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**FAIRY TALES FOR GROWN-UPS:
DIANE ARBUS'S SOCIAL PANORAMA**

by

Frederick Gross

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York.

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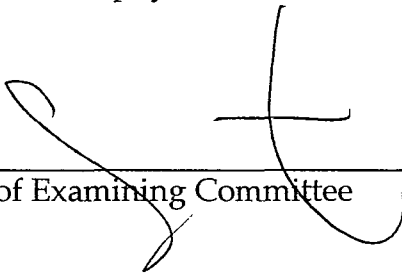
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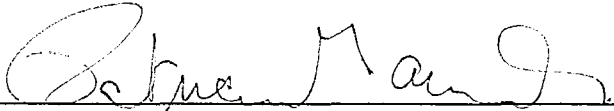
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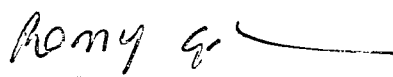
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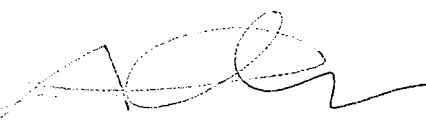
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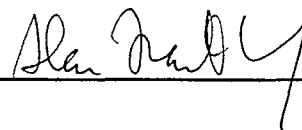
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Introduction

Diane Arbus and Portrait Galleries

The late nineteen-fifties witnessed a fundamental rupture in the photographic representation of Americans. Disenchanted with the universalist vision of humanity proposed by Edward Steichen's widely popular *The Family of Man* exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1955, photographers like Robert Frank and Diane Arbus immediately sought a more jarring, ironic, critical portrayal of Americans. Working within, yet against, the genres of photojournalism and portraiture, Frank and Arbus sought to disrupt the photograph's use as an illustration of a specific ideological discourse which they felt was uncritically aligned to American Cold-War propaganda widely disseminated in popular periodicals such as *Life* and *Look*.

This dissertation proposes a re-examination of the photography of Diane Arbus by situating her work in terms of the history of the photographic "social gallery," and exploring the nature of her relationship to this type of portrait collection. What is here defined as the social gallery refers to a group of portraits arranged by the photographer in agreement with an organizing principle measured by a specific set of social conditions which varied historically and were accordant with different popular pseudo-scientific theories about reading the body according to typology. Overall, Arbus's work may be read in terms of the tradition of the social gallery, but it is in fact an "anti-gallery," ultimately deconstructing the positivist and scientific standards ingrained in this genre's history. Arbus most likely did not read Auguste Comte and Hippolyte Taine,

the fathers of positivism, but she did not have to in order to be aware of a positivist social climate.¹ It will be necessary, then, to explore the differences between preconceived, methodical social galleries, such as August Sander's *Antlitz der Zeit* (Face of Our Time, 1929), which organized individuals according to social class, and Arbus's work, which, at face value, apparently lacked a coherent principle of organization. Yet, when viewed in retrospect, her *oeuvre* seems far more systematic and unified a strategy than is recognized by the existing Arbus scholarship.² Arbus probably never used the term "social gallery" herself, but given that she died at the age of 48, there is enough circumstantial evidence to suggest a reading of her work as a coherent social statement. As such, her work must be historicized more firmly within a culture in which other socially critical projects were being pursued, such as Frank's *The Americans* (1958-59), and the portraiture produced by such diverse practitioners as Richard Avedon and Andy Warhol, among others. An explication of specific works by these different sources will reveal a problematization of the positivist and eugenic standards that had, by the 1960s (along with certain tenets of psychoanalysis), insinuated themselves into the photographic images of popular culture. Working in this terrain, these artworks also contributed to a contemporary tendency to merge art photography with the book or magazine page, photojournalism, fashion, and the celebrity portrait. Looking back, we can see this moment in the 1960s as a point of rupture for the social gallery, as each

¹ A more complete investigation of positivism and the photographic portrait gallery will take place at the end of Chapter One.

² John Szarkowski showed Arbus Sander's *Antlitz der Zeit* in 1963. However, Arbus was aware of Sander as early as 1959, if not before. In 1959, the Swiss magazine *Du* published a portfolio of Sander photographs entitled "Deutsche Menschen." Arbus's close friend Marvin Israel gave her a copy of the portfolio shortly after its publication. She even explained the title of one of the pictures, *Schmierenschauspieler*, in a postcard to Israel (1/24/60): "[he] is a third-rate provincial actor, maybe in a traveling company. German words are wonderful the way they contain whole paragraphs." Diane Arbus, *Diane Arbus: Revelations* (New York: Random House, 2004), 148.

artists' work, in its own specific way, disobeys the systematicity of the genre.

Since Arbus's impulse was to deconstruct the social gallery and reconstitute it on her own terms, I will term Arbus's *oeuvre* a 'social panorama' rather than a 'social gallery.'³ Webster's defines "panorama" as "a picture exhibited a part at a time by being unrolled before the spectator," and, further, "a complete and comprehensive view or presentation of a subject matter."⁴ The term panorama is useful if we look at Arbus's work as a gradual, steady pan across a broad social range of subjects.

To understand Arbus's portraits more fully as a panorama, we must trace their roots back to nineteenth-century portraiture. More specifically, Arbus's socially-conscious portraits need to be contextualized within the history of those series of portraits that implied a social agenda. The French *Galerie de la Contemporaine* was one such portrait group. The *Galerie*, a weekly series of 241 photographs of celebrities published in Paris by Goupil during the Second Empire and the Third Republic (1876-1884), was available to subscribers in a bi-annual run, and came in hardbound albums. Each *semestre*, as the runs were called, the subscriber would receive approximately fifteen 9" x 7 1/8" Woodburytypes or carbon portrait prints of famous writers, actors, painters, composers, politicians, military heroes, or other notable public figures, along with a glowing biography and a reproduced sample of the subject's writing or drawing, complete with signature.

As a social gallery, the *Galerie de la Contemporaine* was an attempt by the

³ The term 'panorama' refers to landscape, but also may be used to refer to a collection of portraits. I do not mean to infer the broader claim that the term 'social panorama' represents a new form of critical social gallery, merely that it represents a wider social vision than social galleries, even Sander's. The term further makes sense in light of the title of a book in Arbus's library entitled *Panorama of Prestidigitators* by Milbourne Christopher (New York: The Christopher Collection, 1956), a collection of vignettes on magicians.

⁴ Philip Babcock Gove, et. al. eds., *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1993), 1631.

photographer or photographers to provide the viewer not only with a collection of noteworthy individuals of the age, but with a moral vision, an instructional primer of the typologies of greatness. It obeyed an organizing principle beholden to the prevailing currents of nationalism, social ideology, and scientific theory. Social galleries were widely popular, and had a privileged position in many middle-class homes in the United States and Europe. The social gallery was not just a nineteenth-century phenomenon; although under different circumstances than the *Galerie*, Sander provided perhaps the most noteworthy example with his *Antlitz der Zeit* (Face of Our Time) in the twentieth century.

This dissertation also suggests a new type of monograph that departs from the standard emphasis on biography and intention. The problem of Arbus's intentions is a central issue with Arbus scholarship, and has usually oscillated between biography and meaning. However, since Arbus's tragic, untimely death, and without the chance to assimilate her work into any definitive kind of retrospective order, her intentions, in terms of her entire body of work, remain obscure; we are left instead with the *effect* of her work, and with how these effects resonate with other works of the period.

The Arbus Estate, consisting of one individual, Arbus's eldest daughter, Doon, has twice turned down my requests to research materials, such as Arbus's letters and assignment notebooks. On each occasion, Jon Pelosi, the lawyer for the Arbus Estate, informed me that my research request was denied. The reason given was that no one is being granted permission to view the letters and notebooks, as Doon feels that she is not currently equipped to have materials properly and archivally viewed, and does not want to have to supervise the use of these fragile materials. Apparently, she is tired of sifting over the archives after the planning of the recent retrospective exhibition, and feels that the Arbus presented in *Diane Arbus: Revelations* ostensibly represents the last word on the

subject. With great restraint, I argued for the sympathetic nature of my approach, including an explanation of my methodology, but the answer remains "no for now." Thus this dissertation is confined to what is more or less publicly available. Even more than before, then, the question of Arbus's intention has to be kept open-ended.

Yet even without access to her notebooks in their entirety, it may be ascertained that Arbus said and wrote comparatively little about her overall intentions. She mentioned a couple of ideas for book projects, such as a "family album," and a book of her photographs of the mentally retarded (to be looked at in greater detail in Chapter Three). Quotations from Arbus, and her own writings about her work, are often stated in rhetorical ellipses; frequently, she seemed to be speaking in a Warhol-inspired deadpan, sprinkled with metaphor and parable.⁵ Perhaps this obfuscation is not just an affectation, but is ultimately a part of her own understanding of her work.

Arbus the 'author' was a woman of complex and chameleon-like identities. She was deeply affected by the art, literature, and social upheavals of the 1960s, a palimpsest of sources she sought to locate, time after time, in her subjects (and perhaps why she formed such a strong bond with them). Prior attempts to evaluate Arbus's intentions fail to adequately come to terms with this complexity. How may we parse these many fragmentary, phase-shifting Arbuses without falling into the trap of positing an illusory intentionality?

Thankfully, Arbus herself offers a clue to this problem with a certain nugget; a riddle from the Sphinx. Arbus stated that her work was about "the gap between intention and effect."⁶ Arbus was referring to the sense of

⁵ Susan Sontag is the first to comment on this connection to Pop, noting that Arbus's statements reflected the "childlike wonder of the pop mentality." See Sontag's "America, Seen Through Photographs, Darkly" in Sontag, *On Photography* (New York and London: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1977), 41.

⁶ Diane Arbus, *Diane Arbus. An Aperture Monograph* (New York: Aperture, 1972), 2.

disconnect, available not to the subject but to the viewer of the photograph, which occurs between “what you [the subject] want people to know about you and what you can’t help people knowing about you.”⁷ No passive witness, Arbus heightened the awareness of triangulation in her compositions between herself, the subject, and the viewer of the photograph in a novel manner in which her presence elicits a palpable response from the subject. The “gap between intention and effect” seems to be a valuable way of framing my argument in terms of Arbus’s intentions, and so I have decided to adopt this ‘gap’ as a methodologically self-reflexive model. My argument resides in this same uncertain space, in this fissure between intention (which is, in this case, unknowable, or at least unprovable) and effect (which is provable, or at least arguable). With this approach, we will consider her work as a social panorama using relevant and circumstantially credible evidence while analyzing the *effect* of her work as a social body, as an entity that needs to be discussed in terms of other like-minded works of the period. ‘Arbus,’ as the subject of a monograph, is used only nominally, as the binder of a non-linear trajectory--an assemblage linking previously disparate bodies of images and texts together to form what I hope for the reader will be a viable reading which more fully integrates Arbus into the historicism of the sixties.⁸ Elements of biography will not be completely abandoned, but used sparingly. As we view it today, the critical impact of Arbus’s *oeuvre* challenged the foundations of thought involved in the naturalized, positivist theories of knowledge and scientific categorization enmeshed within documentary photography and the celebrity portrait. Such a

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ For a sensitive, critical, and thorough discussion of the problems of the contemporary art-historical monograph (and some solutions to the problem), see Douglas R. Nickel, “Introduction,” in his Francis Frith in Egypt and Palestine: A Victorian Photographer Abroad (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 9-19.

critique will be examined in the complex relationship between Arbus's photographs and the social and intellectual setting of the 1960s--a radical moment that witnessed a range of protest and dissent, from sexual liberation to the Civil Rights movement, the Feminist movement, and the Vietnam War.⁹

Three magazine projects of Arbus's point to a reading of her work as a social panorama: "The Full Circle" (1961), "Two American Families" (1968), and "Five Photographs by Diane Arbus" (1971). The dates of these projects, appearing at the beginning, height, and end of her career, attest to the consistency of her desire to produce a group of portraits which contain a social message. Arbus was selective about her social panorama; it did not include everyone, particularly not hippies, athletes, and other contemporary types who had a secure niche in popular visual culture. Although she did some celebrity portraits, Arbus primarily chose individuals who would have been invisible to the mainstream, were it not for her camera. Through visual analyses of these three projects, the foundation will be laid for a fresh consideration of Arbus's work.

In Arbus's photo-essay entitled "The Full Circle," which appeared in the November 1961 issue of *Harper's Bazaar* (figure i-1), her emphasis seems to be on using the form of the social gallery to question its association of an individual's character with physiognomy. Framed by fashion photographs, "The Full Circle" also must be read in the context of a high fashion magazine. In this photo-essay, Arbus provides both the photographs and text, and uses the horizontally- and vertically-oriented frame of the Leica. With their grainy texture, these images

⁹ Maurice Berger, in his *The Politics of Experience: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960s* (Doc. Diss. New York: CUNY Graduate Center, 1988), 5-6, notes that "art-historical analysis of the complex culture of the 1960s has fearfully distanced itself from the political and social issues of the period" by art historians "trained to protect the sanctity of the autonomous museum object." This argument can be extended to include Arbus's work, which holds a prominent place in The Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection of photography.

seem formally closer to the 1950s street photography now recognized as “New York School”; she does not yet employ the familiar square format of the Rolleiflex we most commonly associate with her work (she started using the Rolleiflex in 1962). In terms of layout, the photographs appear to be somewhat along the lines of traditional nineteenth-century portrait galleries of the illustrious: Arbus includes a photograph of the individual, along with a biographical statement about that individual contained within a descriptive, deadpanned, often humorous, style of prose. But Arbus’s choice of subjects is what sets her ‘gallery’ apart. In an introductory statement, Arbus says

These are five singular people who appear like metaphors somewhere further out than we do, beckoned, not driven, invented by belief, author and hero of a real dream by which our own courage and cunning are tested and tried; so that we may wonder all over again what is veritable and inevitable and possible and what it is to become whatever we may be.¹⁰

Arbus’s eccentric sitters (all New Yorkers) include Jack Dracula, The Marked Man (figure i-1), William Mack, Sage of the Wilderness (figure i-2), His Supreme Highness, Prince Robert de Rohan Courtenay, Max Maxwell Landar, Uncle Sam, Polly Bushong (figure i-3), and her alter ego, Miss Cora Pratt, The Counterfeit Lady (figure i-4). What unites these eccentric people is their own invention of a persona, of a fictitious character, an identity which becomes indistinguishable from their real selves. Arbus’s titles, in listing both the real and ‘character’ name of the sitter, attest to this duality. The characters in “The Full Circle” are ‘fairy tales for grown-ups’: their eccentricity read as a parable against the backdrop of contemporary social criticism which dealt with the issue of social conformity.¹¹

In nineteenth-century portrait galleries, a writing sample of the sitter was

¹⁰ Arbus, text from “The Full Circle,” Harper’s Bazaar (November 1961), 133-137, in Arbus, Magazine Work, 14.

