental publications he produced during the period that he worked at Dentsu that formed the direction of Araki's oeuvre and his emergence as an avant-gardist. Araki developed his personal style independently from the work he did for the company, in part perhaps in an act of rebellion against its conservatism. From 1963 until 1972, Araki pursued his personal interest in photography after office hours, using the company's photographic equipment and studio facilities. While critics make mention of Araki's work during this period, it has not been seriously evaluated or studied in detail. Of these early activities, I will discuss *Xerox Photo Album* and the Kitchen Ramen restaurant shows.

Araki's *Xerox Photo Album* (1970)

Araki's self-published *Xerox Photo Album* (1970) (**fig.5.17-fig.5.21**) is an anthology of his private photography, produced by illicitly photocopying seventy copies on a machine at Dentsu. He made twenty-five volumes in varying sizes ranging from six to 144 pages, bound in

black woolen cloth with red binding thread.⁵²⁹ He mailed the copies unsolicited to well-known individuals and ordinary people randomly chosen from the Tokyo telephone book in a manner that might recall the mail art of On Karawa (b.1933).⁵³⁰

Araki's "do-it-yourself" method reflected his ambition to produce and distribute his work. The contents of the Xeroxed books were widely diverse, as were the techniques employed. Nor was his production technique confined to photocopying, as he also employed direct pasting of photo prints to paper and the insertion of illustrations, methods more usually encountered in personal diaries, portfolios, and storyboards. Some elements for which he became well known in his later works, such as excessive narrative, repetition, quotation, and

⁵²⁹ The binding method is called Wa-toji (a traditional form of Japanese bookbinding).

The twenty-five titles are:

- 1: Face 70
- 2: Eisaburou Yaguchi
- 3: The Truth of Carmen Mary: To Be Published on March 18th
- 4: Harumi Miyako (pseudonym): A Trailer
- 5: Adam & Eve
- 6: Fantastic Honeymoon
- 7: Tokyo is Eros
- 8: This is the Photo Exhibition.
- 9: Patora between 7 and 7:07.
- 10: Summer Vacation, Extra Toy and Deron Makes Efforts
- 11: Masayoshi Naitou Freak Show Sign Exhibition (Three Tarzan Sisters)
- 12: Late Summer Greeting-Kitchen Ramen Exhibition 2
- 13: Landscape
- 14: Landscape, Again
- 15: World Fair
- 16: Where is "Snack Domone"?
- 17: "Ah, Japan," Correction "Oh, Japan"
- 18: Summer Vacation at Shintsu Island, Canceled Due to the Marriage of the Model
- 19: Poem
- 20: Love Literature
- 21: Time for Walking
- 22: West Atami Blues, Appendix: Love Calendar for Bathroom
- 23: Singers: A Series of 4811 Photo Prints
- 24: Japanese 70
- 25: My Home I Have Dreamed

⁵³⁰ Conceptual Japanese artist On Kawara's *I Got Up* (1968~ 1979) was a daily work that involved his sending a picture postcard to two of his friends or colleagues, rather than to strangers. It nonetheless presents itself as a precursor to Araki's unconventional method of "publishing" the *Xerox Photo Album*. On the back of each postcard, Kawara rubber-stamped the date and time he awoke along with the addresses of the sender and recipient. Kawara traveled widely and mailed these postcards from many locations. Alexandra Munroe, *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 222.

collage, were already present in the *Xerox Photo* books.⁵³¹ Lacking a logical categorical division of its contents, the entire album seems to reflect the artist's personal interests—women, pornography, jokes, and the contemporary culture of Japan. No longer a documenter of destitute children living in impoverished neighborhoods, Araki had moved on to photographing, in a way seemingly free of social concerns, the business district of Tokyo with its streets filled with bustling energy.

The first volume, *Face 70*, presents photocopied images of his photographs of individual portraits. The title holds a double meaning: the faces of seventy people and the faces of the 1970s. A page from this album (**fig.5.18**) shows a deadpan portrait of a woman in a double-breasted jacket. The woman's unabashed gaze within the tightly cropped frame makes this image an intense portrait whose hidden anxiety lies beneath the surface. Araki inserted into the album a piece of paper bearing the following sentences: "I will publish a photo book for study (masturbation) and self-advertisement (art work). Please send me a letter. Araki Nobuyoshi, Taito-ku, Minowa 2-14-11."⁵³² The names of these seventy people appear at the end of the book, and Araki is thought to have interviewed all of them and asked permission to take pictures of their faces.⁵³³

A page from volume nine, *Patora between 7 and 7:07* (**fig.5.19**), shows photocopied pictures of what appears to be a female office worker standing on a desk, presumably at Dentsu. Her lower body is exposed while a shirt neatly covers her upper body. She poses confidently, wearing no skirt or pants, suggesting, perhaps, that some illicit sexual activity may have

⁵³¹ Kotaro Iizawa, "Xeroxed Photo Albums," *A Book of Araki Books!: 1970-2005*, (Hong Kong: Regent Publishing Ltd, 2006), 27. More details on these twenty-five volumes of Araki's *Xerox Photo* books are discussed in Massaki Hiraoka's "Seeking the Mystery of Nobuyoshi Araki," *Pseudo-Diary of Nobuyoshi Araki* (Tokyo: Bayakuya Shobo, 1980).

⁵³² Hiraoka, "Seeking the Mystery of Nobuyoshi Araki," *Pseudo-Diary of Nobuyoshi Araki*, unpaginated.

⁵³³ Ibid.

occurred—or soon will. In this independent album, Araki plays with the title and its implied meaning: his model is Keiro Ikuyo, a second-rate actress; the photograph presumably was made between 7:00 and 7:07, as the wall clock behind the model confirms; Araki dedicated the photograph to Agnès Varda, a French film director who often addressed feminist issues through documentary realism and socialist commentary. Araki parodies Varda's film title *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962), the plot device of which is a real-time narrative of events occurring between 5pm and 7pm, during which the female protagonist awaits a medical examination scheduled for 7pm. The film's existentialist message is that the character is confronting her mortality. Araki's use of an actress to play the role (the sole female character in this album) may be viewed as a creative device that merged fiction with reality.

In the seminal *Xerox Photo Album*, Araki showed his design sensibility as well as self-confidence in his editing skills. The orientation of the books was either horizontal or vertical, presenting images only on the right page of the folio. The titles of the volumes indicate the wide range of subject matter, some of which record reality, while others (such as the example above, *Patora between 7 and 7:07*) favor staged, fictitious narratives.

Another example (**fig.5.20**), from book seven, *Tokyo is Eros*, presents photocopied images of faces in the crowd, reduced to faint silhouettes or outlines of the figures. Although the title of the book suggests that Tokyo is its subject, the photos were taken in Osaka, Japan's second largest city and the focus of national interest in 1970 as the host of the World Fair.⁵³⁴ Selected pages from the album were reproduced on page 82 of *Araki by Araki* (**fig.5.21**), showing faded Xerox images of the crowd as hollow shells of faces. Araki used repeatedly copied images of his own photographs to turn these urbanites into nothing more than vague

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

impressions, reinforcing his concept of photography by deliberately producing poor quality images on a photocopy machine. The photocopying method recalls the idea of imprinting. The less-than-clear images that result from the diminished volume of toner in the Xerox machine have an appearance reminiscent of the latent chemical images of early photography. The silhouettes, lacking the illusion of volume, are the result of using minimal visual information extracted by a mechanical process.⁵³⁵

Araki's non-participatory photographic studies of pedestrians and other anonymous subjects with whom he had no personal connection, let alone emotional involvement, seem, from the outset of his career, to have been equally important to him as his studies of subjects with whom he had a personal relationship. His photographs of anonymous subjects were displayed either on their own or, on occasion, paired with images from the artist's private realm. One of the most distinctive studies of this type was *Ginza*, a unique scrapbook made in 1967. Araki's experiments with various layouts seem to have had their roots in this self-produced photo book in which he glued photo prints directly into a bound blank notebook (**fig.5.22, fig.5.23**).⁵³⁶

The method Araki used in *Ginza* was a precursor to the Xeroxed photo album. Consistently sized black-and-white photographs were placed against the top and side edges of each page, leaving borders at the spine and bottom. *Ginza*, one of the liveliest districts of Tokyo, and a center of commerce, fashion, and business, was nearby the offices of Dentsu. Araki's interest lay not in the overall impression of the neighborhood, with its modern architecture and wide boulevards, but in its pedestrian life. Ranging over all ages and both genders, the cropped faces and full bodies in single, double, and group portraits were shot quickly while pedestrians

⁵³⁵ Ibid. Masaki Hiraoka noted that the method (the unclear images of faces) was in vogue at the time, as it was used by Takuma Nakahira (a founding member of *Provoke*). I will explore the influences of *Provoke* on Araki shortly in this section.

⁵³⁶ *Ginza* (1967) is now held by the Setagaya Art Museum, a public museum in the Setagaya Ward where Araki lives.

passed by. Those faces that occupy the entire frame evidence the photographer's physical proximity to them. Araki employed both direct encounters with passersby and voyeuristic methods of capturing people. His photographs of pedestrians were exhibited in 1967 at a solo show at the Mitsubishi Electric Gallery in Tokyo (**fig.5.24**), but rather than the clear black-and-white images from *Ginza*, Araki exhibited enlarged solarized prints developed by cutting and pasting together several negatives. These composite images (**fig.5.25**), called "BGs" ("Business Girls"), signal several factors about Araki's work. The enlarged black-and-white solarized photographs, devoid of details, emphasize the flatness of the figures, sacrificing the sense of volume that ordinary photographs provide through their range of gray tonal values. The resultant images, mere outlines of figures, became semi-abstract, somewhat akin to the photo silkscreens of U.S. Pop artist Andy Warhol (**fig.5.26**), whose repetitions of images served to emphasize their surfaces, almost spurning deeper inquiry into their meaning. Indeed, Warhol's famous images of Marilyn Monroe and Coca-Cola bottles are recalled for the emptiness of their wallpaper-like effect. While these artists' works emerged from very different historical contexts, Araki's flattened images (whether the effect was achieved through photocopying or solarization) give a somewhat comparable effect to Warhol's work. Through this aesthetic decision, Araki further emphasized his non-participatory relationship to these "de-personalized" subjects.

Araki's 1967 "BGs" and the *Ginza* exhibition are the precursors of the *Xerox Photo Albums* (1970), absorbing and foreshadowing what was in the air of Japanese photography, as exemplified by the avant-garde magazine *Provoke*, whose first issue was published in August 1968. However, Araki's Xeroxed photographs reduced the photographic images of reality into linear outlines whereas the *are-bure-boke* (grainy, blurry, out-of-focus) characteristics of

Provoke possessed rich painterly tones without clear outlines (**fig.5.27, fig.5.28, fig.5.29, fig. 5.30**).⁵³⁷

While the decision to produce the Xerox albums may have been due in part to financial limitations or to the lack of a willing publisher, the blurriness of the images caused by the photocopier evokes some aspects of the radical aesthetics practiced by *Provoke* magazine photographers. In fact, Daido Moriyama and Koji Taki had used Xeroxed photographs for *Provoke 3*, published in August 1969. Araki later acknowledged *Provoke*'s influence on his *Xerox Photo Album* in an interview in 1993.⁵³⁸ The mechanical results of the photocopy machine transformed Araki's images into something closer to the "rough, blurred, and out-of-focus (*are, bure, boke*)" characteristics of the look sought by *Provoke* artists, although Araki always maintained the look of clear images, usually with visible details, an aesthetic that had more in common with the photojournalistic look of Photo-Realism. Through his self-publishing venture, Araki simultaneously followed the credo of the radicals and challenged their work.

While working for Dentsu, Araki became acquainted with members of *Provoke* and came to share their avant-garde spirit. Two members of *Provoke*, Daido Moriyama and Takuma

⁵³⁷ The publication of a short-lived avant-garde photography journal *Provoke* (No.1 ~ No.3) was published November 1968 [**fig. 5.27**], March 1969 [**fig. 5.28**], and August 1969 [**fig.5.29, fig.5. 30**] respectively). Two writers passionate about photography, Koji Taki and Takuma Nakahira, founded *Provoke* to promote photography as an independent medium liberated from subservience to text. The magazine was intended for a narrow market rather than a general audience. Containing photographs by Daido Moriyama, Yutaka Takanashi and Taki, the magazine was filled with blurry images of indiscernible cityscapes, challenging conventional ideas of photography as visual documents that convey pointed messages. These photographers created intentionally grainy, blurry, out-of-focus (*are-bure-boke* in Japanese) images in order to liberate photographic imagery from the mere depiction of physical reality. Their images eliminated "information, record and especially narrative from their work to create 'pure' images," in the words of Ivan Vartanian, "The Japanese Photobook: Toward an Immediate Media," *Japanese Photobooks of the 1960s and '70s*, 15-16. No longer documenting the reality of place, the works focused on the photographers' state of mind, establishing the roots of a large body of diaristic work found in Japan today. The principal themes presented were "youth, rebellion, despair, rage and hedonism" and the illicit activities of the Shinjuku entertainment district. Shomei Tomatsu viewed the magazine more as a periodical of politics and philosophy than a photography magazine, according to Parr and Badger, *The Photobook: A History volume 1*, 269-70]. Nobuyoshi Araki was especially inspired by *Provoke*, in particular by the blurry nude photographs by Daido Moriyama subtitled *Eros*, published in *Provoke No 2.*, per *ibid.*, 269.