¹¹ See C. Wright Mills’s White Collar: The American Middle Classes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), David Riesman’s The Lonely Crowd (1950; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961) and Robert Lindner’s Must You Conform?, (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1956).

often included, which connected the photograph to the written work, and by extension to the thoughts, the *interior*, of the sitter. Both photograph and written work, working in tandem, displayed irrefutable evidence of the veracity of the referent's inner character. In Arbus's own text, she includes textual samples of her sitter's writings as well. For example, she quotes a passage of Prince Courtenay's writings, which also alludes to her own interest:

So with Growth [*sic*], changing environment and the vagaries of fortune, the facets of a man's life so vary, in a seeming and rapid inconsistency, that he appears to live his life as a succession of characters--in different dramas--sometimes high, sometimes low--and his innermost secrets are hidden in Time; and Time knows nothing! To outsiders, the personal history of anyone is merely a legend, imperfectly understood--and a fable believed and agreed upon!¹²

Courtenay describes the relationship between how others see us to how we construct our own persona, our own character, as a "legend," a "fable." The "personal history" of someone to others is "imperfectly understood"; thus the boundary between what is true and what is fictive is effaced.

With hindsight, we may ascertain that Arbus's "The Full Circle" questioned the legitimacy of galleries of famous people and their promotion of a socially-agreed-upon reading of character. Instead of portraying notable celebrities, writers, and politicians, Arbus chose individuals whose eccentricity flaunted middle-class social convention and propriety. In terms of a social cross-section, there is no easy distinction between the 'freak,' the eccentric, and the 'non-freak' in "The Full Circle." Arbus's two photographs of Polly Bushong is perhaps the best example of Arbus's desire to question a class-based reading of eccentricity. One photograph of Polly, "daughter of a socially prominent New England Gentleman," looks to be of a normal, upper-middle-class white woman smoking a cigarette in front of the vine-covered wall of her home. Yet Polly's alter ego, Miss Cora Pratt, wears hideous false teeth and outdated, frowzy lace

¹² Prince Courtenay in Magazine Work, 20.

clothing, and was known to make socially inappropriate scenes at elegant cocktail parties.¹³ It is as if Arbus wanted sitters who had allowed their secret, their Mr. Hyde, to come through, and were quite comfortable with the results. These sitters reject cultural uniformity in favor of an existential singularity. That singularity may bear the visible signifiers of culture, such as with the tatoos of Jack Dracula or the Uncle Sam costume worn by Max Maxwell Landar, but ultimately, their eccentric use of such signifiers runs against a 'normal' experience of them (of Dracula and Uncle Sam) in popular culture. Arbus wanted her social panorama to as be instructive to the viewer as the traditional galleries were, but as a metaphor of counter-cultural non-conformity, as opposed to a troupe of grand individuals constituting moral exemplars whose achievements mirrored the conservative values of the status quo.

A short story entitled "The House of Asterion" (1947) by Jorge Luis Borges appears opposite "The Full Circle" in *Harper's Bazaar*. In this tale inspired by Greek myth, we experience the perspective of the Minotaur (we don't find out the narrator is actually the Minotaur until the end of the story). The Minotaur asks himself, "What will my redeemer be like.... Will he be a bull or a man? will he perhaps be a bull with the face of a man? Or will he be like me?"¹⁴ The private thoughts of a mythological character in Borges's short story complemented Arbus's "The Full Circle," in which we gain access to a character's own constructed myths. This example serves to illustrate Arbus's complex relationship to literature, a key component of her work to be discussed in the first chapter.

If Arbus's characters in "the Full Circle" are followed by the Borges short

¹³ Arbus in *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, "The House of Asterion" (1947), in Harper's Bazaar (Nov. 1961), 138.

story, they are framed by ads for *haute couture*. Immediately preceding Arbus's "The Full Circle" are black-and-white photographs of glamorous models posing in Givenchy and Balenciaga gowns by Richard Avedon, Al Kublin, and Saul Leiter. Each fashion plate displays the name of the photographer, reflecting Avedon's success in promoting the authorial presence of the magazine photographer. The models are celebrities, such as Sophia Loren, who, wearing opulent costume diamonds, appears with the caption "The Command of Beauty."¹⁵ On the page facing the end of "The Full Circle" are Avedon's glamorous, soft halftone photographs for an advertisement entitled "The Perfect Tailoring of Mainbocher," in which the model, heiress Gloria Vanderbilt, according to the caption, projects "the quintessence of ease," luxuriating in "a wool theatre coat, the color of ripe wheat, with masterfully arching seams curving down the front..."¹⁶ "The Full Circle," set between these paragons of *haute couture*, cannot help but be read against the physiognomic terms of the honorific nature of fashion photography. Yet Arbus's eccentrics, caught between Sophia Loren and Gloria Vanderbilt, assume the tropes of glamour and style, and strike the relaxed pose of the model shot out of doors, "on assignment." Eccentricity, celebrity, and fashion, then, are all conflated for the reader of *Harper's Bazaar* in 1961, and it is within the context of the fashion layout that Arbus's subversive meaning must be understood.

In 1968, Arbus published "Two American Families" in the *London Sunday Times Magazine*, which included A Brooklyn Family on Sunday Outing, 1966 (figure i-5), and A Suburban Family on Lawn One Sunday, Westchester of 1968

¹⁵ Avedon, *Harper's Bazaar*, 125.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 138-39.

(fig. i-6).¹⁷ In this pairing, Arbus chose two different families from two different social classes and demographic situations: One white urban family of working- or lower-middle class, and one affluent, white, suburban upper-middle class family. By referring to them as "American families," Arbus places these two photographs within the context of the social panorama. What is striking about the subjects in these two photographs is precisely the fact that they are *not* freaks, but outwardly 'normal' American families.

Arbus's Brooklyn Family has certain notable formal properties. The couple is divided into two distinct spaces which are bifurcated by the line of a tar-shingled row house that frames the woman on the left. Bright sunlight forms the background of the man on the right. Despite this division, there is a spray of leaves from an otherwise invisible tree which serves as a connecting spark between the two parents. The young mother's face is framed by an oversized Liz Taylor boufant hairdo, while her infant daughter's face is similarly framed by the rounded lace hood of her winter jumper. There are clear genetic similarities between mother and daughter, evident in their oval-shaped face and facial features, and similarly, between father and son; yet the son is mentally retarded. These subtle details add up to an image of little shifting physical samenesses and differences, and it is in the context of the American family as a type that this photograph's differences runs against. This Brooklyn family is neither freakish nor eccentric, but the tender expression on the father's face and the way he holds his son's hand suggest an emotional bond. Their difference occurs in their contrast to the cookie-cutter examples of the happy, prosperous image of the American family enjoying things together in their hours of leisure promoted in the 1950s by popular magazines such as *Life* and *Look*.

¹⁷ Diane Arbus, "Two American Families," Sunday Times Magazine (London) (November 10, 1968), 56-57.

In Contrast to the Brooklyn Family, the affluent suburban Family on their Lawn, sunbathing on wood-framed lawn chairs in their well-manicured backyard, are physically distant from one another. Father, mother, and child do not acknowledge each other's presence--each seems locked in a private thought. In the *Sunday Times magazine* layout, this photograph was bisected down the middle by the seam of the magazine, visibly separating father from mother. Thus, a layout element was used to augment the feeling of psychological isolation in the image. This family, despite having achieved their 'American success story,' seem more ill at ease together, more troubled and emotionally isolated from one another than the Brooklyn Family.

The cover of the May 1971 issue of *Artforum* featured Arbus's Boy with a Straw Hat Waiting to March in a Pro-War Parade, N.Y.C. of 1967 (figure i-7).¹⁸ The young man is photographed looking right at Arbus, and by extension, the viewer, with an almost messianic conviction. With his straw boater, sport coat, button-down white shirt, and bow tie, the young man seems anachronistically dressed for his generation. There is no visible trace of long hair, or the vividly patterned, casual styles popular by the late sixties. By 1971, the war in Vietnam had clearly gone badly for the United States; for the readers of *Artforum*, this young man's position would have been ironic, an 'aw, shucks' naïveté oddly out of place in an era of conceptual art, body art, political art, and massive anti-war protests by people of his generation.

Arbus's use of a flash illuminates the young man's "Bomb Hanoi" and "God Bless America Support Our Boys in Vietnam" buttons, lending a starkness to the background of the photograph. Arbus's flash focuses on the unfashionable details of the young man's dress to reveal his state of mind, which

¹⁸ *Artforum* 9, 9 (May 1971), 64-70.

in this case is a pro-war mentality. There is nothing glamorous about this young man; he does not respond to Arbus, as so many other of her subjects do, with a sympathetic expression. Details of physical appearance are highlighted by Arbus's flash, yet these details do not seem to flatter the young man; in fact, they serve to illuminate his conservatism, even zealotry. It is in this instance that Arbus subverts the honorific, positivist reading of the white, middle-class subject. The young man's physiognomy is used to reveal what might be termed the 'freakishness of morality' in white America. It is precisely with this kind of photograph, taken during an era of racial segregation, lynchings, and race riots, that Arbus sought to efface distinctions between the values of the white middle class and the Other that relegated the Other to a series of types.

"Five Photographs by Diane Arbus" represents a microcosm of her intention to suggest a kind of anti-gallery. The five works chosen span almost the entire decade of her career (the earliest being 1962, and the latest, 1970), suggesting a summa of her *oeuvre* to this point. Under the title of the article and opposite the first photograph, This is Eddie Carmel, a Jewish Giant with His Parents in the Living Room of Their Home in the Bronx, NY 1970, (fig. i-8) are a couple of Arbus's parables, including "Nothing is ever alike. The best thing is the difference. I get to keep what nobody needs."¹⁹ Formally, the sequence of photographs is carefully selected to connect meanings--reading, like Walker Evans's *American Photographs* (1938) and Frank's *The Americans*, as an 'essay written with photographs'. The photographs fill almost the entire page, leaving just enough room for the captions and rough edges of the print.

Looming in the corner of the claustrophobic, boxlike space of the photograph, Eddie Carmel, a Jewish Giant represents one of the quintessential

¹⁹ Diane Arbus, "Five Photographs by Diane Arbus" in *Ibid.*, 64.

types of the freak, The Giant. But this looming giant has very normal-looking middle class parents. What is going on here? The Jewish Giant takes on new meaning when we flip the page and find the Christmas tree in the corner of the Levittown living room assuming the same position. Both Giant and Christmas tree in A Christmas Tree in a Living Room in Levittown, Long Island of 1962 (fig. i-9) fill the left corner space of their living room (and, by extension, in the square space of the photograph) like mythic presences--he perhaps representing the golem of Jewish folklore, and the tree, of course, the multivalent symbol of Christ's birth and life. Familiar objects in each photograph invite formal comparison, such as a similarly-positioned couch, and the just-visible arms of a chair in the foreground, as if we are sitting there observing the scene. With these two photographs, Arbus contrasts a Jewish scene with a Christian one; these are spaces of cultural identity, which often, despite appearances, can be unpredictable in terms of its occupants. By these formal comparisons, Arbus attempts to level the distinction between 'normal' and 'freakish'.

Arbus's Levittown interior, a kind of portrait-of-absence, presents the scene of a banal, suburban, prefabricated home with cheap, mass-produced furniture and appliances. Everything, including the christmas tree and presents, has a commercialized appearance--there is nothing, no object or photograph, that attests to the individuality of those who inhabit this interior. This interior is entirely shaped by mass culture. It appears as if the persons living in this house are mannequins, and the interior a display in a magazine advertisement for furniture, or at a world's fair. This photograph is similar to Arbus's A Castle in Disneyland, Cal. 1962 (figure i-10); a dream façade of a castle meant to be photographed and seen in magazines by tourists rather than an actual, lived-in place. But Arbus renders the familiar strange to the middle-class viewer; Disney's castle and the Levittown interior are creepy, made uncanny by the

process of photography. This picture is a portrait of domestic America in 1962, a space in which the banal sameness of prefabricated houses and cheap, mass-produced furniture and decorations achieved a quotidian existence. Arbus emphasizes the rough edges of the picture; they do not appear to have been cropped. The choice of these photographs by Arbus suggests that she wished to show both those considered 'freaks' and those who are not. Their conflation attests to Arbus's desire to challenge how the public, influenced as they are by cultural attitudes, made distinctions between freak and non-freak.

Following the Levittown living room is the photograph of the Brooklyn family from "Two American Families," captioned A Young Family in Brooklyn Going for a Sunday Outing. Their Baby is Named Dawn. Their Son is Retarded and dated 1966. The *Artforum* photographs are also notable for the titles she gives them. They are more descriptive and sympathetic to the individuals photographed than the titles given to the same photographs in the 1972 *Diane Arbus* monograph. The captions of the remaining two photographs appear as follows: Lauro Morales, a Mexican Dwarf, in His Hotel Room in New York City, 1970., and Identical Twins, Cathleen and Colleen, Members of a Twins Club in New Jersey, 1966 (fig. i-11). Lauro Morales may be a dwarf, another freak archetype, but his expression is sympathetic, even tender. The way his body is framed, sitting on his bed with a towel covering his lower half, suggests a kind of monumentality. In terms of the now-iconic Identical Twins photograph, the last of the five, the fact that the caption by Arbus refers to the Twins Club is interesting because it ties them to an anachronistic, quirky American social group. Thus the iconic Twins photograph needs new interpretations which do not focus solely on Arbus's interest in the psychological condition of her subjects as a metaphor for her own dark urges. It is also interesting, in light of subsequent Arbus publications that the titles are by Arbus herself, and focus

more on the individual in the photographs than on describing that individual merely as a type, as the titles in the 1972 monograph suggest. Indeed, the period 1958-1971, from the moment Frank's *The Americans* was published to Arbus's death in July of 1971, represents a time when the positivist taxonomy in the photograph is undone. A counter-discourse became apparent, of which Arbus's work is a primary example. If we view Arbus's work as a whole, the ironic reversal of the typology (the 'normal freak' and the 'freakish normal') seems readily apparent, but lacking in the Arbus literature.

To date, there have been no attempts to link Arbus's work to the history of the photographic social gallery. The body of critical literature on Arbus tends to focus upon making an argument for Arbus's intentions, specifically in terms of personal psychology, and the extent of her identification with her subjects.²⁰ Early commentators such as Amy Goldin read exploitation in Arbus's treatment of her subjects. Goldin argued that

Arbus may indeed have exploited her subjects, made artistic capital out of their hunger for friendship and acceptance. The desire to be documented in conventional ways is a normal human wish; to be counted, to leave proof of having existed, like everyone else. But people want to be seen on their own terms, and I think it must be admitted that Arbus cheated, and she knew she cheated. She saw her subjects her way, and they are invariably consumed.²¹

In perhaps the first important piece of writing on Arbus, Susan Sontag's "America, Seen Through Photographs, Darkly" (*New York Review of Books*, 1973), Sontag reacted to Arbus's work exhibited in the 1972 Arbus retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York with a mixture of "pain" and revulsion--a stunned witness to a series of "slow-motion private smashups, most of which

²⁰ See Judith Goldman, "Diane Arbus: The Gap Between Intention and Effect," *Art Journal* (Fall 1974), 35, and Max Kozloff, "The Uncanny Portrait: Sander, Arbus, Samaras," *Artforum* (June 1973), 65.

²¹ Amy Goldin, "Diane Arbus: Playing With Conventions," *Art in America* (March/April 1973), 73.

had been going on since the subject's birth."²² Sontag considered Arbus' work a dark vision of humanity, a polar opposite to the universalist optimism of Edward Steichen's *The Family of Man* (1955). Viewing Arbus's photographs as an abandonment of the humanist tradition in photography, Sontag describes Arbus's exhibition as a 'chamber of horrors' in which the distinction between 'freak' and non-freak' has been eradicated. While Sontag's essay has its faults, such as reading Arbus's work now known as the Untitled series (1969-71) as her "most disturbing photographs" when it is now generally agreed by scholars that they are tender and empathetic works, her essay, in its range, is (forgive a trite cliché) a dark cloud with a silver lining. A cloud in the sense that Sontag's essay was written with an emphatic and potent critical voice reminiscent of Clement Greenberg, and influenced readings of Arbus's work for the next 30 years. "America, Seen Through Photographs, Darkly" was Sontag's "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." The silver lining? She also argued that Arbus's work as a collective statement about humanity was insightful, but not historically grounded.

Diana Emery Hulick's dissertation and subsequent articles deal with the historical development of Arbus's formal practice in exploring Arbus's use of the cross-dresser motif by drawing on the history of transvestitism.²³ James Guimond's *American Photography and the American Dream* discusses the work of Robert Frank, William Klein, and Arbus as evidence of a new iconoclastic trend in photography that questioned American values promulgated in photographs in magazines such as *Life*.²⁴ Thomas Southall's valuable essay "The Magazine

²² Sontag, "America, Seen Through Photographs, Darkly" (1973) in Sontag, On Photography, 36.

²³ Diana Emery Hulick, The Photography of Diane Arbus (Ph.D. Diss. Princeton University, 1982); "Diane Arbus's Expressive Methods," History of Photography (Summer 1995); and "Diane Arbus's Women and Transvestites: Separate Selves," History of Photography (Spring 1992).

²⁴ James Guimond, American Photography and the American Dream (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 219-244.

Years, 1960-71" in *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work* contributes data on Arbus's dealings with *Esquire* magazine, and analyzes how commercial circumstances affected her output.²⁵ Carol Armstrong's "Biology, Destiny, Photography: Difference According to Diane Arbus" formally addresses specific photographs in *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph* (1972) to demonstrate Arbus's effacement of the traditional binary system of gender difference by deliberately registering the importance of the "flaw" (the Barthesian *punctum*) in the bodies of her subjects. Armstrong's treatment of Arbus in terms of the body-as-representation inspired the third chapter of my study.²⁶ Ariella Budick's 1996 monographic dissertation, *Subject to Scrutiny: Diane Arbus's American Grotesque*, discusses Arbus's images of gender and the domestic within the context of the grotesque-as-social-critique theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin and Georges Bataille.²⁷ Budick's dissertation goes beyond other studies in its Frankfurt school-inflected discussion of the Cold-War context in which Arbus operated, a discussion that provides the sociological framework of her study. Budick's argument for Arbus's *oeuvre* as a social critique in tandem with sixties counter-culture, and for the ultimately humanistic nature of Arbus's work, remains a valuable contribution to Arbus scholarship.

In early 2004, two exhibitions on Arbus, and their concomitant exhibition catalogues, have shed further light upon her unpublished work: Anthony Lee and John Pultz's *Diane Arbus: Family Albums*, and Sandra Phillips and Doon

²⁵ Thomas Southall, "The Magazine Years, 1960-71," in Doon Arbus and Marvin Israel ed, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work* (New York: Aperture, 1984), 152-171.

²⁶ Carol Armstrong, "Biology, Destiny, Photography: Difference According to Diane Arbus," *October* 66 (Fall 1993), 29-54.

²⁷ Ariella Budick, *Subject to Scrutiny: Diane Arbus's Timely American Grotesque* (Ph.D. Diss. Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1996).

Arbus, et. al., *Diane Arbus: Revelations*.²⁸ As these two sources involve the latest attempt at describing Arbus's collective intentions, I will analyze them here in somewhat greater detail. The *Revelations* exhibition, comprehensive in nature, displayed a broad range of ephemera selected by Doon Arbus, Elisabeth Sussman, and Sandra Phillips. Arbus's Rolleiflex, her collage wall, and over two hundred books from her library were all exhibited (the books, however, were too dimly lit to easily read the titles).²⁹ Collectively, such personal ephemera (covered more thoroughly in Chapter Four) corroborates my thesis of a conceptual response to the social panorama.³⁰

The *Revelations* catalogue is aptly titled, suggesting multiple shades of the meaning of the word. By re-printing some of her personal letters, notebooks, proposals, family photographs, and other writings (these original objects may be seen in the exhibition), *Revelations* offers a closer look at Arbus's thought processes than any previous study. With the inclusion of many previously unpublished yet visually arresting photographs and contact sheets, we bear further witness to Arbus's statement that "I really believe that there are things

²⁸ I refer to Anthony Lee and John Pultz, *Diane Arbus: Family Albums* (exh. cat. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), the exhibition of which began at the Mount Holyoke College Museum of Art, travelled to the Grey Gallery at New York University, then to the Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas; and Doon Arbus and Sandra Phillips et. al., *Diane Arbus: Revelations* (exh. cat. New York: Random House, 2003), which began at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and will travel to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Feb 29-May 30, 2004); The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (June 27-August 29, 2004); The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Feb. 28-May 29, 2005); Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany (June 17-Sept. 18, 2005); The Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Oct. 13, 2005-Jan. 15, 2006); and concludes at the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis (July 9-October 8, 2006).

²⁹ This problem has been somewhat rectified with the publication of a book by Doon Arbus entitled *Diane Arbus: The Libraries* (San Francisco, CA: The Frankel Gallery, 2004). The book is arranged as a foldout of color photographs of the books (and their titles) as they were displayed in the "Diane Arbus: Revelations" exhibition. *The Libraries* also contains a booklet of the full bibliographical citations of the books in the exhibition. It is disappointing that all of Arbus's library is not included in this booklet.

³⁰ In a conversation with LACMA Curator of Photography Robert Sobieszek, dated April 16, 2004, Sobieszek agreed that the contents of the exhibition corroborated my thesis.

which nobody would see unless I photographed them.”³¹ The contact sheets reveal her subjects’ ease with Arbus--the record of an encounter, in most instances, with someone she had just met. She excelled at cajoling her subjects.

Phillips’s essay, entitled “The Question of Belief,” explores the rich and complex relationship of author to subject in Arbus’s work through Arbus’s interest in myth, and its power “as a means of ascribing meaning to everyday existence.”³² Phillips deftly covers a broad amount of known territory with freshness and insight, makes apt comparisons to German photographer August Sander, and investigates Arbus’s fertile dialogue with John Szarkowski, erstwhile MoMA curator of photography. Phillips’s discussion of Arbus’s relationship with Szarkowski is perhaps the most valuable scholarly contribution of the essay.

Revelations also contains a comprehensive chronology of Arbus’s life, assembled by Sussman and Doon Arbus. The chronology, just over one hundred pages long, is chock full of unpublished photographs, letters, copies of open notebooks, etc. which document her life and work in both words and images. Morbidly (and unnecessarily) the chronology concludes with the autopsy report, which adds the absolute reality of Arbus’s suicide by slashing her wrists while battling severe depression. A brief essay entitled “In the Darkroom” by Neil Selkirk details Arbus’s equipment and darkroom methods, and how those methods changed according to Arbus’s pictorial needs.

In Anthony Lee and John Pultz’s *Diane Arbus: Family Albums*, we see for the first time a sizeable group of photographs Arbus took of the wealthy Matthaei family in 1969 during a commissioned two-day shoot in the family’s opulent New York townhouse. In two scholarly essays, including Pultz’s “Searching for Diane Arbus’s ‘Family Album’ in Her Box of Ten Photographs,

³¹ Diane Arbus, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*, 15.

³² Sandra Phillips, “The Question of Belief,” in Arbus, *Revelations*, 50.

Monograph, and *Esquire* Work” and Lee’s “Noah’s Ark, Arbus’s Album,” a hypothesis of Arbus’s intentions is advanced around the idea that she meant to produce a “family album” of sorts which sought to present different aspects of the American family in contrast to the sunny, sanitized one promoted in magazines such as *Life* and *Look*.³³ Two aspects of the word family are advanced via the photograph, one involving the actual family portrait, the icon of the middle-class living room; and a “family of resemblances” or “family of human traits” by which photography has often been used to construct genetic or racial typologies.

Lee and Pultz historicize Arbus’s work within the shifting visual representation of the American family in the 1960s, suggesting that, collectively, her version of the family takes a critical position with regard to images of the family in popular culture. Ostensibly, her version of a “family of man” offers a contrarian position to the one thematized in Edward Steichen’s MoMA exhibition *The Family of Man* of 1955. Despite its compelling argument, to consider her entire *oeuvre* as a family album seems reductive. Pultz’s conception of the “Family Album” is valuable as a step towards a greater consideration of conceptual cohesiveness in Arbus’s work, linking her *formally* to Sander and Evans. However, Pultz does not recognize Arbus’s purposive placement of her work in relationship to of the history of photographic portraiture, nor does he comment on her work as an organized critique of portraiture and the body-as-representation. Absent from Pultz and Lee’s “family album” argument are Arbus’s complex commentary on the body as a central trope of representation in the sixties, her strong connection to literature and psychoanalytical theory, and her placement within a wider artistic critique of the portrait gallery with practitioners outside the field of photography. In the exhibition itself,

³³ Lee and Pultz, Diane Arbus: Family Albums, 1-20; 21-65.

photographs of Mae West of 1965 (figure i-12), Blaze Starr, of 1964 (a stripper from Baltimore, figure i-13) and Tokyo Rose, of 1969 are dubiously presented under the heading “mothers”--Arbus never mentioned them in this context. These individuals have little to do with the trope of the family, particularly in the context of the Matthaes, around whose pictures the exhibition circulates.

A characteristic held in common by the Arbus literature mentioned is a preoccupation with demonstrating Arbus’s intentions. Both her untimely death and a lack of definitive statements about her own work make arguments about Arbus’s intentions difficult to sustain, and I would like to suggest an alternative method. One could situate the *effect* of Arbus’s work as a “social panorama” of portraits conceptually related to both previous (e.g., Sander) and contemporary (Avedon, Warhol) like-minded projects. Arbus’s work lacks the linear systematicity of Sander’s taxonomy of social class, but does contain a formal coherence, in terms of her use of the frontal pose and the square format, and a thematic congruity in her problematization of the social type. Where Sander wanted to demonstrate that an individual’s physiognomy was entirely shaped by the kind of work that they did, Arbus sought to disrupt that reading by showing that culture is worn on the individual like a mask, a false façade she ultimately exposes as a fiction.

There have been a large number of articles written on the two Arbus exhibitions/ texts, which have re-opened the dialogue on Arbus to a much greater degree.³⁴ Collectively, the best of these articles summarize the exhibitions, take umbrage with the reticence of the Arbus estate in the use of reproductions, and/or critique what is seen as the over-inclusion of images in the

³⁴ See Janet Malcolm, “Good Pictures,” The New York Review of Books 51, 1 (Jan. 15, 2004), 4-7; Francine Prose, “Revisiting the Icons: The Intimate Photography of Diane Arbus,” Harper’s 307, 1842 (November 2003), 84-88, 90; Arthur Lubow, “Arbus Reconsidered,” The New York Times Magazine (September 14, 2003), 28-34, 63, 72, 114; Judith Butler, “Diane Arbus, Surface Tensions,” Artforum 42, 6 (February 2004), 118-124.

curation of the exhibitions. However, no real depth is offered in terms of historicizing Arbus's work in relationship to positivism and the social panorama, nor are issues in her work fleshed out in terms of the social, artistic, and intellectual climate in which she worked. These two exhibitions are in fact assemblages of a particular story about "Arbus" which have attempted to come to terms with her intentions. My story, here, will perhaps be more useful to scholars of the 1960s as I mediate between intention and effect with an in-depth look at Arbus's work as a project relating to some of the broader artistic and social issues in which she participated.