⁵³⁸ "Araki Nobuyoshi: Provoku ni shigeki sareta 'hitoridake no 70 nen anpo' / Araki Nobuyoshi, I was Alone with My Private Protest," *Déjà vu* 14 (October 1993): 86.

Nakahira, included Araki in a roundtable discussion for the magazine in the late 1960s. Araki's association with the spirit of *Provoke* encouraged him to experiment with new types of photography, including in his next major work, *Sentimental Journey* (1971), which brought him critical recognition.⁵³⁹

Kitchen Ramen Restaurant Shows

In 1970, Araki engaged in various guerrilla activities, including the formation of a group called *Fukusha Shudan Gerihara* (Guerrilla Reproduction Collective 5), which followed from his theory that “photography is all about reproduction (*fukusha*).”⁵⁴⁰ Among his projects during this period was a catalogue of three-hundred women in their swimsuits with their telephone numbers printed in captions below their images, published in 1971 with the title *Bathing Beauties*.

In an effort to introduce photographs into the everyday urban environment, between 1970 and 1976 Araki held a number of mini-exhibitions at the Kitchen Ramen restaurant (**fig.5.31**) on the Ginza, including a series of nude photographs.⁵⁴¹ No single source archived all the Kitchen Ramen exhibitions, but Masaki Hiraoka's essay provides some detailed information about the

⁵³⁹ When asked in an interview whether he had been influenced by *Provoke*, Araki responded: “I would not say, ‘influenced,’ but it [*Provoke*] was definitely on my mind. It started a big movement against the Japanese mainstream, but unfortunately I was working at Dentsu, which was the kind of establishment that *Provoke* was striving against. Everybody wanted to join *Provoke*. I wanted to join the group too, but I couldn't at the time because I was working for an advertising company. I couldn't fully participate in it, but I shared the rebellious spirit with *Provoke*. Two years later, *Provoke* was pushing me in the direction of making the book *Sentimental Journey*. It became an inspiration for *Sentimental Journey*.”

It was strange for them that I had asked to join them because I was working for Dentsu. Takuma Nakahira of *Provoke* considered me an adversary and attacked me. But when he met me, we became friends with each other. Daido Moriyama defended me. . . . Everyone there was very serious. I told them, ‘Don't get a fever over an idea. It's just an idea. Everybody becomes too passionate about photography, but it's only art and photography. Why would you be so vehement about it?’ ” Nobuyoshi Araki, interview by author, Shinjuku, Tokyo, October 28, 2010.

⁵⁴⁰ Miki, 15.

⁵⁴¹ Iizawa, *A Book of Araki Books!*, 27.

very early exhibitions displayed in 1970.⁵⁴² The first series of Kitchen Ramen exhibitions ran for about two months during the summer of 1970. “Death of Faruko Ikuyo: Part 1” was exhibited between June 6th and July 7th, 1970, followed by “Part 2” between July 7th and August 8th. Araki hosted another exhibition, “Lesbian Shows in Photography: Ah, Japan” at Kitchen Ramen on August 15th to commemorate Japan’s defeat in the Second World War.⁵⁴³ Images from the Kitchen Ramen exhibitions were included in book twelve of the *Xerox Photo* books, titled *Late Summer Greeting-Kitchen Ramen Exhibition 2* (**fig.5.32**). One page from this Xeroxed photo album shows an installation shot of Araki’s illustration works hung over a toilet, presumably in the Kitchen Ramen restaurant. By including a visual document of his own exhibition, Araki expanded the scope of his subject matter. Rather than searching for serious topics suitable for photography, Araki took up anything and everything, eschewing any hierarchical boundaries as to what constitutes art. The Kitchen Ramen shows rejected the established attitudes about where an art exhibition should be presented to the public. Introducing images from his personal life in an everyday place, Araki achieved a kind of democratic expression of the medium. One of the exhibitions (**fig.5.31**), “Eroto-Realism,” included images of the artist’s wife, Yoko, shot during their honeymoon. Many of these images had been published earlier in *Sentimental Journey*, the 1971 record of Araki’s honeymoon. Juxtaposed against framed nude paintings, the nude images of Araki’s wife, including sex scenes, may be viewed as a radical way of making the private sphere public. Fusing art with life and life with art became Araki’s pervasive method as a photographer who, in time, arguably became the principal subject of his own work.

Although Araki was not directly associated with any organized groups or movements at

⁵⁴² Hiraoka, unpaginated.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

the time of his restaurant shows, his decision to exhibit nude photographs in an unusual, lowbrow venue evinces the rebellious spirit of the young Japanese artists of the period. On July 15, 1969, *Bikyoto* (Artists Joint Struggle Council), a group consisting of students from Tama Art University, declared in a handbill titled *Proposal to Artists*, “Let us win the fight to destroy modern rationalism by dissolving the art power system!” The group proposed the destruction of such “fortresses” of established art institutions as the Tokyo Biennale, the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, The National Museum of Modern Art, and the public competition system promoted by Nitten, the official salon, and conventional art associations.⁵⁴⁴ Although Araki lacked the militant attitudes of these artists (he was, after all, working at a mainstream advertising company), his tactics—as in the Kitchen Ramen exhibitions, and the self-published *Xerox Photo Album*—likewise entailed circumventing and undermining “the system.”

The restaurant owner’s agreeing to display Araki’s nudes demonstrates a degree of the cultural readiness to accept such gestures. By 1970, Japanese audiences were familiar with presentations of nudity through performances by Japanese artists who used guerrilla tactics to circumvent censorship by public officials. Provocation and sensation were integral to their strategies. Yayoi Kusama, an artist who had already risen to international fame through her avant-garde *happenings* in New York in the ’60s, returned to Tokyo for three months in 1970 with the intention to “blow away the sexually constipated Japanese.”⁵⁴⁵ Her half-naked *happening* in Tokyo resulted in a confrontation with the police, and the media sensationalized

⁵⁴⁴ Bikyoto, “Bijutsuka e no teisho” (Proposal to Artists), flyer dated July 5, 1969, reprinted in Hikosaka Naoyoshi, *Hanpuku: Shinko geijutsu no iso (Repetition: Phases of New Arts)*, (Tokyo: Tabata Shoten, 1974), cited in Alexander Monroe, “Mono-Ha and Beyond,” *Japanese Art After 1945*, 258.

⁵⁴⁵ Yayoi Kusama, “Rankou koso waga geijutsu” (Orgy Is My Art), *Shukan Posto* (March 27, 1970) cited in Midori Yoshimoto, “Performing the Self: Yayoi Kusama and Her Ever-Expanding Universe, *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 77.

the event.⁵⁴⁶

The year 1970 was significant for Japan in quite a different way, as Osaka hosted Asia's first world's fair, Expo '70, which trumpeted Japan's postwar economic recovery. Conceived as an extravagant showcase for Japan's modernization and technological advancement, the fair was denounced by leftists and artists' groups. Among these groups were *Bikyoto* and the avant-garde *Zero-jigen* (Zero-Dimension), which staged "Crash Expo '70" rituals throughout 1969 in opposition to the fair.⁵⁴⁷ Individual artists such as Chu Enoki performed *Naked Happening* as a protest against the heavily branded "spectacle" of Expo '70. Enoki walked through the middle of a Ginza street on a Sunday, shirtless, with the Expo '70 logo sunburned onto his bare chest.⁵⁴⁸ Such practices by avant-garde performance artists allowed general audiences to view counter-orthodox forms of expression, despite the conservatism and censorship of the authorities. The acceptance of nude photos by a restaurant owner and, apparently, his customers reflected this new climate of avant-gardism in Japan.

Araki's *Sentimental Journey* (1971) and the I-Novel

Araki's next major publication, *Sentimental Journey* (1971) (**fig.5.33**), brought him wide recognition in the world of Japanese photography.⁵⁴⁹ The book was the first of three volumes, to be followed by *Okinawa: Araki Nobuyoshi Photobook 2 [Sentimental Journey Continued]* (1971) (**fig.5.34**) and *Tokyo: Araki Nobuyoshi Photobook 3* (1973) (**fig.5.35**). Both subsequent

⁵⁴⁶ Yoshimoto stated that the media focused on the scandal of the event rather than on Kusama's art. (Yoshimoto, *Ibid.*)

⁵⁴⁷ Monroe, 258-59.

⁵⁴⁸ Midori Matsui, "Chu Enoki: Kirin Plaza Osaka," *Artforum* (October 2006): 282.

⁵⁴⁹ The handwritten title *Sentimental Journey*, transliterated as *Senchimentaru Na Tabi*, appears at the top of the front cover. One-hundred and eight photographic plates are bound in soft cover and stapled. Fukusha Shudan Geribara 5 (Guerrilla Reproduction Collective 5), a group of five people, among whom Araki was the principal member, published the book. Kaneko and Ivan Vartanian, *Japanese Photobooks of the 1960s and '70s*, 108.

books were small and maintained unifying layouts throughout. *Okinawa* is in landscape layout, while *Tokyo* is in portrait format.⁵⁵⁰ In *Sentimental Journey*, Araki placed each photo of his wife Yoko within a frame of abundant white space. In the sequels, the photos are arranged in pairs of images, either side by side, or one above the other, without a space separating the adjacent images. Araki's intention in pairing these images may have been to demand that the viewer read them simultaneously. In *Okinawa*, a spread shows a cityscape or street scene paired with a family photo (**fig.5.34**). One image deals with the public sphere while the other indicates Araki's private realm. In *Tokyo*, Araki used this device when he placed in the top register photographs of crowds taken from the opposite side of a crosswalk with a telephoto lens while he placed in the lower register the image of a naked woman pleasuring herself or engaging with a partner in a bedroom (**fig.5.35**). Each book was slightly different in its layout and content. Araki was working out ideas about the public versus the private, narrativity, and the tension between the general and the specific. Araki himself does not appear in these frames; at this stage of his career, he was more reporter than participant.

The cover of the first book, *Sentimental Journey* (**fig.5.33**), displays a sideways orientation of the image of Araki and his wife on their wedding day. The cover image is the only one that is shot vertically but presented sideways, and it is also the only image showing Araki himself. The book featured photographs of the artist's wife, Yoko, whom he had met seven years earlier as a co-worker at Dentsu, taken during their honeymoon travels to Kyushu by way of Kyoto. The images of the couple's wedding journey reveal a story told entirely through the presence of the artist's wife. While the subject's relationship to the photographer is evident through indications of Yoko's recognition of and responses to Araki, the photographer is largely

⁵⁵⁰ Kaneko and Vartanian, 114-115.

invisible.⁵⁵¹ Printing the images in an old fashioned gray tone emphasized the sentimental feeling of a honeymoon. Initially, the monochromatic presentation of the book was criticized as evidence of poor quality, but that assessment was later re-evaluated as a clever choice that emphasized Araki's intentions.⁵⁵²

The first image (**fig.5.36**), following the cover, shows Yoko on a train, lost in thought, neither looking out the window nor looking at her husband behind the camera. In the next image, Yoko, wearing the same polka-dot dress, has just arrived at a hotel and is seated on a bed. In the following image, on the same bed, now apparently mussed by sexual activity, Yoko is seated naked, less in an act of exhibitionism than as one of simply being at rest. Then comes a close-up shot of Yoko seen in reflection in a mirror. Throughout this sequence (**fig.5.37**), Yoko looks away from the camera.

The next sequence of the book consists of unremarkable cityscapes and street scenes. The couple's journey is implied through images of train stations, a taxi, a bus, and roadways (**fig.5.38**). Following these urban scenes are images of landscapes and interiors that accompany intimate portraits of Yoko in a hotel bedroom, or a garden, or on a boat (**fig.5.39-fig.5.42**). The book presents itself as a visual diary in which the personal realm is the central element, and includes photographs that reveal the most private of acts: Yoko having sex with her husband (**fig.5.41**). Araki's presence is at times made apparent through Yoko's gaze or by his shadow passing over her body during intercourse, in haphazard compositions.

⁵⁵¹ The sequence of the book was reproduced in *Araki Nobuyoshi: Sentimental Photography, Sentimental Life* (Tokyo: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999), 10-17.

⁵⁵² Kaneko and Vartanian, 108.

In the handwritten text that accompanied the images in *Sentimental Journey*, Araki stated that his pictures were a protest against “phony photos.”⁵⁵³ He insisted that his work be emotionally honest, yet contradicted himself when he wrote, “I’m not saying these photos are real”⁵⁵⁴ The narrative expressed in the photographs follows the sequence of the journey. The overall emotional tone of the book is quiet and calm, especially in the pictures of gardens and interior shots of buildings. Araki was drawn to decorative elements, such as old portraits or masks, and he sometimes included shots of the sky or landscapes that seem to have been framed haphazardly.

What may not be “real” about the project is that so much is omitted: Yoko’s partner, Araki himself, is visually absent inasmuch as he is behind the camera (one image shows the lower portion of his naked body, exposing his penis while Yoko performs fellatio). What is arguably “real” in the book is the emotional tenor conveyed through the subject’s intimate physical and emotional engagement with the photographer. Neither exaggerating nor diminishing the realities of his daily life, Araki displayed great candor in constructing the record of his honeymoon with Yoko.

The exposure of such private photos to public view provoked controversy, as it was something that had rarely been done in the field of Japanese photography. While the early 1970s

⁵⁵³ Even though Araki is right-handed, he wrote the preface with his left hand. When asked why, Araki answered, “I did it because I was so embarrassed about writing such a text,” because he did not believe that “it said anything new.” “Back stories and Backstreets: Walking & Talking of Araki Nobuyoshi,” *Déjà vu* 20 (Summer 1995): 67.