My methodology is influenced by scholars such as Allen Sekula and Victor Burgin, who take a critical stance on the history of photography concerning the dissemination of 'photographic meaning.' In his 1975 essay "Photographic Practice and Art Theory," Burgin sought to remove the romanticized, aestheticized, ahistorical mantel from the way in which photographs are analyzed and discussed. The work of Diane Arbus is used as his primary example. Burgin takes the opinions of two "authorities " on Arbus's work from the back of his copy of the *Diane Arbus* monograph as representatives of such criticism: "One tells me 'Her pictures...are concerned with private rather than social realities...Her real subject is no less than the unique interior lives of those she photographed,'...the other, having informed me that Arbus is a 'legend', goes on to say of her pictures: 'it is their dignity that is, I think, the source of their power.'"³⁵ Burgin's problem with this type of criticism is that it ignores the social situation in which the photographs were produced. He considers this form of criticism as unresolved and outmoded: "Typical of the romantic aesthetic attitudes which continue to prevail today is the notion that there are unique essences within things and people which are ordinarily concealed from us by

³⁵ Victor Burgin, "Photographic Practice and Art Theory," *Studio International* 190 (August 1975), 39.

appearances but which artistic genius can reveal to us. Typical of the 'criticism' informed by such notions is the luxury of being equivocal about what is already vague."³⁶ Burgin's argument underlines the methodology with which I would like to consider Arbus's photographs in terms of *effect* in this dissertation:

The point is: the basis of any 'mood' or 'feeling' these pictures might produce, as much as any overt 'message' they might be thought to transmit, depends not on something individual and mysterious but rather on our common knowledge of the typical representation of prevailing social facts and values; that is to say, our knowledge of the way objects transmit and transform ideology, and the ways in which photographs in turn transform these. To appreciate such operations we must first lose any illusion about the neutrality of objects before the camera.³⁷

Using Arbus's photograph of the suburban family with the child in the background, A Family on Their Lawn, as an example of our "common knowledge of prevailing social facts and values," Burgin asserts that our shared social values and assumptions concerning the family unit are brought to bear on both Arbus's subjects and our interpretation of them. The example of A Family on Their Lawn could be extended across her entire *oeuvre*, as she generally sought to record the individual's relative distance from how they would like to look; an *intention* (again, I am referring to Arbus's statement about "the gap between intention and effect" of recognition) that is always socially contingent. Arbus's portraits expose ideological systems of codifying the individual as a fiction, a mask.

Most essays on Arbus also focus upon her work in the context of her "freak" portraits--those of dwarves, a giant, and transvestites, to name a few. But these were not the only people Arbus photographed. She took pictures of

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid. Burgin describes his usage of the term ideology: "By ideology we mean, in its broadest sense, a complex of propositions about the natural and social world which would be generally accepted in a given society as describing the actual, indeed necessary, nature of the world and its events...what is essential about it is that it is contingent and *within it the fact of its contingency is suppressed*...it is in this taking for granted as natural and immutable that which is historical and contingent that we encounter ideology in the classic Marxist sense." (Ibid., 41).

celebrities, artists, feminists, the wealthy, the middle-class, the old and the young--people who definitely did not fit the label "freak." Taken as a whole, Arbus's work involves portraits of representatives from all social strata. With the advantage of hindsight, we might see that she eliminates the positivism of earlier social gallery portraiture by the democracy of her portrait choices and the lack of an organizational hierarchy; the transvestite in her seedy bedroom is captured in the same square format as the socialite in her ornate boudoir. Arbus does not moralize in her photographs--she does not heroicize either, or ask us to take pity on her subjects.

To understand Arbus's portraits as a social panorama, we must look at her production during her own lifetime. The individuals who comprised her growing body of work served as metaphors for Arbus's ambivalence towards the sixties counter-culture. As I intend to show, Arbus's photography had many things in common with the counter-culture thematically, but she largely refused to produce portraits of its major players. Why? The answer lies partly in the pattern of her magazine assignments. From November 1961 onward, Arbus produced photo-essays on eccentrics, celebrities, and a nudist camp, some of which went unpublished.³⁸ These photo-essays appeared in *Esquire*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Glamour*, and *Show*, among others, and wove a narrative about the individual in the photographs. Arbus's sitters were not so much documents of her times as much as metaphors and parables of her times.

In these photo-essays, Arbus was influenced by certain literary authors who also published short stories in magazines, such as Jorge Luis Borges and Joseph Mitchell. Mitchell's stories about New York eccentrics, which appeared in the *New Yorker*, had a strong impact on Arbus's subject matter, and she actively sought out some of the people Mitchell wrote vignettes about, such as Joe Gould

³⁸ Arbus's "Notes on the Nudist Camp" was not published. See Southall, 68-69.

and Mazie Gordon.³⁹ Arbus was fascinated with Mitchell's descriptive prose, and strove to emulate his deadpan, what he called "graveyard," humor in her photographs and written work. Mitchell's writing contained a social critique that interested Arbus: he attempted to establish a link to a vanishing past, to what he saw as a vital sense of humanism and place which still existed in the homes and actions of marginalized individuals. Mitchell found it ironic that such individuals had been cast aside by bourgeois society, and strove to record their value for posterity in an era of growing corporate and mass-cultural hegemony. Thus the collective nature of Arbus's photographs must be understood within the collective context of magazine stories such as Mitchell's.

As I studied the fragments of Arbus's writings, it became increasingly apparent that Arbus was very aware of the history of photography, and more specifically, the socially deterministic history of photographic portraiture. In a letter she wrote to Robert Benton, art director of *Esquire*, we get a sense of Arbus's desire to say something about the social in dialogue with the history of photography: "I was looking for some club that would be good for the upper in the sense of respectable like the D.A.R. (Daughters of the American Revolution)...or a society for the suppression of something or other like vice or sin...Brady once photographed the D.A.R. and it was, in the French sense, formidable...meanwhile, please get me permissions, both posh and sordid."⁴⁰ This statement suggests that Arbus was interested in not only a broad range of social strata, but also organizations (like the D.A.R.) which promulgated both social identity and social difference. In another letter to Benton, Arbus proposes a

³⁹ See Patricia Bosworth, *Diane Arbus* (New York and London: Norton, 1984), 176-78. Despite its much-maligned overdependence on sensationalistic biographical details, the Bosworth biography provides a number of important starting points for Arbus scholars, such as the Mitchell book.

⁴⁰ "Letter from Arbus to Robert Benton, undated, c. October 1959" in Southall, 155-56. See footnote 11 on 156.

project to photograph eccentrics. She reveals her desire to elicit social commentary by quoting Dame Edith Sitwell, author of *English Eccentrics* (1957):

About eccentrics...Edith Sitwell says in what is the prettiest definition: ANY DUMB BUT PREGNANT COMMENT ON LIFE, ANY CRITICISM OF THE WORLD'S ARRANGEMENT, IF EXPRESSED BY ONLY ONE GESTURE, AND THAT OF SUFFICIENT CONTORTION, BECOMES ECCENTRICITY [Arbus's capitals]. Or, if that word has too double an edge, we could use some others: the anomalies, the quixotic, the dedicated, who believe in the impossible, who make their mark on themselves, who-if-you-were-going-to-meet-them-for-the-first-time-would-have-no-need-of-a-carnation-in-their-buttonhole."⁴¹

Arbus agrees with Sitwell's contention that eccentrics contain a "pregnant comment on life," a comment loaded with a message. Sitwell's definition suggests that by resisting conformity, eccentrics have some critical distance, and thus something for us to learn from. In the same c. 1960 Benton letter, Arbus goes on to list a good deal of eccentric subjects she would like to photograph, such as "The Mystic Barber," "someone who collects woodpecker holes," and "a lady in Mt. Kisco who keeps a lion in her living room."⁴² Arbus finishes the letter by saying "These are the Characters In A Fairy Tale For Grown Ups."⁴³ By definition, fairy tales are produced in a book as a group of characters with stories, each containing a moral for children. Arbus wanted photographic 'fairy tales' with a moral for adults. Her portraiture, then, may be seen as 'Fairy Tales for Grown-Ups' comprised of individuals whose portraits are 'pregnant with meaning' about mainstream society by virtue of the subject's distance from it. What was so unsettling about Arbus's images to contemporaneous audiences was that she photographed both nudists and ordinary Americans in the same disturbing way; she always found the flaw, the empty pop bottle and the smelly outhouse. To those accustomed to the optimistic populism of the picture

⁴¹ "Letter from Arbus to Benton, undated, c. 1960" in *Ibid.*, 156, footnote 14.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

magazines or to Steichen's 1955 *Family of Man* exhibit, such images could only seem very 'sick,' or insulting."⁴⁴

Arbus's project proposal for a 1963 Guggenheim Foundation grant application, entitled "American Rites, Manners, and Customs," offers an early glimpse of her intentions to produce a larger social statement with her work, a larger comment about the United States in the same tradition, perhaps, as Robert Frank and Walker Evans:

I want to photograph the considerable ceremonies of our present because we tend while living here and now to perceive only what is random and barren and formless about it. While we regret that the present is not like the past and despair of its ever becoming the future, its innumerable, inscrutable habits lie in wait for their meaning. I want to gather them, like somebody's grandmother putting up preserves, because they will have been so beautiful. There are the ceremonies of celebration (the Paegants, the Festivals, the Feasts, the Conventions) and the Ceremonies of Competition (Contests, games, sports), the Ceremonies of buying and selling, of gambling, of the law and the show; the Ceremonies of Fame in which the winners win and the lucky are chosen or family Ceremonies or gatherings (the schools, the Clubs, the Meetings). Then there are the Ceremonial places (The beauty parlor, the funeral parlor, or simply the parlor) and ceremonial costumes (what waitresses wear, or Wrestlers), Ceremonies of the Rich, like the dog show, and of the middle class, like the Bridge game. Or, for example: The dancing lesson, the graduation, the testimonial dinner, the seance, the gymnasium and the picnic....these are our symptoms and our monuments. I want simply to save them, for what is ceremonious and curious and commonplace will be legendary.⁴⁵

Arbus's Guggenheim proposal suggests a larger principle of organization at work in her *oeuvre*. It is instructive that she does not once mention the word "freak" or "eccentric." The last part of her statement, that the "curious and commonplace will be legandary," does, however, allude to Arbus's desire to play anthropologist, in a sense, by documenting humans and their participation in "Ceremonies." Her subjects, perhaps the stuff of future myth, parable, or fairy-tale, will be instructive to audiences, as with previous galleries --but by

⁴⁴ Guimond, 220.

⁴⁵ Arbus, from a photocopy of her 1963 Guggenheim Proposal, reprinted in Arbus, Diane Arbus: Revelations (NY: Random House, 2003), 41.

problematizing types, not by adhering to them.

Chapter One:

The Trajectory of the Positivist Social Gallery

~The photographic image does not belong to the natural world. It is a product of human labor, a cultural object whose being--in the phenomenological sense of the term--cannot be dissociated precisely from its historical meaning and from the necessarily datable project in which it originates.⁴⁶ ~Hubert Damisch, 1978

From its inception, photographic social panorama portraiture was invested with positivist content that, despite aesthetic shifts, remained intact until the 1960s. Engaging in an extended flashback, this chapter will trace the threads of positivist, typological discourse from the sixties back to the time of Mathew Brady to see how deeply ingrained such discourse had become. I do not intend to pursue a comprehensive history of the galleries, only to focus upon their historical significance along a trajectory ending with Arbus's work. From c. 1850 until c. 1960, the reception of photographs took place in a socio-cultural context in which some form of positivist looking, usually in the form of the pseudo-science of physiognomy, was common. This form of looking was largely unquestioned, a universal truth; part of an acceptable sociological, and thus scientific, means of understanding human beings. Positivist looking, and its relationship to phrenology, and later, eugenics, always had its dissenters, but was not rejected on a broader cultural scale until the 1960s.

Arbus's collection of photographic books suggests a preoccupation with photographers from both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries whose work contained galleries of social types. She owned books by or featuring the work of photographers such as Brady, Sander and Erich Salomon which were not yet well known outside of the professional circles of photography. In general,

⁴⁶ Hubert Damisch, "Five notes for a Phenomenology of the Photographic Image" October 5 (Summer 1978).

though, her collection reflects the wider range of titles made available in the sixties than had been in any previous decade. Generally, her collection suggests a preoccupation with photographers who took portraits and photographed people as a record of their social situation.⁴⁷ Arbus owned books on or images by most of the photographers mentioned in this dissertation.

My analysis in this chapter will focus upon Arbus's relationship to the social panorama portraits of Robert Frank, Lisette Model, Brassai, Walker Evans, August Sander, Alvin Langdon Coburn, Nadar/Etienne Carjat, and Mathew Brady. However, they are by no means the only practitioners whose photography contains positivist content. Despite the apparently arbitrary nature of the selection of these photographers, they have been chosen to demonstrate: 1) the international nature of positivism and its various interpretations in different countries, and 2) the degree to which their work was representative of important aesthetic junctures in the history of photography. Arbus was aware

⁴⁷ The following is a list of the books on photographers in Arbus's library, which are immediately followed by the publisher's dates of copies she owned: Berenice Abbott's The World of Atget (1964), Eugene Atget (1963), and Photographs (1970); William Klein's New York (1956) and Rome: The City and its People (1959); Walker Evans's Many are Called (1966) and Walker Evans (intro. by John Szarkowski, 1971); Roy Meredith's Mr. Lincoln's Cameraman Mathew B. Brady (1946); Henry W. Elson's The Civil War through the Camera (1912, with photographs by Brady); George Elliott's Dorothea Lange (1966); Jacques Henri Lartigue's The Photographs of Jacques Henri Lartigue (1963) and Diary of a Century (1970, ed. by Avedon); Eadweard Muybridge's The Human Figure in Motion (1955); Robert Felix Tournachon's Nadar (1960); Weegee's Naked City (1945) and Weegee's People (1946); Reginald McGhee's The World of James Van Derzee: a Visual Record of Black Americans (1969); Helmut and Alison Gernsheim's exhibition catalogue, Hundert Jahre Photographie, 1839-1939 aus der Sammlung Gernsheim, London (1959); August Sander's Deutschenspiegel (1962); Henri Cartier-Bresson's The Decisive Moment (1952) and The Europeans (1955); Anna Farovna's Henri Cartier-Bresson (1962); a catalogue entitled French Primitive Photography from an exh. at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1969; Avedon's Avedon (1970); Helen Levitt's A Way of Seeing (1965, with an essay by James Agee); Bill Brandt's Perspective of Nudes (1961) and Shadow of Light (1966); Irving Penn's Moments Preserved: 8 Essays in Photographs and Words (1960); Erich Salomon's Porträt einer Epoche (1963); Ludvik Psoucek's Brassai (1962); Russel E. Belon and Robert Weinstein's Will Soule: Indian Photographer at Fort Sill Oklahoma 1869-74 (1969); John J. McKendry's Four Victorian Photographers (1968); she also owned an Atget portfolio, a Stieglitz portfolio, and Ansel Adams's Ansel Adams: My Camera in the National Park (date unknown).

of this history, and her view of it represented an entirely novel understanding of the portrait.