The complete text from *Sentimental Journey* reads:

Dear X,

I can’t take it any more – and I’m not talking about my constant tympanitic diarrhea. I’m talking about all these lies: this fashion photography that’s everywhere, all these faces and nudes and private lives and scenery – and all of it lies. That’s what I can’t take any more. This book isn’t anything like all those phony photos. *Sentimental Journey* is my love, it’s my photographic declaration. But I’m not saying these photos are real just because I took them on my honeymoon. Anyway, what’s happened is that my debut as a photographer coincided with the beginning of my own I Novel, and together they are an act of love. I’ll always be writing this I Novel. I believe the I Novel is very close to photography. Anyway, I simply laid out the photos according to the course of our honeymoon. But, turn the pages and see. The old-fashioned grayish tone is a result of the offset printing, making it even more of a sentimental journey. I think it’s successful. I hope you like it. I feel something like days flow by.

Best,

Araki

⁵⁵⁴ Nobuyoshi Araki, *Sentimental Journey*, 1971, translated text in page 67 in *Déjà vu* magazine.

was, to reiterate, a time of self-discovery in Japan (as it was in the West), pursuing the subject of “sentimentality” signified undue self-absorption according to Japanese cultural, suggesting a lapse of moral and social values, the more so during a time of political upheaval. As a result, the publication of Araki’s *Sentimental Journey* caused an uproar.⁵⁵⁵ Araki recently explained in an interview with the author:

I didn’t mean to shock anyone. It was more of a natural impulse. Only artists without talent try to shock people. Because showing naked (genitals) was prohibited, it was sensational to show them, but I was not thinking in such a calculated way. For the honeymoon, I started taking photography, beginning with riding on a train to having sex. That’s what everyone does on a honeymoon, so that’s nothing special.⁵⁵⁶

The project is not, of course, a typical honeymoon album, which largely features pictures of a couple together. Araki’s explicit depictions of the very private act of sex are (or certainly were at the time) far from ordinary. But in creating the book and stimulating public discourse on its subject and content, Araki opened the door for the personal photograph (*shi-shashin*) to enter the public realm, and, in time, many Japanese photographers followed his approach.⁵⁵⁷

As the foregrounding of subjectivity and autobiography in Japanese photography developed, Araki became the foremost figure of the trend. This development also meant that Japan was no longer isolated from the international cultural scene. The tendency of autobiographical work was everywhere in the West by the early 1970s, while the aspiration for photographic objectivity as an avenue of compelling social narrative waned.

⁵⁵⁵ It is general knowledge that *Sentimental Journey* was highly controversial for taking private life into the public realm, as Kaneko and Vartanian, among others, have indicated. Kaneko and Vartanian, 108.

⁵⁵⁶ Nobuyoshi Araki, interview by author, Shinjuku, Tokyo, October 28, 2010. This interview with Araki is available online. See Hyewon Yi, “Crossing Boundaries: An Interview with Nobuyoshi Araki,” *Trans Asia Photography Review* 2 (Spring 2011). Available at <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7977573.0001.205>

⁵⁵⁷ Photographers such as Noritoshi Hirakawa (b.1960) followed this approach. Later, women photographers followed this trend, including Miyako Ishiuchi (b.1947) and Sakiko Nomura (b. 1967), as well as Mika Ninagawa (b. 1972), Yuri Nagashima (b.1973), and Hiromix (b.1976), who emerged in the 1990s in a movement called “Girl Power.” Araki’s *Sentimental Journey* and Fukase’s *Yugi (Game)* (1971) were known to be the models for these “Girl Power” photographers, who, however, saw a kind of feminist potential in the visual modality in question. Anne Wilkes Tucker, “Why So Personal?,” *Setting Sun: Writings by Japanese Photographers*, 13.

I-Novel [Shi-shosetsu]

Araki borrowed the approach of the Japanese literary genre the *Shi-shosetsu* (I-Novel), which provided him with a basis for a mode of photography based on his everyday personal life. The *Shi-shosetsu* (more formally 私小説 *watakushi shosetsu*) was a formal convention for fictional autobiographical confession, a style that flourished in Japan during the Taisho period (1912-26).⁵⁵⁸ Its narrative character is different from that of the Western novel, embedded as it is in the nature of Japanese language. Narrated in the first or third person in such a way as to represent with conviction the author's personal experience, *Shi-shosetsu* is filled with paradoxes. Often it reads like a private journal, although it is supposedly a fictional narrative. It has the reputation of being true to "real life," yet it frequently strays from the author's alleged life experiences. *Shi-shosetsu*'s personal orientation makes it a completely modern form, yet it is derived from an indigenous intellectual tradition quite dissimilar to that of Western individualism.⁵⁵⁹ *Shi-shosetsu* assumes an important place in the history of modern Japanese literature, and almost every Japanese writer of the early twentieth century experimented with it. The most representative *Shi-shosetsu* include Tayama Katai's *Futon* (1907) and works by Chikamatsu Shuko (1876-1944), Shiga Naoya (1883-1971), and Kasai Zengo (1887-1928).

⁵⁵⁸ Although there have been many Japanese I-Novel writers, studies of I-Novels came about only during the early 1980s, not within Japan itself, but by a German scholar, Irmela Hijiya-Kirschnereit, *Selbst-entblössungstrituale (Rituals of self-exposé)*; Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1981). This text was translated into English. For the "I-Novel" [shi-shosetsu], see Imela Hijiya-Kirschnereit's *Rituals of Self-Revelation Shi-shosetsu as Literary Genre and Social-Cultural Phenomenon* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Edward Fowler, *The Rhetoric of Confession: Shi-shosetsu in Early Twentieth-Century Japanese Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); and Tomi Suzuki, *Narrating the Self-Fictions of Japanese Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

⁵⁵⁹ Edward Fowler, "Introduction," *The Rhetoric of Confession: Shi-shosetsu in Early Twentieth-Century Japanese Fiction* (London and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), xvi.

Although *Shi-shosetsu* is often mistaken for a form of Naturalism adapted from the West, recent studies have demonstrated that it is a product of native traditions.⁵⁶⁰ Categorizing *Shi-shosetsu* from the perspective of Western literature poses a problem. Most Japanese critics are uncomfortable describing *Shi-shosetsu* in terms of the novel or autobiography. In comparison to “pure literature” in the West, where the writer is meant to be removed from the characters and narrative, *Shi-shosetsu* references, but does not fully conform to, the reality of the author’s life.⁵⁶¹

Shi-shosetsu are said to be unsatisfying to Western readers because they do not follow the narrative conventions that govern most Western fiction. In their confessional works, modern Western writers such as Henry Miller and Norman Mailer reveal material more blatantly shocking than do their Japanese counterparts. In Western fiction, moreover, narratives often focus on the linear development of events affecting protagonists who find themselves in positions contrary to institutional authority, and who overcome those obstacles, whereas Japanese authors tend to position their protagonists as yielding and relatively powerless in the face of the forces of society and nature.⁵⁶² Also, the flow of narratives in *Shi-shosetsu* is interrupted by “allusion, polysemy, and discursive meditations,” which disrupt the reader’s concentration on the object of the narration and redirect their focus onto the “narrating subject and/or the very process of narration.”⁵⁶³ This aspect of *Shi-shosetsu* calls our attention to the method of composition itself, a tactic that can be described as producing a “reflexive mode” of writing.

As Edward Fowler explained, rather than attempting to create a fictional world that transcended his immediate circumstances, the Japanese writer “sought to transcribe the world as he

⁵⁶⁰ Fowler, *The Rhetoric of Confession*, xvii.

⁵⁶¹ Fowler, xviii.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, xviii-xxi.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, xxi.

had experienced it, with little concern for overall narrative design.”⁵⁶⁴ Japanese authors limited their scope of authority to their personal realms, the depiction of which was dictated by lived experience. The primary enterprise consisted of recording the writer’s thoughts and actions. *Shi-shosetsu* quickly developed into closely cropped self-portraits, while “realism” in Japan became intimately associated with the personal and the specific rather than universal.

One noteworthy characteristic of *Shi-shosetsu* is the construct of an intimate reader-author rapport. During the heyday of *Shi-shosetsu*, in the 1920s and 1930s, readers of any one author never numbered more than a few thousand. They could readily recognize their favorite author’s persona despite the use of different characters in different texts by the same author. Readers’ affection for their favorite authors was intense, and *bundan*, intimate literary circles of writers, critics, and readers, emerged in the Taisho period.⁵⁶⁵

The difficulty of classifying *Shi-shosetsu* from a Western perspective—particularly in terms of the established nonfiction-fiction distinction—may be compared to the categorization problem that arose with the advent of New Journalism and the “nonfiction novel” at the end of the 1960s in the United States, as both constituted rebellious efforts to contest the strict bifurcation of genres.⁵⁶⁶ While the New Journalism (see my discussion of New Journalism in Chapter One) provided fertile intellectual ground for the emergence of participant observer photography, the revitalization of the *Shi-shosetsu* in Japan through Araki’s work strikes an interesting cultural parallel for a more private realm of photography. New Journalism applied the techniques of classical narrative to actual events, whereas the *Shi-shosetsu* used the techniques of the personal essay, the diary, and confessional and other non-fiction forms to present the fiction of a faithfully chronicled experience.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., xxiii.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., xxv – xxvi. Similar rapport occurs in the Kabuki theater and among readers of Haiku.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., xxviii.

In his preface to *Sentimental Journey*, Araki wrote in confessional tone, “as a photographer I have made love my starting point, and by chance I began with the *Shi-shosetsu*. There’s nothing more than that. Originally, in my case, I always intended it to be a *Shi-shosetsu*. That is because I think the *Shi-shosetsu* is the closest thing there is to photography.”⁵⁶⁷ Araki believed that the essence of photography is to reveal oneself. Araki’s understanding of the *Shi-shosetsu* provided him a rationale for narrating his personal stories through photographic images. He took up the details of the environment that surrounds the “I,” immersing himself in the world of his subjects.

Araki never shied away from revealing his personal relationships, and he continued to make photo albums with his wife. *Yoko My Love* (1978) is a collection of photographs focusing on the story of his life with Yoko, from 1968 to 1977, with texts accompanying the images. While photographing a family trip was a commonplace activity for amateurs, Araki established such personal subjects as a legitimate topic for professional artists.

III. *Pseudo-Diary* (1980)

In Araki’s much-discussed preface to *Sentimental Journey*, he wrote, to reiterate, “But I am not saying these photos are real just because I took them on my honeymoon.”⁵⁶⁸ While Araki decried “phony” photography, and the *Sentimental Journey* was represented as the opposite of anything phony, Araki admitted that the photographs in the book were not necessarily “real,” suggesting that the project is not strictly a record of the artist’s honeymoon, but rather an art project in which he took some liberties with the truth, enabled by his advantageous insider position. The apparently sincere images and authentic record were, in fact, obtained by a degree of staging. Some

⁵⁶⁷ Translations of Araki’s text are available in several versions.

⁵⁶⁸ *Sentimental Journey*, preface. Translation from “Araki Nobuyoshi and the ‘I Novel,’” *Déjà-vu*, no.20 (Summer 1995): 67.

evidence may be found in posed and candid shots in which Yoko did not seem to mind being exposed. From its outset, the honeymoon had the dual purpose of providing a celebratory wedding journey and a collaboration on a project for publication. Yoko's unabashed distribution of the album to her colleagues at Dentsu confirms her willing participation. Araki explained:

When *Sentimental Journey* was published, Yoko brought this book to the office where she worked. The great thing about Yoko is, she tried to sell it to her co-workers, even to her boss.⁵⁶⁹

The question as to what is real and what is not was explored more explicitly in *Pseudo-Diary* (1980). The book's title uses the word 偽, "phony," or "fake." *Pseudo-Diary* 偽日記 (1980), published by *Byakuya-shobo*, is a compilation of photographs that were presented originally as a serial in the magazine *Weekend Super*,⁵⁷⁰ managed by Akira Suei, who later published the magazine *Photo Age* (*Shashin Jidai*). *The Weekend Super* ran from 1977 to 1981 or 82. Similar to *Photo Age*, it offered a mix of art, sub-cultural, and erotic content.

Araki referred to some of his publications as diaries and others as novels. The diaries are more fragmented, lacking a coherent narrative, whereas his *Shi-shosetsu* work bears a sense of overall narrative structure, despite some interruptions to the flow.⁵⁷¹ As a case in point, in *Pseudo-Diary*, which is in horizontal format with pairs of images shown on opposing pages, the sequence of images has no apparent order other than that imposed by the date appearing at the lower right corner of each photograph, easily recorded with an automatic date function. About ten percent of the dates

⁵⁶⁹ Araki, interview by author, Shinjuku, Tokyo, October 28, 2010.

⁵⁷⁰ In the original publication, diary entries were included along with photographs. The entries record Araki's daily activities, mostly banal ones. One entry reads, "July 4. Got up at 9 a.m. Decided on sex over jogging. Ate breakfast watching Baisho Chieko and Hashi Yukio on the tube. Fried rice and leftovers on parade ..." Quoted in Akira Hasegawa, "Pseudo-Diary," *Pseudo-Diary of Nobuyoshi Araki* (Tokyo: Bayakuya-Shobo, 1980), unpaginated.