Historicized collectively, portraits by these photographers exemplify the transition of positivist content in photographic portraiture from the mid-nineteenth to well into the twentieth century. Each section of my chapter deals with a different photographer and focuses on the social climate in which he or she operated, yet Arbus always remains in our field of vision. Her serious artistic work, beginning around 1958, represents the end-point of this history. Thus, the 1950s is where this flashback begins. What were Arbus's immediate influences?

I. The Fifties: Edward Steichen's *Family of Man*, Robert Frank's *The Americans*

The period roughly from 1955 to 1965 was one of profound change in the way that photographers conceived of the social panorama. After World War II, the image of the American was glorified in the media, bolstering the political stance of the nation during the Cold War years. Along with Arbus (with whom he became friendly in the late 1950s), Swiss photographer Robert Frank felt that the image of the American promulgated in the American mass media was a hypocritical myth--a mirage masking more brutal realities, such as poverty and racial segregation. Frank's seminal book *The Americans* (1958-59) represented the first significant challenge to America's image of itself.⁴⁸ Most photojournalism made around the time Frank was photographing *The Americans* was optimistic and upbeat in its presentation of Americans, reflecting the attitude

⁴⁸ Frank's book was originally published in 1958 by Robert Delpire, Paris, and then by Grove Press, New York, in 1959. The Grove Press edition was the first to contain the introduction by Jack Kerouac, giving *The Americans* a decidedly 'Beat' tone.

of a prosperous post-war America; this phenomenon has been well documented.⁴⁹ Frank's work clashed with this prevailing trend in photography. With the work of Frank and Arbus, we witness a fundamental shift in the social panorama--the moment of disintegration for the positivist taxonomy taking place in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The public's knowledge of honorific portrait galleries was exploited by the American mass media in the 1950s. Such galleries were employed either to make social statements or sell products. Marshall McLuhan was one of the first to critique this type of representation. In McLuhan's *The Mechanical Bride*, published in 1951, close readings of newspaper pages and advertisements are employed to uncover the problematic ideologies with which "industrial man" is saturated. McLuhan argues that the male white-collar worker is continuously bombarded by forces of commerce which "burrow deeply into his consciousness to shape his view of the world."⁵⁰ One such advertisement deals with a portrait gallery of photographs. McLuhan reproduced an ad for Lord Calvert whiskey in which an honorific gallery of nine "Men of distinction" are presented, each holding a glass of whiskey (figure 1-1). The photographs are retouched to add the clearly-presented glass of whiskey. In McLuhan's text accompanying the ad, also entitled "Men of Distinction," he mentions the ubiquity of this type of representation in such magazines as *Harper's* and *Life*. McLuhan then links the honorific qualities of the portrait gallery with the consumer product: "by proclaiming a set of social and intellectual distinctions in accordance with

⁴⁹ For a thorough investigation of this cultural period, see James Guimond, American Photography and the American Dream (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), Eric Sandeen, Picturing an Exhibition: The Family of Man and 1950s America (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), and Ariella Budick, "Impermissible Ambiguity: On Being Nonaligned in Cold War America" in her Diss. Subject to Scrutiny: Diane Arbus's American Grotesque, 58-94.

⁵⁰ Philip B. Meggs, "Introduction" in Marshall McLuhan, The Mechanical Bride (Corte Madera, CA: Ginkgo Press, 2002 (1951).xiii.

consumer goods, the chart ignores and conceals any real basis for such distinctions.”⁵¹ Thus the seriality of the mass-produced commodity is linked to the serial nature of the portrait gallery. In accord with McLuhan’s text, Arbus’s work sought to dislocate what McLuhan called “the folklore of industrial man,” an idea which represented part of the identification and critique of social myths fomented by the American mass media.⁵²

The profusion of documentary photography in 1950s magazines such as *Life* and *Look*, culturally legitimized as art by the widely popular *The Family of Man* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (1955), irked photographers like William Klein, Frank, and Arbus for its presentation of humans according to stereotypical typologies. Edward Steichen’s *Family of Man*, an apotheosis of the documentary photograph, was ideologically wedded to the discursive arenas of positivism, photography, and the art exhibition, presenting a hegemonic view of mankind seemingly at odds with the strong social undercurrent of alienation and racial division threatening to burst the thin membrane of postwar prosperity promoted in popular periodicals.

Like Frank’s work, Steichen’s *Family of Man* also debuted in the 1950’s, but unlike Frank’s work, which went largely ignored for many years, it rapidly achieved broad public acclaim.⁵³ A former staff photographer for the U.S. military, Steichen witnessed a great deal of combat during World War II, and became convinced of the potential to document history through documentary photographs.⁵⁴ *The Family of Man* followed war-themed exhibitions such as *Road*

⁵¹ McLuhan, 58.

⁵² McLuhan, “Preface,” v.

⁵³ For a comprehensive historicization of the exhibition, see Eric J. Sandeen, Picturing an Exhibition: The Family of Man and 1950s America (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1995). For an important institutional critique, see Christopher Phillips’s “The Judgement Seat of Photography” in Richard Bolton ed., The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1989), 15-48.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

to Victory (1942) and *Power in the Pacific* (1945), in which documentary photographs were enlarged to mural scale. These exhibitions in part were influenced by graphic design layouts such as those in *Life* magazine.⁵⁵ They were a huge popular success, drawing large crowds and critical praise.⁵⁶

Steichen's decision to assemble a massive collection of photographs from around the world had its basis in a universalist impulse, a desire to create a sense of harmony in the postwar era. Sponsored by the Rockefeller Family, the exhibit traveled around the globe (perhaps most significantly, to Moscow, in 1959) with the assistance of the United States Information Agency. The exhibit promoted the myth of America as a place of harmony and freedom in the cold war era.

Guided by a romantic impulse, Steichen consciously generalized human beings to suggest human continuity in an age of racism and the looming possibility of nuclear war. Often, such ahistorical generalizations relegated people to stereotypes, implicitly confirming for the audience the separation between white, middle-class viewer and Other. The images in the exhibition focused largely on the themes of family and home, reinforcing the common human bonds which exist among nations and international peoples. The text accompanying the images was selected from a variety of different sources, such as Carl Sandburg and Bertrand Russell, and connected to a quasi-religious vision of a homogeneous humanity. In deliberately obscuring the differences among cultures, Steichen chose to aim for the widest possible audience, constructing the exhibit with accessibility in mind.⁵⁷

Steichen chose a photograph by the team of Allan and Diane Arbus (a man and his son on a couch), and several by Frank (from his Welsh series).

⁵⁵ Phillips, 27.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ <http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/bassr/511/projects/dimoia/final/Frank1.htm>

Frank was particularly uncomfortable with Steichen's schematic. He felt that the overarching theme of the exhibition conveyed a meaning through his work contrary to its original intent. The coincidence of the *Family of Man* exhibition and Frank's decision to apply for a Guggenheim grant seems a little more than accidental. Eric Sandeen makes the salient point about the critical reception of the exhibition by a new generation of photographers: "In effect, Steichen had constructed a mosaic out of what was really a kaleidoscope of changing meanings of individual images in motion. Increasingly, Steichen's collection was used as a counterpoint for rebellious comments...continuing through post-Vietnam photographic criticism."⁵⁸

Born in 1924, Frank was one year younger than Arbus. He emigrated to New York from Switzerland when he was 23, and for two years worked as a fashion photographer.⁵⁹ But soon his aspirations to produce an artistic statement took precedence over his commercial work. In 1955-56, Frank received the first Guggenheim Fellowship in photography granted to a non-American.⁶⁰ After winning the Guggenheim, Frank described the impetus for *The Americans* as a social panorama just before it was published: "with these photographs, I have attempted to show a cross-section of the American population. My effort was to express it simply and without confusion. The view is personal and, therefore, various facets of American life and society have been ignored."⁶¹ Frank's espousal of a 'personal vision' was explicitly opposed to magazine photojournalism. With echoes of McLuhan, Frank said: "mass production of

⁵⁸ Sandeen, 156.

⁵⁹ Tod Papageorge, Walker Evans and Robert Frank: An Essay on Influence (Exh. cat. New Haven CT: Yale University Art Gallery, 1981), 2.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Robert Frank, "A Statement..." U.S. Camera Annual 1958 (New York: U.S. Camera Publishing Corp., 1957), 115, in Anne W. Tucker ed., Robert Frank: New York to Nova Scotia (exh. cat. Houston, TX: Museum of Fine Arts, 1986), 31.

uninspired photojournalism and photography without thought becomes anonymous merchandise. The air becomes infected with the smell of photography...I am not a pessimist, but looking at a contemporary picture magazine makes it difficult for me to speak about the advancement of photography..."⁶² Frank sought a startling formal approach whose unusual framing and ironic subject matter was quite removed from the documentary photo-stories of popular magazines. Anne Wilkes Tucker describes the sea change Frank's formal approach represented:

Frank's compelling demonstration of the small camera's potential changed contemporary understanding of how a photograph might look and what it could mean...to the general camera world, many of whom were preoccupied with previsualization of the negative in order to control nuance of tone and detail, the force of the pictures in light of their spontaneity and innovation was, in the least, disturbing and, for many, unforgivably offensive.⁶³

Commenting on Frank's *The Americans* in 1958, Walker Evans revealed both its subversion of images of Americans in popular publications and its ironic social message. Evans said, "this bracing, almost stinging manner is seldom seen in a sustained collection of photographs. It is a far cry from all the woolly, successful 'photo-sentiments' about human familyhood; from the mindless pictorial salestalk around the fashionable, guilty and therefore bogus heartfeeling."⁶⁴

The titles of Frank's photographs in *The Americans* do not refer to individuals or people as types, but to locales which could be almost anywhere in America. Ian Jeffrey argues that Frank's *Americans*

bore no relation to the conventions and fictions proposed by the idea of America...[t]he names may be redolent of glamour, of a heroic past and an optimistic tradition, Santa Fe, Chattanooga, Belle Isle and Butte; he

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Anne W. Tucker, "It's the Misinformation That's Important" in Ibid.

⁶⁴ Walker Evans, "Robert Frank" *U.S. Camera Annual 1958* (New York: U.S. Camera Publishing Corp., 1957), 90., in Anne W. Tucker ed., *Robert Frank: New York to Nova Scotia* (exh. cat. Houston, TX: Museum of Fine Arts, 1986), 30.

acknowledges this in the roll call of his titles and in his constant allusion to political and religious ideals, to images of leadership and reverence...but the inescapable actuality is of desolate roadsides, impoverished hotels and the tedium of travel.⁶⁵

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Frank's *The Americans* in terms of Arbus's *oeuvre* was its stated goal as a kind of personal anthropology. Frank wanted to cut through the myths of American identity as presented in popular culture to reveal his own vision of the social unease beneath the sunny exterior. In his guggenheim proposal, Frank stated

the use of my project would be sociological, historical, and aesthetic. My total production will be voluminous, as is usually the case when the photographer works with miniature film. I intend to classify and annotate my work on the spot, as I proceed. Ultimately the file I shall make should be deposited in a collection such as the one in the Library of Congress."⁶⁶

That Frank mentions the Library of Congress is revealing in terms of the project's aspirations as a social panorama; the Library has a vast repository of prints and photographs as documents of Americans.

Even today, commentators and critics of Frank's *The Americans* focus upon Frank's vision of America as a fundamentally rural one--of segregation, working class or poor southerners, and people in cars on desolate roads. But these largely 'invisible' spaces and people were not the only Americans Frank was interested in. In Movie Premiere, Hollywood (fig. 1-2), Frank captures a glamorous, elegant, yet aloof young white woman in evening attire; in New York City, three vamping latino transvestites on the street; and in Hotel Lobby, Miami Beach, a corpulent, well-to-do couple whose sneering expressions suggest social intolerance. These sharply contrasting photographs ran counter to

⁶⁵ Ian Jeffrey, "Robert Frank: Photographs from London and Wales, 1951" in Colin Osman and Peter Turner ed., Creative Camera International Yearbook 1975 (London: Coo Press, 1974), 11-12, in Anne W. Tucker ed., Robert Frank: New York to Nova Scotia, 58.

⁶⁶ Robert Frank, "Guggenheim Fellowship Application Form," 1954, in *Ibid.*, 20.

America's myth of the smiling, happy, white middle class. The transvestites seem confident and comfortable with Frank's presence--he does not present them as freakish or comical. It is the well-off whites who seem arrogant and disdainful, in marked contrast to their presentation in *Life* and *Look*. In Luncheonette, Butte, Montana (fig. 1-3) Frank photographs a leaning bumper-pool table with a gallery of white male faces behind it: political campaign signs with pictures of men running for Railroad Commissioner, State Treasurer, Attorney General, County Attorney, and State Legislature. The empty pool room of Luncheonette, with its gallery of local men, offers an ironic commentary on the visual power of the men who comprise local political leadership; the gallery is all white men. The placement of these faces also suggests a space in which 'backroom politics' takes place, one that has overtones of racial segregation.

There are numerous parallels between Arbus's and Frank's work which suggest a 'counter-typology' which subverts the homogeneous image of the happy, virtuous white American. Such types include teenage couples of mixed ethnicity, transvestites, sneering whites, and young women with an oddly blank expression, to name a few. An apt comparison may be made between Arbus's Woman With a Locket in Washington Square Park of 1965 (figure 1-4) and Robert Frank's Ranch Market--Hollywood of 1955-56 (figure 1-5). The Woman With a Locket is blond, slightly heavy, but has an attractive face, and her eyebrows and eyes are carefully penciled. In fact, her makeup is a bit overdone. The locket around her neck draws attention to her low neckline and cleavage. All of these details accentuating the woman's feminine attributes would be unremarkable, but for the expression on the woman's face; she seems to stare into space, as if lost in a moment of inner reflection. Her blue eyes are like mirrors. We have no idea what she is thinking, but the effect is numbing, like she has been anesthetized. This woman, whose white skin, blonde hair, and ample

bosom does not seem comfortable with the attributes which otherwise render her desirable to mainstream society. Frank's Ranch Market depicts a young woman working the counter of a diner, the quotidian American eatery. She seems fastidious about her slightly overdone appearance; her hair, lipstick, and eyebrows are done in a manner fashionable for the mid-1950s. Yet this young woman's expression is cloudy, unfocused--it is as if she is having a private thought. Arbus and Frank's young women both seem uncomfortable in their own skin. Their blank expressions contrast sharply with their somewhat overdone makeup. In each photograph, the signifiers of femininity, markers of what is considered 'normal' or desirable to prevailing attitudes found in the mass media and popular culture have here been called into question.