⁵⁷¹ To the question of how his diary works are related to his novel works, Araki answered, "novels are written out of diaristic materials—they're fair copies of diary notes. In a way, my diaries are already novels. A novel is always possessed by the eye of an Other – and so are photographs." "Back stories and Backstreets: Walking & Talking of Araki Nobuyoshi," *Déjà vu* (summer, 1995): 70.

occur in 1979; otherwise, most are during 1980. Starting with April 1, 1979, the book ends with some fictional future dates, such as March 17, 1988 and March 5, 1992, on the final two page spread of the book. This raises the question of whether the other dates correspond to factual reality and suggests the possibility of fabrication. In actuality, the dates are known to be of two kinds, one true, and the other fictitiously manipulated on the date function of the camera. With the exception of the future dates, both true and fictitious dates are presented as if they were equally valid. A significant portion of the book is dedicated to noteworthy dates. For example, April 1, 1980, April Fools' Day,⁵⁷² is one that Araki considered "the ultimate metaphor for a photographer, because he is a liar."⁵⁷³ Another set of dates that carry significance is August 6th, 9th, and 15th. The first two are the dates of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the third is the date of the Japanese surrender that ended World War II in the Pacific theater, though the images that were assigned these dates have no apparent relationship to those historical events. Araki's manipulation of time challenges certain received ideas about photographs and their relationship to real time. By adding a fictitious date to a photographic image, and so using time fluidly, Araki deliberately blurs the line between reality and unreality. Araki also mixed candid snapshots (unmediated reality) with staged shots (composed un/reality). Some examples will be discussed in this section. These images parody amateur photographs, which at the time often bore a date, so whether Araki's date is real or false is unimportant. What matters is Araki's experimental exercise in the perception of reality through photographic experience.

⁵⁷² April Fool's Day was introduced to Japan during the Taisho Era (1912-26), around the time of the First World War (1914-18).

⁵⁷³ Araki, interview by author, Tokyo, October 28, 2010..

Araki made frequent allusions to the “slender margin between the real and the unreal,”⁵⁷⁴ a phrase used by seventeenth-century playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon in formulating his theory of dramatic art.⁵⁷⁵ Chikamatsu posited that the so-called “realism” of the theater was actually founded on the border between the truth and the lie.⁵⁷⁶ In the modern era, Roland Barthes posited that truth is a function of what comes last in fiction. In the development of theater, Barthes asserted, “the dénouement is compromised in a disclosure: what constitutes the dénouement, is the truth.”⁵⁷⁷ Barthes continued, “truth is the predicate at last discovered,” and “the dramatic narrative is a game with two players: the snare and the truth.”⁵⁷⁸ Likewise, Araki’s sense of realism may be found in the blurred boundaries between the real and the fictitious.

Unlike *Sentimental Journey*, *Pseudo-Diary* has no overall narrative replete with beginning, middle, and end. There seem to be fragmented narratives within it, reflecting what might have been the record of his life as a photographer, in and out of public and private spheres. The rhetoric of Araki’s visual scheme lies in his disregard for the relative importance of any particular image within this equality of photographic images. Often, juxtaposed images jump abruptly from a mundane outdoor shot to a photo of an exposed body, resulting in an idiosyncratic feeling (**fig.5.43–fig.5.45**). This kind of arrangement was suggested earlier in books such as *Okinawa* and *Tokyo*, which were part of the *Sentimental Journey* series discussed in the previous section. However, in *Pseudo-Diary*, Araki expanded his method of image arrangement in a fuller, more complex way while introducing a new type of participant observer mode, as will be explained later in this section.

⁵⁷⁴ Hasegawa, “Pseudo-Diary,” unpaginated.

⁵⁷⁵ Chikamatsu Monzaemon’s real name was Sugimori Nobumori, (1653–1725)

⁵⁷⁶ Hasegawa, “Pseudo-Diary,” unpaginated.

⁵⁷⁷ Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 187.

⁵⁷⁸ Barthes, *S/Z*, 188.

Throughout his career, Araki produced numerous photo stories in books and magazines. While many of his stories have a narrow focus, such as an individual person or even his cat, Chiro, Araki frequently juxtaposed images in ways that do not immediately make sense or have an apparent relationship to the primary subject. These multifaceted, scattered topics, ranging from intimate images of naked female bodies to street views of Tokyo, reveal a distinctive strategy of juxtaposing heterogeneous images. While some of Araki's books proceed in a straightforward narrative, in other books, Araki assembles and fabricates stories out of sequence (such as in *Pseudo-Diary*). The images from one event may appear again, extracted from their original contexts, in different books that may focus on another narrative. He loosely knit together the fragments taken from different events into one narrative without any clear linear structure. Juxtaposing contradictory or unrelated images side by side may evoke the way in which a contemporary viewer in Tokyo sees and experiences the city.

The most distinctive visual strategy Araki employed in *Pseudo-Diary* was to pair Tokyo street shots with interior shots, often of naked women (presumably models for Araki's magazine work or his lovers) (**fig.5.44, fig.5.45**). A detailed visual analysis of these images indicates a deliberate arrangement in which literal and figurative patterns may be observed. In these sets of photographs, Araki's participation with his subjects is evident. None of them look at the camera; some even face away from it. In one example (**fig.5.43**), an interior scene on the right page shows a couple dining together but not looking at each other, apparently lost in their own thoughts. In the street scene on the left page, Araki focuses on three women conversing with each other at some distance from his camera outside a building (the sign indicates that it is a wedding event company called *Freesia*), while a man walking in the direction of the three women is just entering the frame from the lower right corner near a road sign ("motor vehicle prohibited to enter"). The "do not

enter” road sign separates the male passerby from the female group; the parallel wall of the building obstructs our view, preventing our eyes from entering further into the space. The lattice design created by the tiled wall of the building is echoed in the traditional Japanese window in the interior scene of the couple dining together. The lack of connection between male and female subjects is more directly emphasized in the interior scene.

Throughout *Pseudo-Diary*, candid shots are repeatedly paired with staged shots. In the previously discussed example, the street scene reads as a candid, while the image of the couple dining is an image drawn from a fictional context (it appears to be a still photograph taken on the set of a television program or film). In another example (**fig.5.44**), a pair of images bearing the date “80. 8. 9” (August 9, 1980) juxtaposes an image of a street in the entertainment district with its restaurants, bars, and clubs against the image of a naked woman in bondage occupying a cheap hotel room. The mundane exterior shot includes a couple walking with their backs to the viewer along a small street on an early weekend morning or late afternoon, as indicated by the long shadows and relative pedestrian and vehicular inactivity. The paired interior image is of a woman whose naked buttocks face the viewer. Araki likely staged the scene. None of these subjects looks at the viewer, delivering a sense of muteness and non-communication.

A sense of alienation among urban passersby appears in a street image (**fig.5.45**) that strikingly resembles a photograph by Garry Winogrand, *American Legion Convention, Dallas, Texas* (1964) (**fig.5.46**). Although taken at very different moments and places, the photographs share tilted perspectives revealing a moment in a street scene: pedestrians on a sidewalk ignoring an individual in peril (a disabled veteran, in Winogrand’s case, and a drunken sleeping man, in Araki’s case). No one attempts to help these disadvantaged subjects, suggesting a sense of indifference and remove among urbanites. The shadows in Araki’s photograph indicate that it was taken in the

morning or late afternoon. The stark contrast makes his work more dramatic than Winogrand's, emphasizing the alienation of urban life further. Araki's street image is juxtaposed with an image of a naked woman in a motel room whose relationship to the photographer may be inferred as an expendable one: when her task is completed, she will be dismissed. Her naked body in repose, either before or after the exchange of sex and picture making, is comparable to the distressed man lying on the sidewalk. Both subjects assume a position of disadvantage, whether voluntarily or not.

Picturing "Picturing": Reflexive Mode

One of the most distinctive characteristics of *Pseudo-Diary* is that Araki shows not only the result of his shooting, but also images of his image-making process, particularly those of a pornographic nature (**fig.5.47 – fig. 5.49**). Images shot by his assistants, or whoever else attended his photo sessions, display Araki photographing women in close proximity. These images of sexual performances were commissioned by and first published in *Weekend Super* (mentioned above), a magazine devoted to topics ranging from artistic and sub-cultural to erotic content.⁵⁷⁹ By mixing these pornographic images into his book, Araki blurred the distinctions between his art photographs and his commercial ones. Discussion of when and how Araki's commissioned magazine work migrated into the realm of his personal projects lies outside the scope of this dissertation, but by his making no distinction between the two areas of work, Araki developed his unique aesthetic strategy. The only distinction the viewer can make between the two types of published images appears to lie in the different intended audiences for the work. The commissioned sadomasochistic images for *S & M Sniper*, for example, which had brought him such disrepute, served mainly a male audience pursuing pornographic pleasure; the same images were recycled into published compilations of art

⁵⁷⁹ Araki's sexualized performances were championed by the editor Araki Suei, who was not only the publisher of *Weekend Super*, but later published the influential photo magazine *Photo Age*.

work and exhibited in art shows to be viewed by both genders in a context that demanded readings beyond the pornographic.

Araki used his camera as a psychological stimulant capable of provoking action and revealing character. His camera allowed him to enter others' worlds and lives (encompassing the sex industry, nude models, chance meetings with random women), although it should be noted that his commercial work during the 1980s entailed compensating the women who worked at clubs in the entertainment district where sexual access was an assumed condition. Araki acknowledged, "I gained access (to these women) through sex. Sex is like foreplay. Photography comes afterwards. Or vice versa."⁵⁸⁰ His words reveal the absence of personal attachment or sentiment in these relationships. His statement also describes a commoditization of sex, including the possibility of making sexually charged photographs. The images that portray Araki's insertion of himself into the process of photographing a model reveal a self-conscious and performative act that illustrates this kind of frank exchange, and makes plain Araki's exploitation of his subjects, in part in pursuit of his own financial and other self-interests. Depicting the process of making a photograph of the exposed body of a model presents Araki as not only a participant observer but also an authoring agent directing the scene.

In one pair of images (**fig.5.47**), Araki squats holding his camera while directing a woman to reveal what is underneath her dress, exposing her vagina. In the second image, Araki is closer to the woman whose exposed genitalia (blurred in this book, *Pseudo-Diary*, to meet the demands of censor) draw his interest. In the following sequence, other poses by the same woman shot from a different angle culminate in an image (**fig.5.48**) in which two cameras, a spotlight, and leftover food lie about like items discarded after their purposes have been fulfilled, suggesting postcoital states. In another image (**fig.5.49**), the raised lower body of a woman posing for Araki seems nothing more

⁵⁸⁰ Araki, interview by author, October 28, 2010..

than a target for prurient scrutiny. Unlike Araki's earlier works, such as *Satchin*, in which his personal relationships with his subjects was a means by which to gain access to them so as to make personally charged photographs, or *Sentimental Journey*, in which he already had an intimate relationship with his wife, these pornographic images are devoid of emotional connection. His sole interest was in obtaining close-ups of female genitalia or perverse images of sadomasochism. In this process, the inequality of the power relationship between the photographer and the model emerges.

Araki's method exposes the latent voyeurism associated with observational or integrated participant observer photography while turning the innately voyeuristic nature of pornographic photography into a more confessional and performative genre. He admits to the use of a theatrical, staged process in making this kind of picture. The occasional presence of Araki within the camera's frame constitutes a reflexive mediation. In the social sciences, a reflexive method takes account of itself or of the effects of the personality or presence of the researcher on the subject being investigated. One of the characteristics of the reflexive mode, as Bill Nichols defined it, is that "Instead of what can be represented through realism (lived experience) forming the focus of reflexivity, the question of realism itself, or of representation (formal structure), becomes the focus."⁵⁸¹ Reflexive documentary arose from a desire to make the conventions of representation themselves more apparent and to challenge the impression of reality which other modes (such as observational and interactive modes) normally convey unproblematically. As the most self-conscious mode, it uses many of the same devices as other documentary modes but sets them on edge so that the viewer's attention is drawn to the device as much as to the effect. Pictures made in the reflexive mode may raise the viewer's consciousness about how subjective perceptions affect

⁵⁸¹ Bill Nichols, "Documentary Modes of Representation," *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 67.

one's understanding or assessment of what one is viewing.⁵⁸² Araki's picturing of picturing might be said to move the viewer to a heightened consciousness of his or her own relationship to the photographic image. The photographic apparatus intervenes in the process of representation, while frames of reference collide between the representational and the referential in such a way that an initially untroubled access to another world becomes problematic.

An emphasis on the materiality of photography was evinced by photographers discussed earlier in this dissertation, starting with the anthropologist James Mooney's inclusion of his own shadow and tripod into the frame and Lee Friedlander's frequent inclusion of his own reflection or shadow in his work. However, Araki entered the frame with the full force of his entire presence. Clark, Goldin, and Araki all appeared before their own cameras, but their position of participation with their subjects differed. Goldin was, more or less, an equal with her subjects, while Clark and Araki were not. Both Clark and Goldin maintained their roles as photographers, though there were occasional disguises. Araki too maintains his role as photographer, even when his assistant operates the camera for him under Araki's direction. Through his reflexive mode of photography, Araki reexamined the effect realist conventions have on a viewer.

In *Pseudo-Diary*, Araki reveals aspects of his life as a photographer, blurring the boundary between life and art in accordance with his idea of photography as *Shi-shosetsu*. What he claims to be his life (his everyday activities as a photographer, including photographing naked women, activities not common to most people) falls prey to self-contradiction. He works

⁵⁸² Araki's mode in *Pseudo-Diary*, and perhaps throughout his career, might recall the reflexive mode of filmmaking seen in the work of cinematographer Dziga Vertov (1896-1954) who made the experimental film *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). Considered one of the most innovative and influential works of the silent era, the film captured a montage of images of urban Russian everyday life, featuring people at work and leisure. Vertov employed unorthodox camera angles, superimpositions, and rapidly edited scenes in which a camera operator goes everywhere in a city recording modern life. The theme of Vertov's film is the cycle of life over the course of a constructed day. Its fast-paced technology and energetic labor differ from Araki's depictions of street life and sex (although Vertov depicted an intimate birth scene), but both artists share a way of recording the world and editing images so as to give the effect of a continuous bombardment of stimuli.

hard at creating stimulating, unusual, even extreme scenes for his art. Furthermore, once he acquired a reputation as a photographer, the kind of life he presented to the viewer became something quite different from the more or less earnest life he showed in *Sentimental Journey*. This practice follows what Japanese literary critic Ken Hirano (1907-1978) called *Shi-shosetsu u engisetsu* (I-Novel as performance) in his 1951 essay *Shi-shosetsu no niritsu haihan* (*The Antinomies of Shi-shosetsu*). Hirano pointed out the issues raised by the gap between art and life among the *Shi-shosetsu* writers. While one group realized harmony between the self and the outer world, other writers lived in self-imposed discomfort in order to experience material to write about, believing that, if necessary, a miserable life must be simulated for the sake of art.⁵⁸³ According to Hirano, this phenomenon is a reversal of the relationship between art and life. As Yoshiaki Kai pointed out, Araki's *Shi-shashin* (I-Photography) entails the same paradox as the Japanese *Shi-shosetsu* writers who effectively lived their lives as a form of performance.⁵⁸⁴ Araki's reflexive mode of photography is most clearly manifested in his picturing himself picturing. This blurring of the line between art and life mirrors other permeations of boundaries, such as the introduction of his commercial (mainly pornographic) magazine work into the realm of his artistic endeavors, and the expressions of self seen in the documentation of his personal life in violation of long standing cultural inhibitions.

IV. *Tokyo Lucky Hole* (1990)

Among Araki's numerous erotic works, perhaps the best known is the book *Tokyo Lucky Hole* (1990). Between 1983 and 1985, Araki and Akira Suei—the former editor of *Weekend Super*

⁵⁸³ Hirano cited in Hijiya-Kirschneireit, *Rituals of Self-Revelation*, 90. Ken Hirano, "Shishosetsu no niritsu haihan (The Antinomies of Shishosetsu)," in *Geijutsu to jisseikatsu (Art and Real Life)* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2001), 9-43. Yoshiaki Kai also discusses this issue in his chapter, "Sunappu and Everyday," 248.

⁵⁸⁴ Kai, 248.

(1977-1981) and the editor of the monthly magazine *Photo Age* (*Shashin Jidai*), founded in 1981 by Byakura-shobo—roamed the red light district of Tokyo and other Japanese cities photographing the customs of the sex industry. The documentation of their nightly activities culminated first in the publication of a series in *Photo Age*, and ultimately in independent book format as *Tokyo Lucky Hole*. *Photo Age*, a sophisticated magazine similar to *Weekend Super*, was devoted to erotica and featured frank sexual images that blurred the boundary between pornography and art. The collection of photos in the book also included Araki's images from the series "The Shinjuku Sex Scene," which was published in the magazine *The Truth Behind the Gossip*.⁵⁸⁵

Araki's explicit photos of sex led to frequent conflicts with legal authorities. The abundant images of genitalia in *Tokyo Lucky Hole* (1990) are covered with black dots or triangle shapes. Public display of pubic hair and adult genitals was illegal in Japan until the mid-1990s. While complying with censorship demands, Araki and his collaborator devised ways to circumvent censorship. In some instances, female subjects shaved their pubic hair. In others, Araki painted hair over the pubic area, either directly on the model or on the photograph. When censors required his subjects to wear underwear, they wore nearly transparent garments that revealed their pubic hair.⁵⁸⁶ (In 1997, Taschen published an unexpurgated version of *Tokyo Lucky Hole* in a thicker, glossier form and with additional images by Araki for Western viewers.)

⁵⁸⁵ Akihito Yasumi, "The Photographer Between a Man and a Woman," *Araki: Tokyo Lucky Hole* (Köln: Taschen, 1997), 6.

⁵⁸⁶ Prompted by censorship laws, Araki started using black ink as a tantalizing tool to stimulate his models in the photo shoots. Complying with censorship rules, *Marvelous Stories of Black Ink* (1994), published by ART ROOM, shows female models in bondage, dressed in kimonos, while Araki draws ink onto their genitals. Afterwards, the prints were drawn over with black ink, as if the ink were dripping blood, suggesting grotesque images from a horror film. The *Part of Love* series (1987) is devoted exclusively to close-ups of genitals. But, Araki did not restrict his interest in female genitals to the real thing. He explored anything moist and supple, finding analogous images in toothbrushes, cracks in concrete, oysters, caviar, and flowers, for example.

Araki utilized the participant observation method to obtain his commercial magazine work, such as the images included in *S & M Snipers*, *Photo Age*, and *The Truth Behind the Gossip*, among many others. These commercial images differed significantly from the record of his honeymoon in their representation of women. Although Araki was frank in publishing sexual images of his wife, Yoko, he refrained from displaying her genitalia. Araki used the rhetoric of participation to express sentimentality and intimate love in his images of Yoko; he used a somewhat different visual strategy when representing sex as a consumer commodity. Araki stated:

My photography reveals everything, differently from typical pornography. There is a Japanese proverb, “Hiding makes it flower (秘すれば花).” But my models and photographs show everything. That can’t make it flower. I am not photographing to show someone else, but photographing for myself. All these soft pornographic photographs in magazines do not last, but my photos will remain.⁵⁸⁷

Araki’s photographs of the sex industry of Tokyo reveal the sexual customs of a particular region at a particular time, even suggesting that the subculture was a beneficial phenomenon, one in which he participated as if it were his personal playground. But Araki’s documenting of the Japanese sex industry also raises critical issues, including questions about the way female sex workers were represented and treated, the status of women in Japanese society, the history of prostitution in Japan, feminist perspectives on the sex industry, as well as the effects of censorship laws discussed earlier in this chapter. In this section, I will touch upon aspects of each of these issues.

Araki’s decision to document the sex industry came amidst new cultural landscapes in Kyoto, Osaka, and Tokyo at the end of the 1970s. Akira Suei described a newly developing business in Kyoto in 1978, *no pan kissa* or “no-panties coffee shops,” in which young waitresses wearing no underwear serve male clients. The idea became popular, spreading quickly to Osaka a year later,

⁵⁸⁷ Araki, interview by author, October 28, 2010.

then to the business district of Higashi-nagasaki in Tokyo. These “bottomless” coffee shops popped up near every major subway line in Tokyo, and, as “soft sex” businesses, attracted young women who had no prior experience as professional sex workers and male clients too reserved to patronize more traditional sex businesses. Soon, variations on the new sex businesses expanded to include peep rooms and “massage” parlors with private cubicles, producing such ludicrous but overtly suggestive names as “Coffin Coffee House and Pornographic Fortune-Telling” and “Lucky Hole.”⁵⁸⁸ In the clubs of Kabuki-cho in Shinjuku (the pleasure district of Tokyo), an area known for employing professional sex workers, more hard-core themes such as “no-panties massage parlors” flourished.⁵⁸⁹ These bizarre practices became part of the urban social landscape of Tokyo and elsewhere in Japan from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, in part because of the dramatic increase in discretionary income available to ordinary Japanese men during the economic boom. As Tokyo underwent rapid changes in infrastructure, old districts were demolished to make way for development, paradoxically paving the way for the end of the soft-sex industry, which was eventually brought to a halt by legislation that regulated the sex industry in a way that effectively favored traditional businesses and pushed out the amateurs.

The public shared Araki’s fascination with the bizarre sex industry of Tokyo. Late night television programs would regularly run features on the subject.⁵⁹⁰ But the boom took its toll, as customers became bored with any one theme. The “no panties coffee shops” disappeared after a couple of years. Constantly seeking new ideas, the industry flourished until it was stemmed by the

⁵⁸⁸ The title *Tokyo Lucky Hole* was actually the name of a club where male customers would enter a curtained room in which they would encounter a sheet of plywood in the rough outline of a female body bearing the photograph of an actress or otherwise attractive young woman. In the genital area was a hole through which a male customer would insert his penis to be masturbated by a woman on the other side. This hole became what Suei called a “black hole,” where endless desire for lust was sought.

⁵⁸⁹ For more details of the history of the new sex businesses in urban context in Japan, see the essay by Akira Suei, “The Lucky Hole as the Black Hole,” *Araki: Tokyo Lucky Hole* (Köln: Taschen, 1997), 10-15.

⁵⁹⁰ Yasumi, “The Photographer Between a Man and a Woman,” 6.

enactment of the New Amusement Business Control and Improvement Act of February 1985, which effectively excluded the ordinary young Japanese women who became involved in the business. Afterwards, the primary participants in the traditional sex industry, which was still sanctioned (and some would say encouraged) by government policies, were professional sex workers, who were largely foreigners. In defiance of this new law, *Photo Age* featured a collection of Araki's images from the bygone era, but it was ordered to recall all copies of the April 1988 issue, which was deemed obscene. Eventually, the publication of *Photo Age* ceased.⁵⁹¹

Araki and Suei explored these areas as active participant observers who imposed no moral judgments (**fig.5.50, fig.5.51, fig.5.52, fig.5.53**), often serving as catalysts for the more performative scenes. Araki's images of those involved in the pleasure district, taken as apparently candid snapshots, may well seem unstaged to the viewer. In their matter-of-fact-appearance, Araki's black-and-white photographs of the Kabuki-cho of the 1980s seem to employ ordinary snapshot procedures, placing the subject in the center of the frame and releasing the shutter. Occasionally, the subject was too close to the camera, resulting in what looked like badly made images. Passing from one club to the next, Araki and his collaborator (and sometimes their assistants) participated in this fast-moving hedonistic activity as enthusiastic tourists and consumers, not as investigators. These explicit photographic sketches of endless variations of sexual practices seems to offer little insight into the psychological or social motivations of the sex workers, but rather to remain, on the surface, not very different in spirit from Araki's earlier pictures of crowds appearing like empty shells in their Warholian embrace of surfaces. One might argue that Araki's obsessive, even tedious review of the sexual practices of the red light district reveals an affective emptiness that borders on the callous.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid, 9.

One spread (pages 26-27) (**fig.5.50**) in *Tokyo Lucky Hole* is part of a sequence of images of a club. Prior to these pages, there are images showing the exterior of the club, photo portraits of the women with their names hung in the lobby of the club, then two female workers ready to serve, and then servicing male customers on deep couches. In this spread, the four images show two sets of sexual activities, represented by two pairs of male customers and female workers. On page 26, the half-exposed female worker is receiving cunnilingus from a male customer fully immersed in the activity, while the woman is directly engaging with the camera. She is doubly exposed to men (the customer and the photographer): her nametag appears on her skirt while the male customer's identity is obscured as his head is facing away and partially under her skirt. On page 27, a female worker performs fellatio on a male customer. On the following page, Araki, wearing jeans, unlike other customers in suits, is kissing and touching the bare breast of a young female worker.

In *Tokyo Lucky Hole*, there are other pictures of customers hiding their faces, and a few with women turning their heads away from Araki's camera, but in most cases neither the women nor their customers shy away from the camera despite the fact that these women were comparatively amateur sex workers, including college students making money in a temporary job. The women's boldness suggests a degree of complicity with Araki's project, although perhaps their behavior was no different when Araki was not present. The women were aware of the presence of the camera, knowingly consenting to their exposure. Unlike their predecessors in more traditional sex businesses, whose options were limited due to poverty or to an unfortunate past, the female sex workers in Araki's *Tokyo Lucky Hole* appear to be willing participants who were drawn by the prospect of quick money and the thrills of the pleasure district. As such, they reflect social changes

during the time of the economic bubble, when legitimate high earning jobs were generally available only to male workers.⁵⁹²

Araki's portrayal of sex workers as carefree, willing participants expressing their own personal sexual liberation may be misleading. Despite the economic boom of the 1980s and the improvement of the status of women in Japan that new legislation sought to bring about, everyday life was not normally equal. Many women worked at part-time rather than full-time jobs, due in part to their obligations of caring for family and home. Moreover, had higher paying employment been available, many of these young women might have preferred to do something else. In that respect, these images of amateur sex workers may be interpreted as signifying the economic coercion imposed by having no better options than becoming self-imposed victims of a sex industry that existed almost entirely to serve male interests and male pleasures.

An examination of the conditions preceding the boom of the "soft-porn" sex industry of 1980s reveals a highly patriarchal society. During the prewar era, the concubine system and licensed prostitution were considered serious problems, according to Kajiko Yajima.⁵⁹³ Socialist feminists viewed commercialized sex as a capitalist exploitation of women, and the mainstream Japanese feminist approach to prostitution was to prohibit the sale of sexual services entirely.

The status of women was elevated during the Allied occupation of Japan (1945-1952), as women's legal standing became equal to that of men, guaranteed in the new constitution. The *ribu* (an ill-pronounced abbreviation of *liberation*) movement began in 1970 with a focus on female sexual liberation, akin to the call for sexual, social, economic, and political equality in

⁵⁹² Suei, "The Lucky Hole as the Black Hole," 11.