II. Towards an Alternative Portraiture:

Model, The New York School, Brassai

Arbus's work has clear affinities with certain photographs by her teacher, Lisette Model. Model's portraits subverted the honorific portrait tradition by giving heroic proportions to the outsider, such as with her corpulent Coney Island Bather of c. 1941 (figure 1-6), and made the middle class seem sneering and wretched, as in her *Nice* series (1934). Model's subjects represent an urban gallery of types from which Arbus drew inspiration. In particular, Arbus was drawn to three types of subject matter that Model had covered: corpulent or elderly white middle-class women, dwarves, and the characters from the Forty-Second Street Flea Circus in New York. Model's interest in urban "types" has its precedents in the work of Brassai and Sander. Curator Ann Thomas equates Model's search for human types to a director searching for actors in a play: "For Model, the world was a stage, and she brought to photography a sense of

gesture, emphasis, and generalization in order to make strong, moving, visual theatre. Her search for types--not unlike a casting director--also links her activity to theatre."⁶⁷ And Model herself stated that "I am always very attracted to certain types--which are not always the same because they do not exist anymore--even in Paris and Nice...only in New York can I find very strong personalities."⁶⁸

Model was not shy about capturing some of her sitters in a less-than-flattering manner. Some of her images reflect an intrusiveness on the part of the photographer. In Model's Pedestrian, New York of c. 1945 (figure 1-7), she has captured an urban woman who seems to look at the camera with a mixture of disapproval and disgust. Her chin is pulled toward her chest, and the corners of her mouth are drawn downward in a scowl. Clearly this middle-class woman does not enjoy Model's intrusive presence. The image is frontal and close-cropped; we only see the upper half of the woman's body. Model focuses our attention upon the countenance of the subject. This attention is not flattering, and seems to represent a photographic manifestation of the *epater le bourgeois* favored by the avant-garde.

Arbus pursued a similar kind of direct confrontation with the 'disapproving lady' urban type, with two photographs, A Woman With a Pearl Necklace and Earrings, N.Y.C. of 1967 (figure 1-8), and Woman on a Park Bench on a Sunny Day, N.Y.C. of 1969 (figure 1-9). In each instance, the photographs appear to be the result of unpremeditated, spontaneous street photography, as opposed to a pre-arranged photo-shoot. Woman With a Pearl Necklace completely fills the square frame of the photograph; her lips are pursed, and, with her sun hat, cheap pearl earrings, and *faux*-zebra-striped shirt, exudes the

⁶⁷ Ann Thomas, Lisette Model (Exh. cat. Ottawa, Canada: National Gallery, 1990), 148.

⁶⁸ Lisette Model, lecture, March 4, 1983, Haverford College, Haverford, PA., in *Ibid.*

jowly truculence of a determined American tourist. In Woman on a Park Bench, the woman offers a wan, thin-lipped smile which cannot mask the furrowed eyebrows and creased forehead of a look of disapproval. She seems about to say not “what are you doing?” but “what are you doing with yourself?,” as if she has consented to the photograph, but does not approve of the photographer. Like Lee Friedlander, Arbus includes her shadow in the image, which is cast over the woman’s shoulder, a purposive amateurishness that draws a physical correlation between Arbus’s presence and the woman. The woman’s Rose-Kennedy-like helmet of hair frames her face, lending the authority of the Kennedy matriarch to the woman’s expression of bemused disapproval. It is certainly possible that the woman’s disapproval is gender-related; the woman does not approve of Arbus’s role as a photographer, and her photographic gaze. But her disapproving look may also be one of incomprehension. Arbus is presenting her with a photographic situation outside of her experience of photography via the snapshot, as if to say, “Why does she want a picture of me?” In either case, Arbus’s presence mediates the expression of the subject, instead of passively or voyeuristically documenting a subject.

Model is a significant figure in Arbus’s development of a critique of social portrait photography. She also may be seen as a founding member of the “New York School” of photography. Stylistically, The New York School uses the methods of documentary journalism—small cameras and available light, a sense of the fleeting and the candid—but it rejects the anecdotal descriptiveness of most photojournalism. It is a style often undertaken in the spirit of Sartre’s and Camus’s existentialism: a strong adherence to the phenomenological idea of continual self-creation, and a quality of wanting to be responsible for one’s own identity and reality.⁶⁹ The influence of *film noir* is also a significant characteristic of

⁶⁹Jane Livingston, The New York School: Photographs, 1936-1963 (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1992), 259.

the New York School.⁷⁰ Photographers such as Model, Louis Faurer, Helen Leavitt, Weegee, Sid Grossman, and William Klein used the hand-held camera to record grainy, fleeting images of the urban experience to capture the transitory, whimsical, and often menacing quality of the New York street. These photographers all worked for magazines, and were unified in the differentiation of their "magazine work" from "artistic work." However, when possible, they tried to introduce novel means of photographic representation in popular publications which challenged the readership.

Model is a good example of this trend. Some of her portraits appeared in *PM* magazine. *PM*, an offshoot of *Fortune*, and its Sunday magazine *PM's Weekly*--started by *Fortune's* Ralph Ingersoll--published Model's photographs of the idle bourgeois on the *Promenade des Anglais*, Nice (1934) in January 1941.⁷¹ Model's photographs in *PM* recalled the social satire tradition of Hogarth, Goya, and Grandville. The intended result was a critique of the apathetic French bourgeoisie. Instead of looking at lower classes with stereotyped or heroicized photographs of the subject to affirm the "rightness" of the magazine's white, middle-class readership, Model subverts the tradition of documentary looking to a degree. She focuses on the physiognomies of a hobbesian middle class, reducing them to a typology as a form of criticism. If August Sander sought to record the individual through physiognomy, Model sought to *expose* the individual through physiognomy.

Model's Nice photographs show rumpled, puffy-eyed, bilious citizens, greedily soaking up a harsh sunlight. Yet there exists something monumental about their scale in relationship to the close-cropped edges of the photograph.⁷²

⁷⁰ Ibid., 260.

⁷¹ Ibid., 263.

⁷² With this quality, Model's work recalls Paul Strand's photographs of New Yorkers from 1916.

Their monumentality is not flattering; Model's subjects are, apparently, monuments to lassitude. One of the photograph's captions reads

Your gallery this week hangs portraits made in France before World War II began. The photographer, a Frenchwoman [(Model was Austrian)], offered these to us as her explanation of why France fell. They were taken at Nice, and while you may not agree with her that France fell because too many people were like this, we think her explanation is clear enough and dramatic enough to deserve expression.⁷³

Each photograph of an individual was given an allegorical heading, such as "Greed," "Self-Satisfaction," "Weariness," and "Cynicism." Perhaps Model did not intend as scathing a criticism as the article suggests. But these members of the middle class were not American. At the level of reception, they were photographs of Europeans, and as such were still the "other," in a sense, for the American readership. They could be safely considered as symptoms of the decline of European cultural values, and, by extension, the ascension of American ones, which was promulgated by the American media with increasing frequency in the 1940s.

Ian Jeffrey suggests a more complex reading of Model's Nice photographs. He argues that Model's unflattering portraits were taken in reaction to pictorial conventions supported and widely disseminated by fascist governments.⁷⁴ Model's unflattering portraits, like Sander's portraits of Germans, resisted racist human typologies. Arbus's work was influenced by this form of resistance in the portrait. Ariella Budick rightly claims that "Arbus absorbed her teacher's ambivalent mixture of repulsion and tribute, just as she learned to use a combination of harsh light and grotesque realism to reveal

⁷³ text from PM's Weekly (Jan. 19, 1941) in Livingston, 264.

⁷⁴ Ian Jeffrey, "Diane Arbus and the Past: When she was Good," History of Photography (Summer 1995), 95.

aspects of the psychic and social lives of her subjects."⁷⁵ Model's significance for Arbus may be located in her subversion of positivist social types in magazines.

In her teaching notebooks, Model mentions that she chooses her subject matter spontaneously, as though the subject chooses her, "like by a magnet," contrasting her approach to that of Evans and others whom she says "think about it, plan, and then start to work."⁷⁶ Model believed that the photographer always had to be prepared for the unexpected moment when the possibility of a good photograph asserted itself.⁷⁷ Her portraits, then, lacked a systematic hierarchy of organization, but still considered the individual at the level of the type. Model's lack of systematicity would influence her pupil Arbus, but Arbus sought out the flaws of her sitters precisely to negate their appearance as a type.

The New York School also documented an awareness of eugenics and its impact upon popular culture in magazines. From the beginning of the twentieth century up until the 1960s, eugenics is perhaps the most prominent manifestation of positivist science as it relates to vernacular culture and photography. Lest we think that the reading of the human face and inherent character traits loses favor in the second half of the twentieth century, consider Jacques Penry's introduction to his *The Face of Man: A Study of the Relationship Between Physical Appearance and Personality* (1952):

What then has this book to do with the study of human nature? The answer is that it primarily concerns the complex relationship between physique and personality, and endeavors to show how body and mind affect and are affected by each other. The intention has been to outline as clearly as possible the kind of mentality and disposition which might be expected to accompany a certain configuration of the body, so that as a step to a wider understanding, 'types' might be identified.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Budick, Subject to Scrutiny: Diane Arbus's Timely American Grotesque, 184.

⁷⁶ Model in Ann Thomas, Lisette Model (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1990), 126.

⁷⁷ Livingston, 300.

⁷⁸ Jacques Penry, The Face of Man: A Study of the Relationship Between Physical Appearance and Personality (London and New York: Rider and Company, 1952), xiii.

Penry's book represented a populist trend in American sociology at the time, hinting at the deeply ingrained nature of positivist looking in American society. Weegee, a prominent member of the New York School photographers, documented the popular manifestation of the way in which positivism and eugenics became part of our culture. In his Showgirl (Sherry Britton) reading Apes, Men, and Morons, (fig. 1-10, c. 1944), Weegee presents a wry commentary on the coupling of eugenics and popular culture.⁷⁹ His documentation of these vernacular rituals in photographs of perfect baby contests attests to their widespread appeal in popular periodicals.

Model and Weegee were drawn to the same kind of subject matter, and, in the mid-1940s, they often went together to Sammy's or Nick's Jazz Joint to take pictures of musicians, audience members, and eccentric characters. Like Model, Weegee was interested in types, and photographed circus performers (dwarves, clowns, etc.), transvestites, masquerade balls, and even pompous-looking socialites. Weegee's use of a flash produced high contrasts of light and dark, throwing his subjects into sharp relief. Weegee's urban types were a source of images from which Arbus drew. Generally, Weegee's types were photographed in public places, rather than in private. Arbus was friendly with Weegee, and in 1965 went on assignment with him, riding around in his battered Chevrolet.⁸⁰

Occasionally, though, Weegee caught his sitters behind the scenes, getting ready for a performance, such as Dressing Room at a New Orleans 'Burly-Que.'

⁷⁹ Carol Squiers's exhibiton "Perfecting Mankind: Eugenics and Photography" (New York: International Center of Photography, 2001) traced the appearance of eugenics in photography and popular culture from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries. My work in this chapter may be seen partly as an expansion of this inquiry.

⁸⁰ Bosworth, Diane Arbus, a Biography, 238.

Oct. 4, 1950 (figure 1-11), and Jimmy Armstrong the Clown, c. 1943 (figure 1-12), a dwarf clown with a muscular torso who is wearing incompletely applied white face makeup. A bright flash illuminates Armstrong, while throwing the rest of his surroundings into almost total darkness. Like Model, Weegee closely crops the edges of the image, rendering Armstrong quite prominent, almost heroic. Weegee photographs Armstrong as a strong physical presence, in marked contrast to the public persona of the dwarf--that of a small, mishapen human rendered different or even comical by his scale in comparison with 'regular' humans. Weegee does not exploit Armstrong's diminutive size; rather, he produces a sensitive and psychologically probing portrait.

Weegee's Jimmy Armstrong represents for Arbus, I think, a glorification of the outsider, of the other--and for the author, a kind of identification with an oppositional sensibility. Weegee's treatment of all of his subjects in an equal manner, from celebrities like Clark Gable and Jane Mansfield to Jimmy Armstrong, also helped to blur the boundary between the celebrity and the other in photography. Arbus's work reflects, and expands upon, such an approach.

Like Weegee, Arbus photographed perfect baby contests. For example, consider her drooling Diaper Derby contestant (figure 1-14) in an article in the London *Sunday Times Magazine* (March 21, 1968) entitled "Pauline Peters on People: How to Train a Derby Winner."⁸¹ On the title page of the article, an Arbus photograph shows a young couple holding up a scowling baby between them who is wearing a tall paper crown (figure 1-15). The sign behind them advertising the Diaper Derby clearly states that it is the "30th Annual" event, attesting to the contest's longevity as a popular social gathering. The sign also reveals that the contest is taking place in New Jersey. On the facing page, a well-

⁸¹ See Southall, Diane Arbus: Magazine Work, 94-95.

known Arbus photograph of a slobbering contestant being held out by its mother gapes almost in terror. These two photographs clearly subvert the perfection of the perfect baby concept. Instead of photographs of smiling, delightfully chubby, perfect babies, with Arbus's piece we are presented with drooling, wild-eyed, toothy elves. With these images, Arbus disrupts comfortable, stereotypical associations readers might have had about babies and motherhood.