⁵⁹³ Kajiko Yajima (1833-1925), who founded *The Japanese Moral Reform Society* in 1886, saw prostitution as one of the two gravest problems for Japanese women besides the concubine system. For early feminist thought in Japan, see Sharon L. Sievers, *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1984), 87-113.

the 1960s and 1970s in North America.⁵⁹⁴ Despite formal changes such as guaranteeing women the right to vote, the Japanese government organized a system of brothels to service the occupying forces, which developed over time into the illegal prostitution industry that thrives today. During the first eight months of the Allied occupation of Japan alone, some sixty to seventy thousand women were employed in sanctioned brothels that were disguised as bars and restaurants. While these women served mainly the Allied Forces, Japan is notorious for its *jungun ianfu* or “military comfort women.” Some 80,000 to 200,000 women, mainly Koreans and others from Japanese occupied nations, served as forced sex workers for Japanese troops before and during World War II. The women hired to work in official government brothels in the postwar period were regarded as dutiful, self-sacrificing daughters working to meet their families’ financial needs and responding to a patriotic call. In contrast, independent prostitutes, or *panpan girls*, were oppressed and criminalized. Men, even obvious patrons, were never arrested.⁵⁹⁵

Although the female sex workers portrayed in Araki’s *Tokyo Lucky Hole* appear liberated, the strict division of gender roles in these establishments perpetuates a system of sanctioned prostitution, albeit now motivated by the forces of profit. And while these women may have made voluntary decisions to become sex workers, the hook in this system, money, is held and wielded by men, and so represents inequality between the sexes. Suei’s interpretation of phenomena like the no-panties coffee shops as a positive development, conveniently consonant with the general population’s fascination at the time, can be regarded as a patriarchal point of view, and Araki’s photographs serve that point of view.

⁵⁹⁴ Sandra Buckley, “A Short History of the Feminist Movement in Japan,” *Women of Japan and Korea: Continuity and Change*, ed. Joyce Gelb and Marian Lief Palley (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 172-73.

⁵⁹⁵ Ayala Klemperer-Markman, “Art, Politics, and Prostitution in Occupied/Contemporary Japan: The Voice of a Sex Worker,” *PostGender: Gender, Sexuality, and Performativity in Japanese Culture*, ed. Ayelet Zohar (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 232-237.

Araki was well established in Tokyo by the early 1980s, a familiar face to the public. Women sex workers in Kabuki-cho may have recognized his celebrity status, so his presence might have elicited performances that were more elaborate. In this context, their activities, already taking place in a kind of theatrical space where male customers and female prostitutes indulged in and realized fantasies through role-playing, became even more highly fictionalized. For instance, a set of photographs (**fig.5.51**) shows a peculiar practice in which a male customer lies inside a mock coffin while naked young women act as fortunetellers. Playing the part of the customer in one of these photos, Araki pretends that he is examining the breast of a naked female worker. In this reflexive mode, Araki becomes a catalyst in the process of documenting the activities of these once-flourishing sex clubs. Whether the presence of Araki and his camera encouraged the performative aspect of the female workers' and customers' activities is unclear, as it was in the nature of these sex clubs to engage in role-play.

Through the audaciously uninhibited act of revealing himself in his work without concern for securing the most aesthetic images, Araki produced reportage on a subject that had rarely been seen previously in that light. His achievement required the use of a technique akin to that of an anthropologist investigating his own culture through participation and active observation. Araki said:

I needed to break down the me-and-you barrier. I can say that I have collapsed the previous tradition of photography that emphasized objectivity. In the past, photographers felt they had to eliminate their subjectivity as much as possible. I consider myself a “subjective” photographer. I try to get as close as possible to the subject by putting myself within the frame.⁵⁹⁶

Araki's often deadpan, nonchalant facial expressions, suggesting that he is more observer than actor (although he is both), contrast with the smiling faces of women showing a putative

⁵⁹⁶ Araki, interview by author, October 28, 2010.

ecstasy. The private spaces of these clubs entered the public domain once Araki published images of them. In this sense, the clubs became stages for fictional scenes within the larger reality of what occurred inside the sex industry.

Araki employed both first person and third person approaches through his participation as customer and observer, catering to the male gaze. He and his collaborators participated as customers, on many occasions becoming subjects before the camera (**fig.5.52, fig.5.53**). The position of his camera was not fixed, but moved its location fluidly. Araki recalled:

In the course of the activity of having fun, I passed my camera to a woman or to my partner. Sometimes he took pictures of me. He instructed them. By doing that, I got different kinds of shots.⁵⁹⁷

Araki recalled particularly the role of his editor:

The editor was enthusiastic and was also a participant. He took multiple roles from taking pictures of me to inviting customers to take pictures. Now editors don't do that kind of a role for me any more. It was back in the 1980s.⁵⁹⁸

Araki's photography practice at these clubs seems to have been spontaneous, making the act of photographing a part of the performance. He moved in and out of his own frame in several projects following *Sentimental Journey*. The role of documenter shifted around, with Araki no longer assuming the fixed role of recorder, as he had done in *Sentimental Journey*. Despite occasional opportunities for female sex workers to take photographs of the scenes of Araki's performative photography sessions, on the whole, the images do not represent the point of view of the sex workers.

There have been art works made by sex workers in Japan, the most notable contemporary instance of which is Bubu de la Madeleine (b. 1961), a college educated woman whose life path passed through prostitution to sex worker activism. Her video project, *Made in*

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

Occupied Japan, made in collaboration with leading feminist artist Yoshiko Shimada (b. 1959), presented Bubu's personal experience as a prostitute along with historical aspects of Japanese prostitution during the Allied Occupation of Japan, which affects Japanese society even today.⁵⁹⁹ One element of the work was to claim that prostitution should be seen simply as a job that includes enjoyment in dealing with clients (**fig.5.54**), while other scenes of the video presented photographic stills of a prostitute and a uniformed U.S. soldier, suggesting the exploitative utilization of women by their government mentioned earlier (**fig.5.55**). The juxtaposition of these two perspectives and their concomitant attitudes (prostitutes as victims vs. prostitutes as self-determined women) raises unresolved issues about women's roles. Shimada said in a 1994 interview, "Japanese women were not entirely voiceless victims of the male-dominant militarism," but "many of them were enthusiastic fascists and willing to sacrifice themselves and to victimize others in the name of the emperor." She insisted that Japanese women "remind ourselves that we were not victims but on the side of the aggressors. ... Even now, many Japanese men see women not as individuals, but only through the images of 'mother' or 'prostitute' (and) those images ... are used to manipulate women, making them either domestic slaves or sex slaves."⁶⁰⁰

Araki's collection of photographic images for *Tokyo Lucky Hole* may be viewed in this light, especially inasmuch as ordinary women were driven to the industry to satisfy the desires and fantasies of men and thereby perpetuate stereotypical images of women. Araki's women exposing themselves in sadomasochistic scenes demand further examination in this light. His first person participant observer approach may have driven his access to the sex industry, but

⁵⁹⁹ Klemperer-Markman, 230.

⁶⁰⁰ Teresa Watanabe, "Gutting the Myth of Subservience: Yoshiko Shimada's Volatile Images Explore Japanese Women's Role in World War II," *Los Angeles Times*, August 20, 1994, http://articles.latimes.com/1994-08-20/entertainment/ca-29113_1_world-war-ii-s-end (accessed December 30, 2011).

that approach is an explicitly masculine one; for women rarely patronized these clubs, and could not readily occupy the role of the customer there.

The division of gender roles described and celebrated in Araki's work later merged with the fantasy of Orientalism for which Araki became known in the West in the early 1990s. Araki deliberately produced images in this vein, and the Araki "industry" fed Western viewers' desires. This tendency has been criticized by Hiroko Hagiwara, who argues that the blinders attaching to sexist and Orientalist biases have led to misinterpretations of the status of Japanese women, particularly by Western critics, such as Jean-Christophe Ammann, Nicholas Bornoff and Mario Kramer.⁶⁰¹ Araki's photographs of women in bondage (not illustrated in this chapter), often wearing kimonos while exposing their genitals, or appearing naked, were interpreted by Ammann as images of women who were subjugated by the absurd formalities of a society structured by highly ritualistic forms of order. Bornoff and Kramer saw Araki's work as a metaphorical reference to the strictly disciplined character of Japanese society.⁶⁰² On the other hand, these male Western critics depicted the Japanese women's involvement in the act of bondage as a liberating act on their parts. This interpretation was heavily criticized by Hagiwara, who pointed out that the women were not the ones who employed a "Master of Bondage" or a mainstream male photographer. Furthermore, the works were of course exhibited not as the models' work, but as Araki's.⁶⁰³

⁶⁰¹ Jean-Christophe Ammann, "Nobuyoshi Araki," in Nobuyoshi Araki, *Shikiyo/Sexual Desire* (Zurich: Edition Stemmler, 1997), 6-12; Nicholas Bornoff, "Hiromix and Araki: Japan's Photography Superstars," *Creative Camera* (1997); Mario Kramer, "Nobuyoshi Araki: Private Toyo," 13-15, in Araki, *Shikiyo/Sexual Desire*.

⁶⁰² Ammann, "Nobuyoshi Araki," 8; Bornoff, "Hiromix and Araki," 22-23; Kramer, "Nobuyoshi Araki: Private Tokyo," 15.

⁶⁰³ Hagiwara, "Representation, Distribution, and Formation of Sexuality in the Photography of Araki Nobuyoshi," 243.

Hagiwara points out the shrewdness entailed in the way Araki's images were edited differently in catalogues for Western and Japanese audiences. Images that might offend Japanese viewers, such as formal portraits of Emperor Hirohito and the Empress, were deleted from the 1996 catalogue *Shikijo/Sexual Desire*, while the European version offers the content of Araki's solo show in Frankfurt intact.⁶⁰⁴

An essay by Austrian critic Christian Kravagna, "Bring on the Little Japanese Girls! Araki in the West," published in the catalogue produced for Araki's exhibition in Vienna in 1997, is another rare case of a critic subjecting Araki's photography to a serious critique. Kravagna objected to Araki's images as an exploitative commodification of sex, arguing that the Western reception of them is based on an Orientalist contradiction. Kravagna's essay was unavailable to Japanese readers, however, and was omitted from the Japanese-English version of the catalogue. That omission was supported by Japanese photography critic Akihito Yasumi, and Kravagna's essay was attacked by Shunji Ito the photography critic and organizer of the 1997 show in Vienna.⁶⁰⁵

This incident demonstrates the Japanese photography industry's—or, more specifically, the Araki industry's—tight control over the circulation and reception of his works.

⁶⁰⁴ Hagiwara, 240.

⁶⁰⁵ Hagiwara, 234 – 237. Christian Kravagna, "Bring on the Little Japanese Girls! Araki in the West," in Nobuyoshi Araki, *Toyko Comedy* (German-English edition) (Kyoto: Korinsha, 1997), unpaginated; Akihito Yasumi, "Araki Nobuyoshi no Shashin ha Seisabetsu Hyogen ka?" (Is Araki's Work Sexist?), *Déjà vu* 12 (1998): 14-15; Shunji Ito, *Araki in Wien* (Kyoto: Korinsha, 1998).

Performative Mode

Unlike Billingham, who assumed an observationally dissociated participatory role with quiet detachment, Araki engaged in a performative mode, fluidly moving from acting before his own camera, to recording scenes, to deliberately shaping events. The uninhibited expressive manner of Araki's work reflects not only his lifestyle, but also the way he photographs. He said, "When I photograph, I photograph with words. I do play the clown after all. Non-stop shooting."⁶⁰⁶ While staging his pictures, Araki's communicative method is to constantly talk to his subjects, often making jokes as a way of engaging them.⁶⁰⁷ While this method is common among studio portrait photographers and fashion photographers, who generally try to bring out the best performances by their models, Araki's constant barrage of words and shifting roles before and behind the camera are performances in and of themselves.

The performative acts in Araki's photographic practice are also born of a particularly decadent lifestyle, involving hanging out in bars and having frequent sexual relationships with multiple partners and prostitutes. (The artist no longer engages in such activity since his diagnosis of prostate cancer in 2008.) Although there is no direct evidence, the decadence in Araki's work was perhaps indebted to the *Buraiha* or Decadent School in Japan that arose just after the defeat in the Second World War. This group consisted of writers such as Sakaguchi Ango, Oda Sakunosuke, and Dazai Osamu. In their works, the protagonists are male anti-heroes who led aimless and dissolute lives. These early postwar writers rejected traditional values, especially the moral conservatism that had prevailed during the war, embracing eroticism and

⁶⁰⁶ Araki, interview by author, October 28, 2010..

⁶⁰⁷ Araki's working method may be observed in the documentary *Arakimentari*. Travis Klose, *Arakimentari*, DVD (New York: Tartan Video, 2005).

decadent behavior as more authentic modes of expression.⁶⁰⁸ The rebellious lifestyle of the Decadent School may have influenced those avant-garde Japanese photographers who rose to recognition during the late 1960s. The libertine's way of life was a means of coping with the despair and confusion of the defeat in the war, but subsequent generations of photographers who adopted their lifestyle, including Araki, used it as a means of expressing individual freedom and provoking and challenging authority.

Araki's attitude toward sex as something to reveal rather than to hide coincides also with the position of Japanese New Wave filmmaker Nagisa Oshima (b. 1932), who is known for experimental films with pornographic content, and who likewise contended with obscenity laws and censorship. One of his most controversial films, *In the Realm of the Senses* (**fig.5.56**, **fig.5.57**), portrayed frank sexuality. Shot in Kyoto but produced in Paris in 1976,⁶⁰⁹ the film reconstructed the true story of Sada Abe (1905-1970), a prostitute who, in 1936, killed her lover, Kichizo Ishida, while he slept, strangling him in a simulation of erotic asphyxiation. After he died, she severed his penis and testicles and carried them in her purse for several days until the police apprehended her. Abe's story stunned the Japanese public at the time, and she became a popular, nearly mythical figure. In Oshima's film, Abe is portrayed as a maid in a hotel owned by Ishida. The two soon become sexually intimate and they indulge in sexual pleasures increasingly involving pain. Oshima's Ishida dies as a result of consensual erotic asphyxiation. The film depicts scenes of unsimulated sex between the actors (Tatsuya Fuji and Eiko Matsuda),

⁶⁰⁸ Iizawa, *History of Japanese Photography*, 211, Footnote 3.

⁶⁰⁹ When *In the Realm of the Senses* premiered in Japan in 1976, all its sexual scenes were optically censored. There were forty-nine objectionable scenes, which was close to one-third of the film, cut out or airbrushed. The uncut version of the film was re-released during the 1990s in Japan, but with digitally scrambled images of genitalia. However, when it was re-released, the film attracted only scant attention by the public in Japan, excepting cinema critics. For the history of reception of the film and of the legal issues around the film, see James R. Alexander, "Obscenity, Pornography, and the Law in Japan: Reconsidering Oshima's *In the Realm of the Senses*," *Asian-Pacific Law & Policy Journal* 4, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 148-168.

including explicit images of male and female genitalia, coitus, fellatio, and sex between women, all of which violated Japanese government censorship standards in the 1970s. Oshima was prosecuted on obscenity charges following his publication of a book of still photographs and script notes from the film. After a highly publicized trial, Oshima was acquitted in 1982.

Defending his film, Oshima wrote:

The concept of “obscenity” is tested when we dare to look at something that we desire to see but have forbidden ourselves to look at. When we feel that everything has been revealed, “obscenity” disappears and there is a certain liberation. When that which one had wanted to see isn’t sufficiently revealed, however, the taboo remains, the feeling of “obscenity” stays, and an even greater “obscenity” comes into being.⁶¹⁰

Oshima lamented the dearth of personal expression in documentaries that dealt with the male-female relationships that occurred behind the barricades of the student protests of 1968-69.⁶¹¹ The pre-World War II notion of sex in Japan as something of which to be ashamed or to be kept hidden in order to mystify it waned after the war, as Japan headed in the direction of liberation and freedom from the restrictions imposed by the dominant values of society, state, and family.⁶¹² Araki, not unlike Oshima, sought freedom of expression in depicting sexual practices, although he often presented his material in a ludic manner.

There are important differences between *In the Realm of Senses* and *Tokyo Lucky Hole*—the first is a fictional reconstruction of historical events while the second is a photo-

⁶¹⁰ Nagisa Oshima, “Theory of Experimental Pornographic Film,” *Cinema, Censorship, and the State: The Writings of Nagisa Oshima*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Dawn Lawson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 261.

⁶¹¹ See Nagisa Oshima, “Sexual Poverty,” in *Cinema, Censorship, and the State*, 240-48.

⁶¹² Japanese feminists entered the public debate on pornography and censorship. The pro-censorship feminists argued that there is a direct causative relationship between the consumption of pornographic images and sexual violence and gender stereotyping in society. The anti-censorship feminists argued that there is no evidence of a causative link and have pointed to the war-time and occupation-period censorship regulations to underline the risks of government intervention in cultural expression. See Sandra Buckley, “Techno-Porn: Censored,” in Brian Massumi, *Politics of Everyday Fear* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 171-184. For the history of pornography in Japan, see Paul R. Abramson and Hauro Hayashi, “Pornography in Japan: Cross-Cultural and Theoretical Considerations,” in *Pornography and Sexual Aggression*, ed. Neil M. Malamuth (Orlando, FL: Academic Press, 1984), 173-183.

documentation of reality (although there is a staged quality implied within that reality)—yet there are also many similarities between them. The sex feels “real” in both works, yet after so many sex scenes and photo images of sexual activity the viewer may feel nothing in the end. This is akin to the numbing effect noted by Andy Warhol in a 1963 interview with Gene Swenson: “When you see a gruesome picture over and over again, it doesn’t really have any effect.”⁶¹³

Although Oshima was acquitted, his trial revealed the arbitrariness inherent in applying a law without a clear definition of obscenity or a consensus as to how to apply it. Several years later, the April 1988 issue of *Photo Age* that contained Araki’s photographs of the sex customs of Kabuki-cho in the 1980s was confiscated under this same law (Article 175 of the Criminal Code). While Araki’s pornographic images serve the male gaze, and their publication may encourage a male-dominant point of view, nonetheless, censorship restricts freedom of expression for all artists. Araki’s adaptation of the Japanese literary genre *I-Novel* [*shi-shosetsu*] had helped open the door for the personal photograph (*shi-shashin*) to enter the public realm. With Araki’s works of a sexual nature, projects in which he merged documentary recording with the staging of his subjects, reflexivity and performativity became his signature tactic.

⁶¹³ Gene R. Swenson, “What is Pop Art? Interviews with Eight Painters,” *Art News* 62 (November 1963): 26.

Conclusion

Participant observation in anthropology is a method of obtaining information through everyday activities and immersive relationships. In his studies of the Cherokee in the mid- to late nineteenth century, James Mooney, one of the first anthropologists to utilize photography in his work, applied immersive methods, gaining access to customs forbidden to outsiders. Portable Kodak cameras facilitated his efforts, and the inclusion of Mooney's shadow and that of his tripod in his photographs may be viewed as a deliberate act that blurred the social distinction between observer and observed. Over time, the participant observer approach came increasingly to be used to study groups that were geographically, socially, or racially distant from the social scientist's background. It was discovered that ethnographic studies of such secretive groups as drug dealers, bank robbers, or street gangs required the surreptitious immersion of the observer into these closed groups. And in the West, the participant observer method was adapted to social study on the home front in the 1970s, particularly in North America, Scandinavia, France, and Great Britain.

In this dissertation I have chronicled notable historical predecessors to the establishment of a contemporary participant observer photography genre. Although insider photography, as I also term it, rose to prominence in the latter half of the twentieth century, the impulse on the part of professional photographers to penetrate the cultures of others had existed long before. Some examples mentioned in this dissertation include Walker Evans, who in 1936 documented the lives of sharecropper families in Alabama during the Depression (working in a team with the writer James Agee), and W. Eugene Smith, who realized photo-essays such as "The Country Doctor," produced for *Life* magazine in 1948. Both of those projects were pioneering endeavors in intimate reporting that posed moral dilemmas for the photographers, who deliberately

maintained a degree of distance from their subjects. A watershed in the development of participant observer photography occurred in the United States in the 1960s with the emergence of Diane Arbus, whose work documenting marginalized persons or groups, such as “freaks”, transvestites, and nudists, conveyed deep sympathy for her subjects, with whom she built connections and trust over time. Unlike the social evangelist photographers who preceded her, Arbus’s intense interest in deviant lifestyles and her urge to document them were free of the desire to reform subjects, whom she approached without moral judgement.⁶¹⁴

The emergence of New Journalism in the United States in the 1960s provided a new model of subjective reporting techniques. This immersive method, widely adopted by writers associated with what has also been called *Gonzo* journalism, challenged traditional forms of reporting, in their putative objectivity and emotional detachment. *Gonzo* journalists, such as Hunter S. Thompson (who coined the term), blurred the boundaries between their professional and personal identities in reporting stories that refrained from imposing moral judgements. New Journalism authors generally became central figures in their own stories, and their self-consciously subjective, at times extreme experiences were integral to their narratives, which could blur fact and fiction into indistinctness. Similarly, the four artists in this dissertation brought a sense of daring to their photographic practices by involving themselves personally in the situations addressed by their work, without imposing moral judgements and without adhering to received narrative structures. By blurring the line between the position of the

⁶¹⁴ Arbus’s work has been contextualized in the tradition of Social Landscape photography, which facilitated depictions of subculture and counterculture lifestyles free of preconceived judgement, as in the work of Bruce Davidson, Danny Lyon, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand among many others. Finding acceptance first in the United States at the end of the 1960s, the genre extended to Great Britain and Japan. Arbus’s influence in Britain is particularly noteworthy, as her images of unconventional and abnormal families made a profound impression on photography there. In Japan, Social Landscape photography directly influenced the rise of *Kompora* photography.

observer and that of the subject, Clark, Goldin, Billingham, and Araki acted to destabilize the conventional role of the photographer as witness and independent author.

Stylistically free and strongly reliant on the presence of a first person narrator—and often under the influence of mind-altering substances—New Journalists ventured to enter the minds of their characters through full-blown, stream-of-consciousness-like prose. Likewise, when Clark, Goldin, Billingham, and Araki pressed their shutter buttons, it was not in a polite, detached, would-be objective spirit, but with a full-hearted abandonment of caution. They borrowed the *Gonzo* journalists' shocking approach of enunciating a kind of purposeless, amoral attitude by favoring raw, revelatory, highly subjectivized approaches, which sometimes were heedlessly exploitative in character. The seemingly unprofessional look of their photographs, coupled with the, at times, shocking tactics they used to enhance the emotional qualities of their photography, distanced them from the received traditions of documentary photography. The strong parallels to *Gonzo* journalism would justify calling the new genre represented by these artists *Gonzo* photography.⁶¹⁵

The four photographers featured in this dissertation had the bravery to look where others would not—or, at least not consistently. They put themselves on the line to show social extremes, sustaining psychological injury, physical harm, and, in one instance, a period of incarceration. These artists eschewed the sometimes patronizing gaze of the documentary photographer in favor of confronting mainstream audiences with darker realities concerning the marginal communities to which they themselves were tied; in so doing, they succeeded in serving as comparatively authentic voices for their disadvantaged subjects. Plunging into and exposing lives entailed various forms of excess—including drug abuse, erotic deviance, and

⁶¹⁵ I thank Geoffrey Batchen for suggesting this parallel between *Gonzo* journalists and my four principal artists. Batchen, conversation with the author, March 31, 2012.

violent domestic relations—they sometimes elicited shock, moral outrage, and dismissal from critics. In perversely celebrating forbidden psychological and erotic forces within human nature, these four artists became, in a way, contemporary incarnations of the *poète maudit* of old.⁶¹⁶

The principal four artists in this dissertation set out to depict the raw reality of their lives from within social milieus often associated with shocking conduct and customs. Their credibility, as insiders, became a tactic in their work, factoring in different and complex ways. But the element of authenticity in these artists' work would come to be a central point of debate between their supporters and detractors.

Each of these four artists enacted the role of the insider in a distinctive way, although the modalities they developed also overlapped at times. Clark's "voyeuristic mode"—when his participation appeared more as that of an invited guest than as a member of a given cohort—became his dominant approach in the projects he produced subsequent to his breakthrough 1971 photobook *Tulsa*. What I call Goldin's "integrated mode" encompasses, firstly, her intimate relationships with subjects who became an alternative family for her, and, secondly, her integration into a 1980s urban bohemian lifestyle where intermingled art forms blurred boundaries within a community that she and her fellow artists helped create. Billingham's position was distinctive (among these four artists) because he never appeared before his camera. What separates him even more is his apparent emotional detachment; his role as a "dissociated observer" appears to have helped save him from the stresses of poverty, abjection, and chaos rife in his working-class family. Araki's photographic method was influenced by the Japanese autobiographical literary genre the "I-Novel," which poses a challenge of categorization similar

⁶¹⁶ The term *poète maudit* refers to a poet who lived a life against or outside a society. It was originally applied to 19th century French poets Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, Lautréamont, and Alice de Chambrier. In 1972, Pierre Seghers published an anthology, *Poètes Maudits d'Aujourd'hui 1946-1970*, categorizing works by a dozen 20th century writers in these terms, including Antonin Artaud. My thanks go to Stuart Liebman for suggesting the parallel.

to that of *Gonzo* journalism due to its blurring of distinctions between fact and fiction. Araki's experimental exercises in exploring the perception of reality through photographic experience applied tactics that parodied amateur photography. His disclosure of the image-making process (particularly in certain of his works of a pornographic aspect)—his picturing of “picturing”—has been described here as constituting a “reflexive mode” of photography that serves to make the conventions of representation more apparent.

The Paradox of Insider Participant Observation Photography: The Consequences of Fame

Claims to a heightened degree of authenticity in their revelations of the social margins helped bring, not merely opprobrium, but also interest and success to the four artists featured here. But these artists' primary goal was less to reveal authentic social realities than to make compelling and unique artworks by drawing upon the circumstances of their personal lives. The factor of authenticity in their work may be seen to have waned over time, for that matter, in part on account of the eventual, cumulative effects of fame on their practices—effects that came in a way even to preclude authenticity. As these artists succeeded in their careers, their social status changed. The inevitable result was that the relative parity that had existed between them and their subjects altered. That outcome is at least partly due to factors over which the artists had no control—such as their no longer belonging to groups to which they had once belonged, or to their subjects dying. And their changing life conditions led the artists, each in his or her own way, to shift their approaches, as they at times would work in order to satisfy critical and public expectations, at times assumed a more exploitative role relative to their subjects, and at times abandoned the project of insider photography altogether. The viewers' presumption of authenticity—or, one might even say, the viewers' demand for authenticity as regards these

artists' work—was based on the photographers inhabiting their subjects' milieu. So a paradox arose: how could a successful artist continue to produce raw, gritty images of underground subcultures that mistrusted or even barred the socially or culturally mainstream? Does the artist then go, in effect, slumming in order to satisfy audience expectations? An irony surfaces, where and if the artists do so, since an underlying principle of their work was their level approach to their subjects.