Brassaï was also important to Arbus in terms of her conception of a social panorama. Brassaï pursued a type of portraiture that, like Model's, operated on the level of the type. Brassaï's *Paris de Nuit* (1933) addresses the theme of the search for an authentic vernacular past. In his later book *The Secret Paris of the 30's*, based upon the photographs in *Paris de Nuit*, Brassaï describes the impetus for his photographs:

I was eager to penetrate this other world, this fringe world, the secret, sinister world of mobsters, outcasts, toughs, pimps, whores, addicts, inverters. Rightly or wrongly, I felt at the time that this underground world represented Paris at its least cosmopolitan, at its most alive, *its most authentic* [my italics], that in these faces of its underworld there had been preserved, from age to age, almost without alteration, the folklore of its authentic past.⁸²

Clearly Brassaï was interested in uncovering archetypal Parisians, such as the pimp, the whore, and the ragpicker. For Brassaï, these social types were gradually being eliminated by the 'bourgeoisification' of Parisian mass culture. Brassaï sought an 'authentic vernacular' that represented something ineluctably characteristic of his country's social fabric. In the text accompanying *Paris de Nuit*, Brassaï emphasizes his separateness from the "suspicious, closed circles" of places like the *Bal des Quatre Saisons*, in the Rue de Lappe.⁸³ He mentions that his sitters are suspicious at first of his presence, but ultimately take him into their

⁸² Brassaï, *The Secret Paris of the 30's*, Richard Miller trans. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976--first published as *Paris de Nuit*, 1953), n.p.

⁸³ Ibid.

confidence and let him photograph their conversations.⁸⁴ But a *flâneur*-like detachment exists with Brassai, despite his closeness to Surrealism.⁸⁵ Brassai's social types were produced in response to literary works he admired by Baudelaire, Stendhal, and Mérimée. Arbus's early work (and some of her later work) needs further discussion in terms of its closeness to literature, and will be covered in Chapter IV. Evans and Brassai are important sources for Arbus in this respect.

Perhaps Arbus is best known for her transvestites, and others who blur the boundaries of gender. Apart from Weegee's transvestites, Arbus no doubt would have been familiar with Brassai's La Môme Bijou, Bar de la Lune ("little miss jewel") of 1932 (figure 1-16) whom Brassai encountered in the Montmartre bar. She also would have known Brassai's Lesbian couples, such as Fat Claude and her Girlfriend at Le Monocle, c. 1932 (figure 1-17). Arbus's Masked Man at a Ball of 1967 (figure 1-18) and Lady at a Masked Ball With Two Roses on Her Dress, also of 1967 (figure 1-19) echo Brassai's masked figures, both circus performers at a peep-show and socialites: Masked Ball, Pré Catelan of 1947 (figure 1-20); Three Masked Women and Their Barker, Street Fair, c. 1931 (figure 1-21). Brassai's interest in producing a collection of 'underground' types set a precedent for Arbus's own focus on those who complicate the boundaries of gender and identity.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ See Alain Sayag and Annick Lionel-Marie, Brassai, the Monograph (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2000), 13-14.

III. America's "Usable Past": Documentary Photography, Walker Evans

Particular attention must be paid to Walker Evans and documentary photography, two seminal influences any young photographer of Arbus's generation measured herself or himself against. Thus it is necessary that this section takes a longer look at Evans and documentary photography than the other sections. This apparent imbalance of emphasis is important in establishing the conflation of positivism, modernism, popular culture, and documentary photography, and what exactly Arbus was measuring her social panorama against.

A crucial bridge joining American social gallery portraiture of the nineteenth century to that of the twentieth is the significance of what the writer Van Wyck Brooks phrased "a usable past." In the 1960s, historian Henry Steele Commager historicized the concept in his book *The Search for a Usable Past*.⁸⁶ For Commager, this "search for a usable past" involved finding "the stuff for patriotism, for sentiment, for pride, for memory, for collective *character* [my italics]."⁸⁷ According to Commager, the historical past and an historical memory are essential ingredients for a viable sense of nationalism.⁸⁸ Commager argues that the problem for Americans was that they had no usable past, in the way that England or France or Germany had. He describes the theme of a usable past as one that "runs like a red thread" through early American literature and oratory, and finally connects itself triumphantly to the ideology of Manifest Destiny.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Henry Steele Commager, *The Search for a Usable Past, and Other Essays in Historiography* (New York: Knopf, 1967).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

That red thread also ran through most portrait galleries by well-known photographers, linking positivism and eugenics with Manifest Destiny.

In the 1930s, social panoramas of photographs provided Americans with testimonials to national character against which their own could be measured. The search for a usable past was the defining characteristic of a profusion of pseudo-scientific literature that attempted to produce a physiognomic science of "The American Race."⁹⁰ In his book *American Types* of 1931, psychologist James Oppenheim outlines sixteen definite 'American Types', determined by the physiognomic characteristics of noted celebrities and public figures like Greta Garbo, Al Smith, and Henry Ford.⁹¹ The 'need for a usable past' surfaced now and again in cycles dictated by war or extreme fluctuations in the economy (or both), when national character was put to the test.

The search for a usable past emerged during the Great Depression years in response to a larger sense of national retrenchment. During this period, artists and writers focused on themes and individuals constituting a 'legitimate' American identity. The intention was to uplift the spirit of the unemployed worker, of the "common man," through an aesthetic of heroic, rugged individualism. Reflecting this sentiment, cultural critic Lewis Mumford often broached the subject of a usable past when writing about American identity in reference to philosophy, literature, modern cities, and the machine.⁹² In essays on noted 'men of letters', such as Emerson, Audobon, and Melville, among others, written between 1926 and 1968, Mumford intellectualized the roots of American "character" in his own 'textual portrait gallery'. On Emerson's character, Mumford said:

⁹⁰ See James Oppenheim, *American Types* (New York and London: Knopf, 1931).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 103-111.

⁹² See Lewis Mumford, "The Origins of the American Mind" in *Interpretations and Forecasts: 1922-1972* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 3-16.

if any one essay might be singled out to reveal Emerson's peculiar virtue and character as an American, it would probably be that on Self-Reliance; for there he spoke with the unmistakable voice of the New World man, opening up and exploring a virgin continent of the mind, testing himself against nature, and finding out how much past knowledge and equipment he might need in order to survive and prosper.⁹³

With laudatory rhetoric, Mumford praises Emerson's literary impact upon the nation, burnishing the existentialist writer's image as one of America's mythic forebears. For Mumford, Emerson represented a pioneer of the untamed American consciousness, and thus an exemplar of Manifest Destiny in his exploration of the "virgin continent of the mind."⁹⁴

In the 1930s, the usable past concept was linked to photography. As editor of the Harvard-based literary magazine *Hound and Horn*, Lincoln Kirstein was a major proponent of such a move. In 1933 Kirstein urged Charles Flato to include an essay on Matthew Brady's Civil War photographs for the October-December issue.⁹⁵ Following the literary tenor of Kirstein's publication, Flato described Brady's civil war photographs as "literary-minded" works in which Brady sought to understand his time through frank records that did not have the pretensions of art: "his years at the front brought to Brady, as to Whitman, a heightened sense of the beauty of struggle and of the commonality of mankind, and he came unawares into a comprehension of the universal."⁹⁶ Flato's language couches Brady's work as the first significant moment in American artistic/documentary photography: "clearly the whole body of his [Brady's] war

⁹³ Mumford, "Morning Star: Emerson" in *Ibid.*, 27.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Charles Flato, "M.B. Brady: His Photos 1861-65." *Hound and Horn* 7, 1 (Oct.-Dec. 1933), 35-41. Evans's photographs appeared in *Hound and Horn* (for example in the July-september 1934 issue in which three of Evans's photographs of Cuba appeared), attesting to his dialogue with Kirstein and the literary bent of the publication. I believe Kirstein wanted to make the connection between Brady and Evans as evidence of a 'classical' American style of photography.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

work was journalistic in intent, though not the kind of the newspapers; rather something less ephemeral and of a more profound order, more alike to Baudelaire's 'desire to present things as they are'--in the tragic confluence of individuals and events."⁹⁷ In a rhetorical *tour de force*, Kirstein linked the concept of the usable past to modernist photography. With Kirstein's encouragement, Flato sought a new place for Brady as the source of an authentic American photographic classicism, predicated upon the "usable past" of America's Civil War. This 'usable past of photography' was linked to the work of Walker Evans, whose photographs appeared in *Hound & Horn*, and whose friendship with editor Lincoln Kirstein is well documented. In Walker Evans's *American Photographs* (1938), Kirstein hailed Evans's work as a truly 'American' means of expression: "the continuous fact of an indigenous American expression, whatever its source, whatever form it has taken, whether in sculpture, paint, or architecture: the native accent we find again in Kentucky mountain and cowboy ballads, in the compositions Stephen Foster adapted from Irish folk song and in contemporary swing music."⁹⁸

Evans wished to document an authentic American vernacular, capturing contemporary manifestations of the usable past concept. Like Lewis Hine, Evans's portraits contain a humanism designed to heroicize the plain, rural sitters in his photographs. Yet Evans's literary, *flâneur*-like detachment from his subjects maintains the separation between photographer and the Other.

For Arbus, and indeed every other photographer of her generation, Walker Evans was a seminal influence, someone whose work had an unquestioned 'high art' pedigree. Arbus held Evans in very high esteem, and was exceedingly nervous about first meeting him in 1962, when Evans was fifty-

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Kirstein in Evans, *American Photographs*, 195.

nine.⁹⁹ Initially shown Arbus's work by Marvin Israel, Evans was greatly impressed, and soon, he and Arbus struck up a rich, yet short-lived dialogue.¹⁰⁰

Evans clearly identified with the detached stance of the *flâneur*, and his photographic practice reflects this influence.¹⁰¹ Evans claimed that he was often "operating direct from the French aesthetic and psychological approach to the world."¹⁰² His principal artistic influences were both literary: Gustave Flaubert and Charles Baudelaire. Both writers engaged certain aspects of Realism. Flaubert's penchant was for a strict, disciplined scientific methodology, so applied to the artist's recreation of reality that his personality would be totally invisible. His realism, then, was the dream of a perfectly objectified, unemotional representation of a subject. Flaubert "wanted to be like God in creation, invisible yet still responsible."¹⁰³ Evans wanted to be a modern Flaubert with a camera: he strove to emulate this sense of detachment, and let his photographic subjects speak for themselves.

Evans was also influenced by the dandyism of English and French writers. Maria Morris Hambourg argues that "[T.S.] Eliot's superb diction, hauteur, scorn for American mediocrity, taste in english clothes, and love of French poetry stimulated and confirmed the same characteristics in Evans--essentially those of

⁹⁹ Bosworth, 209.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. Evans's sponsorship no doubt contributed to Arbus's successful proposal for a Guggenheim fellowship in 1963 (she was rejected in 1962 and 61).

¹⁰¹ Sobieszek, Robert. "Another Look at Walker Evans." *Art in America* (Nov.-Dec. 1971), 120. Sobieszek discusses Evans' practice in relation to the *flâneur*: "Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, *flâneurs* were described as wandering through their world as chance or the roadbed dictated; their role was that of witness, observer, critic, and philosopher. The *flâneur* was fully possessed of his individuality. (the *badaud*, on the other hand, gave his up to the spectacle of the crowd, to the street or to his particular situation. Through the medium of the scene itself he became an impersonal being, absorbed into what fascinated him)."

¹⁰² Evans, "Interview With Leslie Katz," *Art in America* (1971), 84.

¹⁰³ Sobieszek, 120.

the serious dandy.”¹⁰⁴ A noblesse of the mind, dandyism had been definitively characterized by Charles Baudelaire as “the burning need to create for oneself a personal originality...a kind of cult of the self...the cultivation of utter detachment.” Crucial to the dandy was “combating and destroying triviality. It is from this that the dandies obtain that haughty exclusiveness, provocative in its very coldness.”¹⁰⁵ As a young man, Evans shared with T. S. Eliot a fervid belief in the morality of this stance, “the last spark of heroism amid decadence.” For Evans, and contemporary intellectuals like Aldous Huxley, detachment from the subject in the 1930s was vital to any creative enterprise.

But as the French *flâneur* of the time of Baudelaire was principally an urban observer, Evans the *flâneur* went to the unknown-to-the-general-public backwaters of the United States. Leslie Baier argues that “*American Photographs*, published in 1938, was an early manifestation of the embracing of America’s past and present culture as a viable subject for artistic expression,” and that the motivation behind Evans’s work was “the unrecognized beauty and grandeur inherent in the order and simplicity which he discovered in the segments of popular culture rejected by high standards of educational refinement.”¹⁰⁶ However, Evans’s *flâneur*-like detachment was predetermined by a modernist literary perspective fully cognizant of the high standards of educational refinement that rejected the crass, vulgar connections associated with American popular culture. In Evans’s “a photographic editing of society” (1931), he suggests a project for himself, that might “combine the ‘poetry’ of Atget’s ‘lyrical understanding of the street’ with Sander’s ‘type studies’: a case of the

¹⁰⁴Maria Morris Hambourg, “A Portrait of the Artist” in Hambourg et. al., *Walker Evans* (exh. cat. NY: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), 8.

¹⁰⁵ Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and other Essays* (London: Phaidon, 1964), 27-28.

¹⁰⁶Lesley K. Baier, *Walker Evans at Fortune 1945-1965* (exh. cat. Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College Museum, 1978), 10.

camera looking in the right direction among people."¹⁰⁷ Both Atget and Sander were interested in categorizing individuals according to typologies.

For middle-class viewers, there was something inherently unsettling in looking at photographs of what Evans called "vernacular," something clearly dangerous for the photographer, like an anthropological trip to photograph the 'head-hunters of New Guinea'. Martha Rosler describes the documentary aesthetic as a new form of authorship: "Documentary testifies, finally, to the bravery or (dare we name it?) the manipulateness and savvy of the photographer, who entered a situation of physical danger, social restrictedness, human decay, or combinations of these and saved us the trouble. Or who, like the astronauts, entertained us by showing us the places we never hope to go."¹⁰⁸ This trajectory of authorship begins with Evans and runs through Frank and Garry Winogrand, among others. In the following analysis of Evans's closeness to the history of the positivist social gallery, I would like to focus upon his portrait photographs in Evans and James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1936, first published in 1941) and Evans's *American Photographs* (1938).