Craigie Horsfield, for one, observed certain artists falling into such a trap. In his response to an Araki exhibition at White Cube in London, Horsfield said, "Once recognized [artists such as Araki] are separated from the community of which they were (or were supposed to be) a part and, with that separation, automatically lose what may have been their only language and are destined henceforth to be outside. They can no longer act as those with the sole need of authenticity."⁶¹⁷ Paradoxically, the success of insider photographers means the impossibility of their continuing their approach, because their subjects come to understand that there is an exchange of privatized exposure for recognition as public figures or, perhaps, for some other form of compensation. As Liz Kotz asked, rhetorically, "what does it mean for such moments of recognition to be monumentalized into images, photographs that are no longer consigned to the photo album or dresser drawer but publicly disseminated through mass reproduction or museum exhibition?"⁶¹⁸

In response to the altered conditions produced by their changed status, each artist in this dissertation found a different approach toward her or his work. Larry Clark shifted toward a

⁶¹⁷ Craigie Horsfield explained that the recognition and reception of Araki's work in the West went hand in hand with reception of works by Larry Clark and Nan Goldin. Horsfield, who does not like these works, links them to the mind of the current generation, represented by a gallery such as White Cube, that promotes emerging art – that is where Araki's work was presented. Craigie Horsfield, "Araki: Unconscious Kitsch," *Galleries Magazine* (Oct/Nov 1994): 77.

⁶¹⁸ Liz Kotz, "Aesthetics of 'Intimacy,'" *The Passionate Camera: Photography and Bodies of Desire*, ed. Deborah Bright (London: Routledge, 1998): 209.

voyeuristic mode as he “aged out” of a youthful cohort that he continued to depict. The growing age and social gap between Clark and his subjects led to his assuming a directorial position, as he eventually produced fictional films that bear similarities to the groundbreaking realism of his early photographs.⁶¹⁹ When Clark could not crash the kids’ party any longer, he instead induced the kids to come to him to be filmed and so to be famous.

Some critics, such as Solomon-Godeau and Kotz, have raised questions concerning the qualities of authenticity that have all along been attached to the works of insider photographers. While Goldin has been lionized within the art world for her honesty, Kotz’s interpretation is that her work appears to possess that quality in part “because her enthusiastic willingness to naturalize the photographic transaction allows us to ignore everything we know about the history of photography.”⁶²⁰ But Goldin’s images of drag queens and transvestites, whose lifestyle is integrally immersed in performativity, were viewed with suspicion by Solomon-Godeau, for one, who argued that the “truth” in those photos remained of a superficial kind due to her subjects’ use of masquerade.

Although I generally argue here for Goldin’s sincerity in her early works, the issue of Goldin’s authenticity becomes more apparent and problematic in her later projects, where her subjects exposed their bodies and sexual activities before her camera. Many of the depictions of intimate relations among the subjects in the 2003 photobook *Devil’s Playground* are frankly voyeuristic and exhibitionistic. Goldin may in fact have had intimate connections to these

⁶¹⁹ Larry Clark said in 2003, “I think it’s interesting what you say about not waiting for the images to happen, to make up your own images now, because that’s why I started making film, because there were things that I couldn’t document. I mean you can’t go out and document the things that are in my films, so you have to do films. If you want to tell these stories, or if you want to show these images, you have to set them up, and that’s really what pushed me into making films. I always wanted to be a filmmaker, but that’s probably what pushed me over.” Larry Clark and Ryan McGinley, “Conversation on Art the Whitney Museum of American Art with Larry Clark, Ryan McGinley, and Sylvia Wolf,” March 25, 2003, <http://ryanmcginley.com/essays/larry-clark-2003/> (accessed June 14, 2012)

⁶²⁰ Kotz, 208.

couples and lovers, but her participation seems to remain on the level of a peripheral, voyeuristic witness. Goldin appears to have assumed increasingly the part of an invited guest—one who refrains from participating in the sexual and other behaviors of her fellow partygoers, who likely understand that their appearances before her camera carry the potential for being monumentalized on the walls of commercial galleries and museums, illuminated in slideshows, or permanently preserved in her books.

Nowadays, more optimal expressions of Goldin’s talents include undertakings such as the pairing of her photographic documents of members of her social sphere with images of art works at the Louvre Museum, a project that culminated in a twenty-five minute slideshow and photographic prints exhibited under the title, *Scopophilia* (2011) (**fig.6.1**).⁶²¹ Presented alongside Goldin’s photographs of partial or full views of paintings and sculptures in the Louvre collection, her photographs of her intimate circle ask to be considered as timeless monumentalized art works, in a way that effectively nullifies the specificity of their cultural context. An aestheticized experience is imposed upon the viewer, one resonant of a humanist universalism that transcends differences of time and regional context. *Scopophilia* (“love of looking”) demands that Goldin’s personal photographs be seen against the burden of allegorical meanings of mythologies depicted in the context of art history, thereby apotheosizing her own subjects from her past and current life to the level of semiotic icons.

Goldin’s shyness before her camera in recent years might also signal her waning desire for the intimate photography that became her signature style. Goldin said in a recent interview,

⁶²¹ Nan Goldin was given unique permission to photograph the collections at the Louvre Museum during its off hours in 2010. The resulting digital images of the Louvre collections were paired with her photographs of her intimate circle, accompanied by Goldin’s narration as well as music. The twenty-five minute slideshow contained over four hundred digital images for the purpose of collaborative editing.

“I don’t want to show my life to the public this way any more. It’s cost me a lot and I don’t want anyone to know anything about my life today.”⁶²²

After his success with *Ray’s a Laugh* and other video works, Richard Billingham moved on to other projects that did not require the participant observer method. His parents, Liz and Ray, passed away several years after he became established as a successful artist. With the exception of his photographs of his own family, begun in 2007 (**fig.6.2**), Billingham has avoided human subjects all together in his subsequent publications, *Black Country* (2004), *Zoo* (2007), and *Landscapes 2001-2003* (2007), thus extending his detached stance.⁶²³

Over the half-century of Nobuyoshi Araki’s prolific career, he has produced a gargantuan body of work of over four-hundred publications that include photo books, essays, and diaries. His works have been viewed as highly personal, yet their wide circulation gives rise to a paradox. Hagiwara questioned, “Why is the personal quality of the photographs so stressed? ... How can we see these publicly and widely distributed photographs as personal? And if they are really personal, why is it necessary to repeatedly view this man’s ‘private life?’”⁶²⁴ In time, Araki’s relentless exposure of his private life raised issues of authenticity because his subjects, including his female sex partners, were increasingly aware of the blatant transaction inherent in a relationship that exists for the sake of the commercial publishing industry. As Hagiwara asserted, the emphasis on the personal aspect of Araki’s photographs had been its selling point:

⁶²² Nan Goldin cited in Juliette Soulez, “Nan Goldin Emerges From Seclusion in a New Louvre Show,” *ArtInfo France*, December 15, 2010, <http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/36585/nan-goldin-emerges-from-seclusion-in-a-new-louvre-show/> (accessed August 19, 2012).

⁶²³ Billingham’s new family photographs were shot with more refined techniques than the works in *Ray’s Laugh*. These carefully composed, aesthetic exercises, devoid of any abjection or domestic chaos, present images of his domestic partner, their son, Walter and the family dog in an orderly middle-class family life revolving around raising a child.

⁶²⁴ Hagiwara, 238.

By stressing this aspect, the distribution circuit for Araki's work has expanded. To be personal, informal, frank, fearless, populist, and antiestablishment is his constructed photographic style, which allows him to enjoy mainstream success in the Japanese art world.⁶²⁵

Thus, the celebrity status accruing to insider photographers in time became an obstacle to the continuation of their apparently authentic portrayals of personal subjects, not least as a result of their subjects' awareness of the transactional nature of the relationship.

The Legacy of Participant Observer Photography⁶²⁶

Participant observation photography continues as a practice in the hands of numerous urban photographers who variously pursue the approaches of the four artists this dissertation has examined. The impact of the work of Clark, Goldin, Billingham, and Araki upon current participant observer photography is a topic for further research. But a few cases in point can be briefly introduced here. Juliana Beasley (b.1967), who became a photographer after graduating from New York University in 1990, worked as a stripper and recorded her experiences in Queens and elsewhere over the next eight years. Her access to the clandestine world of sexual nightlife allowed her to record images of customers engaged in intimate activities. Taken from an insider's vantage point, the images provide a close look into the lives of lap dancers. Her project culminated in the publication *Lapdancer* (2001), a book of color photographs of sex workers who seem to take a casual attitude toward their occupation. Images of the photographer **(fig.6.3)** and other strippers counting their money after their shifts amidst the flotsam of the night present a usually unseen side of what she called "a lucrative business venture" and "another day at the office." Overall, the book's voyeuristic position provides curious readers

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ Even though, chronologically, Billingham is of the same generation as the photographers introduced in this section, his earlier success, during the mid-1990s, separates him from them.

access to inside scenes behind the doors of one of the most enduring subcultures in the United States, namely the sex industry.

Another notable participant observer photographer of a new generation, Jessica Dimmock (b.1978), by chance encountered a cocaine dealer in Manhattan and gradually gained access to the life of heroin addicts who lived in a West 22nd Street apartment owned by a former art dealer who himself became an addict. Then a student at the International Center of Photography, Dimmock is the child of a former junkie, so it seems likely that her personal history drew her to her subject.⁶²⁷ Over three years, Dimmock followed the lives of the main players in her story before and after their eviction from the apartment, as some succeeded in getting clean, while others failed to recover. Before Dimmock's camera, the addicts inject themselves and others, engage in sex, sleep, and fighting. Her images have aspects that are similar to the works of Clark, Goldin, and Billingham, but evince more of the searing intensity of the reality of the lives of the addicts, whose self-inflicted condition appears to trap them. The curtain between viewers and subjects is pulled aside by Dimmock's surrogate role. Acquiring intimate access to the fringes of society requires long-term engagement, but I assert that the participant observation photography pioneered by Dimmock's predecessors showed outsider photographers such as herself how they might obtain results comparable to those of insider or participant observer photographers.

Another artist who belongs to this second generation of participant observer photographers is Sebrina Fassbender (b. 1977), who has, like Beasley, documented the lives of sex workers in New York City. In Fassbender's images, the women's thin bodies, showing tattoos and needle marks, are often recorded in chaotic domestic environments, where the subjects are shown

⁶²⁷ Mike Von Joel, "The Ninth Floor... and Going Down," *Photoicon.com*. <http://www.photoicon.com/library/35/> (accessed August 13, 2012)

mostly alone or sometimes with a male companion. Their disturbing states of psychological, sexual, and physical abuse are captured by the sympathetic eyes of an artist who delivers a sense of intensely raw emotion.

In Japan, Sakiko Nomura (b.1967), a former assistant of Araki (1991~), took up the photo-diary snapshot format, photographing mostly indoors. She shot her friends, who posed nude in hotel bedrooms and bathrooms (**fig.6.6**). Her male sitters often directly engaged her camera, their languid bodies exhibiting quiet solitude and fragility. These images are devoid of the overtones of sexual exploitation seen in Araki's works. Nomura's photographic practice seems to be removed from contextual reality as her shots were created in transient environments that tell little of her sitters' lives.

One common characteristic among this new generation of photographers, different from the tradition of quasi-documentary associated with the participant observer method, is their subjects' apparent awareness of the presence of the camera and the consequences of its use. In a 2003 conversation with Ryan McGinley, a younger photographer whose work is often compared to Clark's, Clark expressed his feelings toward the current trend in photography and the impossibility of his continuing the kind of work he did for *Tulsa* as the rationale for his turning to filmmaking.

People started becoming aware of the camera and the ramifications of photographing and being photographed. Now everybody is aware. I mean, everybody is acting for the camera, everybody is posing, everybody knows what's going on. I think it's almost impossible to make documentary photographs any more, to an extent. I'm certainly overstating, but I mean, something happened. ... There was no more innocence ... Everything is documented. There are cameras everywhere, photographing every aspect of people's lives.⁶²⁸

⁶²⁸ Larry Clark and Ryan McGinley, "Conversation on Art the Whitney Museum of American Art with Larry Clark, Ryan McGinley, and Sylvia Wolf," March 25, 2003, <http://ryanmcginley.com/essays/larry-clark-2003/> (accessed June 14, 2012)

As Clark acknowledged, the widespread availability of digital cameras and instantly accessed, sharable media outlets have trained ordinary people in the power of exposure as their lenses routinely carry private images into the public realm. The ubiquity of the new media may also have undermined the sense of rarity or genius attaching to the work of insider photographers, who were formerly seen as having penetrated the impenetrable.

The proliferation of “insider” style in contemporary photography found expression in fashion photography. “Heroin chic,” a look popularized in the mid-1990s by fashion insiders such as model-turned-photographer Corinne Day (1965-2010) (**fig.6.7**) and Juergen Teller (1964-), was characterized by neurasthenic models with wan skin tones, dark circles under their eyes, and angular bone structures. Its acceptance as a commercial aesthetic demonstrates the widespread impact of Goldin’s vision of a sometimes drug-addled bohemianism and Clark’s drug-infused nihilism.⁶²⁹

In sum, while participant observer photography has come up against limitations attributable to shifts in media culture and to the artists’ inability to continue as integral members of the communities to which they once belonged, insider photography has also had a demonstrable impact on a new generation of photographers. As practiced by younger photographers, the method continues to flourish, aiming to show the way things really are, while also producing images that are inevitably, at least in part, ruses which disguise the participant observers’ conscious acts of art-making.

⁶²⁹ I thank Siona Wilson for pointing out the significance of this trend in fashion photography.

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