In 1936, *Fortune* magazine ran a documentary series called "Life and Circumstances" about poor and lower-middle-class Americans. *Fortune's* "Life and Circumstances" series treated its subjects in a patronizing manner, as the magazine's editors feared their readers--well-off, [white,] hard-headed businessmen--would be bored by the lives of those of a lower social class, were they not made quaint and amusing. In a typical article, "Success Story: The Life and Circumstances of Mr. Gerald Corkum--Paint Sprayman at the Plymouth Motor Plant," *Fortune* ran a close-up photo of a newspaper, a *Saturday Evening Post*, and a *Webster's Daily Use Dictionary* on a living room table with a cotton

¹⁰⁷ Alan Trachtenberg, "Walker Evans's Message From the Interior." *October* 11, 7.

¹⁰⁸ Rosler, "In, Around, and Afterthoughts", 309.

doily; the photo was facetiously captioned "The Corkum Library."¹⁰⁹ Eugenic studies of lower class, rural American families were widespread from approximately 1875-1925, and the "Life and Circumstances" series was a popular manifestation of the public's belief that these families were genetically inferior.¹¹⁰

Agee received the commission for a piece on southern tenant farmers from *Fortune* magazine as part of the "Life and Circumstances" series. He chose Evans to provide the photographs which would accompany the text of the article. However, William Stott argues that Agee "did not sensationalize their [the tenant farmer's] distress by "parading their nakedness, disadvantage and humiliation" as *Fortune* had intended him to do. Instead, he went to great length to dignify the tenant farmers and to insist that they were, in all important aspects, as worthy and precious as any *Fortune* reader."¹¹¹

Rejected by *Fortune* in 1936, the piece was published by Harper-Collins in 1941.¹¹² Agee did not want *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* to be considered science, sociology, art, or a political statement. He promulgated the heroic, spiritual aspect of his tenant farmers—their dignity, pathos and beauty in the face of abject poverty. Agee offers the following description of the project: "the effort is to recognize the stature of a portion of unimagined existence, and to contrive techniques proper to its recording, communication, analysis, and

¹⁰⁹ William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 262.

¹¹⁰ See Nicole Hahn Rafter, *White Trash: The Eugenic Family Studies, 1877-1919* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1988). Rafter examines a number of these studies, such as Richard L. Dugdale's infamous "Hereditary Pauperism as Illustrated in the 'Juke' Family" of 1877. The "Jukes" was a pseudonym given by Dugdale to a large family living in Ulster County, N.Y., and became a common word to signify a poor rural family. Eugenic studies emphasized the connection between poverty, criminal activity, laziness, sexual promiscuity, and inheritable genetic traits.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Fortune's* editors found Evans's photographs too shocking, and Agee's text too controversial, for their readership.

defense. More essentially, this is an independent inquiry into certain normal predicaments of human divinity."¹¹³ Tenant farmers and their families were put on earth by God and have some divine purpose. This was at the core of Agee's liberal humanism.

In concert with Agee's spiritual agenda, Evans' photographs in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* reveal the sense that these tenant families and the spaces they occupy have a grace and dignity meant to induce empathy in the middle-class reader. Despite the rough quality of their humble possessions, the Gudgers keep their spaces neat and clean. Such a perspective may be contrasted with Arbus's subjects, who are anti-heroic, flawed; their spaces are garish, surreal. Arbus's subjects seem to be comfortable with their own otherness, whereas Evans' Allie Mae Burroughs (Figure 1-22) is not depicted that way. She humbly draws in her lower lip, suddenly self-conscious in front of the camera.

The liberal humanism in Evans's work had a strong impact upon the 1960s. During this period, his work became widely known by the public. According to Stott,

Evans has always had eloquent admirers--James Agee, Lincoln Kirstein, William Carlos Williams, Glenway Wescott, Lionel Trilling; and they have finely analyzed his art. but until 1960, his reputation was limited, esoteric. In that year U.S. Camera observed that some of the best photographers America ever had worked for Roy Stryker on the FSA, named seven of them, and omitted Evans. That same year, however, the second edition of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men was published by Houghton Mifflin to take advantage of the cult forming around Agee because of his Death in the Family, film scripts and film criticism, and early death. The book sold well...it has introduced Evans's photographs to a new generation and trained them to see the thirties, and America, through his eyes.¹¹⁴

When Walker Evans's retrospective opened at the Museum of Modern Art in January 1971, Hilton Kramer of the New York Times wrote: "For how many of

¹¹³ James Agee, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (New York: Ballantine Books, 1974 (1941)), xiv.

¹¹⁴ Stott, 268.

us, I wonder, has our imagination of what the United States looked like and felt like in the nineteen-thirties been determined not by a novel or a play or poem or a painting or even by our own memories, but by a work of a single photographer, Walker Evans?"¹¹⁵ Kramer was, as he knew, not alone. The foremost art reviewers of the day agreed with John Szarkowski, who introduced the exhibition by declaring that Evans more than any other man had created "the accepted myth of our recent past."¹¹⁶ *Life* critic Walter McQuade said "his photographs [have] become part of our past, whether or not we were ever there."

By then Arbus was well aware of Evans's view of Americans.¹¹⁷ She produced a set of photographs which appeared in an article for *Esquire* entitled "Let us now praise Dr. Gatch" with text by Bynum Shaw, perhaps her answer to *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.¹¹⁸ Arbus's photographs of extreme abject conditions of two poor families in South Carolina's affluent Beaufort County (figures 1-23 and 1-24) emphasize the squalor of their homes, literally one-room clapboard shacks. In stark contrast to Evans's handsome, clear-eyed, heroic George Gudger (fig. 1-25), Arbus's families are dirty, unkempt, and overcrowded--anything but heroic. With the use of a flash, she illuminates the hardship and filthy living conditions of the poor by accentuating dirty fingernails, unwashed faces, and grimy, homespun dresses. Like Evans's photographs of sharecroppers and southern churches, Arbus's frontal framing of the subject and use of a flash focuses our attention on the surfaces of things.

¹¹⁵ Hilton Kramer, "review," The New York Times (Jan. 28, 1971), 42 in Stott, 267.

¹¹⁶ John Szarkowski, Introduction to Walker Evans (Exh. cat. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1971), 20.

¹¹⁷ See Bosworth, Diane Arbus, 208-212,

¹¹⁸ See Southall, Diane Arbus: Magazine Work, 100-105. Arbus was well aware of Agee's Work, as she owned a copy of his A Death in the Family (1957) and Agee on Film (1958).

Perhaps the most direct influence of Evans on Arbus's conception of the social panorama comes from Evans's book of "subway portraits" in his *Many are Called* (1966), of which Arbus owned a copy.¹¹⁹ Evans's decision to publish these photographs after twenty-five years no doubt was influenced by their apparent relationship to the off-center documentary work of photographers such as Klein, Frank, and Arbus. In these covert photographs, taken with a concealed camera (a 35-millimeter Contax hidden under his coat) in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Evans sought a social panorama. Agee stated in the introduction:

They are members of every race and nation of the earth. They are of all ages, of all temperaments, of all classes, of almost every imaginable occupation. Each is incorporate in such an intense and various concentration of human beings as the world has never known before. Each, also, is an individual existence, as matchless as a thumbprint or a snowflake. Each wears garments which of themselves are exquisitely subtle uniforms and badges of their being. Each carries in the postures of his body, in his hands, in his face, in the eyes, the signatures of a time and a place in the world upon a creature for whom the name immortal soul is one mild and vulgar metaphor.¹²⁰

Unframed and unposed, these photographs represented a marked departure from Evans's churches and portraits of Alabama sharecroppers taken in the 1930s with a view camera. Evans's subway photographs, taken without the aid of a viewfinder, are framed off-center, which may be seen as a precursor to Arbus's deliberate, slightly off-center images.

In addition to his desire to capture a social cross-section, Evans thought the subway perfect for the portrait photographer who may be tired of the usual approaches to the subject. Agee wrote that it offered a "dream location for any portrait photographer weary of the studio and of the horrors of vanity...the guard is down and the mask is off: even more than when in lone bedrooms

¹¹⁹ For an excellent discussion of Evans's subway portraits, see Mia Fineman, "Notes from Underground: The Subway Portraits" in Maria Morris Hambourg et. al., *Walker Evans* (exh. cat. NY: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), 107-129. Fineman asserts that Frank, Arbus, Winogrand, and Friedlander were the "spiritual stepchildren" of Evans's subway portraits.

¹²⁰ James Agee, Intro. to *Many are Called* (1940; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

(where there are mirrors), people's faces are in naked repose down in the subway."¹²¹ Agee first made the statement about capturing the subject with his or her 'guard down and mask off' in 1940:

The simplest or the strongest of these beings has been so designed upon by his experience that he has a wound and nakedness to conceal, and guards and disguises by which he conceals it. Scarcely ever, in the whole of his living, are these guards down. Before every other human being, in no matter what intimate trust, in no matter what apathy, something of the mask is there; before every mirror it is hard at work, saving the creature who cringes behind it from the sight which might destroy it. Only in sleep (and not fully there), or only in certain waking moments of suspension, of quiet, of solitude, are these guards down; and these moments are only rarely to be seen by the person himself, or by any other human being....¹²²

This statement possibly represents an important antecedent to Arbus's interest in the gap between intention and effect, which resides at the center of her *oeuvre*. Evans, and later, Frank, were interested in the ability of the sitter to let his or her guard down, and this interest seems to have helped Arbus to understand ways around representing people as traditional types.

IV. Germany: August Sander

Ultimately, Arbus's interest in types obfuscated any suggestion of the role of the type as an integral part of some kind of larger social taxonomy. August Sander's *Antlitz Der Zeit*, however, suggests just such a system. Sander scholar Ulrich Keller positions Arbus's portraiture as precisely the opposite of Sander's social taxonomy, in which each individual has a functional purpose, such as a bee has to a hive:

Arbus identified herself with nothing--above all, with no social order. She stood outside any social context in which she found her models. Her

¹²¹ Walker Evans, "The Unposed Portrait," *Harper's Bazaar* 95 (March 1962), 120, 125.

¹²² *Ibid.*

photography came out of total alienation and seems to find its only satisfaction in imposing the stigma of alienation on others. Arbus thus took up a position directly opposed to that of Sander, whose point of view was that of the respectable middle-class and who presupposed the existence of an intact social framework. No matter how often Sander may have pointed out dissonances between personal projection and social reality, he never lost his belief in a functional individual existence and an integral collective order.¹²³

Keller points to a method in Sander's work of capturing the "dissonances between personal projection and social reality" that is also a precedent for Arbus's "gap between intention and effect." However, Keller is mistaken in one aspect; like Edith Sitwell, in her *English Eccentrics* (1957), Arbus believed that her portraits would be *épater le Bourgeois* and be instructive in the same instant (a more complete comparison of Arbus and Sitwell will appear in Chapter Four).

Following Arbus's desire to produce photographs bearing the 'look' of those by famous photographers (her own personal take on pastiche is predicated on the increasing ubiquity of the art photograph, to be given more attention in the next chapter). Let us therefore compare and contrast a Sander and an Arbus; Sander's Smalltown Man and Wife of 1928 (figure 1-26) with Arbus's Elderly Couple on a Park Bench of 1969 (figure 1-27). In the Sander photograph, the couple poses somewhat stiffly, yet unemotionally. For Sander, they are the middle-class bourgeois type. His clear, centered composition concentrates our attention on details of physiognomy. Arbus's photograph also focuses on physiognomic details, but these details serve to not to personify but to disrupt the middle-class type. Despite the appearance of bourgeois propriety, Arbus's couple seems ill at ease. The old man bears a look of consternation; the woman purses her lips and grips her purse uneasily. Regardless of their affluent social class, the couple seems unhappy. Sander produced numerous photos of elderly couples, including one of a wealthy rural couple, which Edward Steichen showed

¹²³ Ulrich Keller, "Sander and Portrait Photography," in Gunther Sander ed., August Sander: Citizens of the Twentieth Century (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1993), 5.

in the *Family of Man* exhibition. Along with the Sander books in her library, it is clear, then, that Arbus was aware of such Sander photographs.

Unlike Sander's work, in which the gaze of the middle class presupposes a collective order evident in the physiognomies of the sitters, Arbus's subjects are produced *against the grain* of bourgeois looking.¹²⁴ They confront the viewer's expectations by their refusal of the voyeuristic yet dominant gaze designed to appeal to the tastes of white, middle-class magazine readers. Arbus's work, then, operates directly against the gaze, and it is no surprise that contemporary audiences were shocked by her work.

The influence of positivism in Weimar Germany was pervasive. August Sander's *Antlitz der Zeit* (Face of Our Time), published by Kurt Wolff of Transmare in 1929, was, according to Sander, an instant success, "a *popular* edition in the best sense of the word [my italics]."¹²⁵ This statement is important, as it reveals the populist ideology characteristic of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* movement in Germany with which Sander was aligned. George Grosz and Otto Dix, painters at the heart of the movement, sought a return to pictorial realism after the war to counter what they felt was a failure of German Expressionism: the ability of the masses to easily understand its message. To painters like Grosz and Dix, the Cubo-Expressionist syntax of fractured planes and strong diagonal lines obfuscated meaning. The *Neue Sachlichkeit* painters wanted a cold, clear, confrontational realism that rejected the cubist angularity, vibrant, unnatural colors, and the utopian rhetoric of Expressionism. Sander's photographs lacked the sharp criticism of Weimar society found in the work of Grosz and Dix, but the forthrightness of his photographs, resulting from the direct confrontation of

¹²⁴ Sander's work went against the grain of 'Nazi looking,' but upheld class distinctions and physiognomic codes commensurate with the way the German middle-class read portraits.

¹²⁵ August Sander, *August Sander. Photographs of an Epoch, 1904-1959* (New York: Aperture, 1980), 11.

the subject with the viewer, parallels similar images by the two German painters.

Sander's *Antlitz der Zeit* perhaps lacked the "aura" of an individual painting, but nonetheless contained artistic merit. *Face of Our time* was an attempt at a hierarchical taxonomy of human beings according to their "social type," a project designed to document the physiognomies of humans, which Sander believed were shaped by one's respective social situation. Concerning the book's organization, Sander remarks that,

The whole work is divided into seven groups, corresponding to present-day society and comes to a total of about forty-five portfolios with twelve photos in each. It proceeds from the earthbound man to the highest peak of civilization, and downward according to the most subtle classifications to the idiot.¹²⁶

Sander was convinced that the camera, if honestly and straightforwardly employed without retouching or developing tricks, could probe beneath appearances and reveal the "truth" of the subject. This "truth," exposed by the unmanipulated photographic image, would reveal universal knowledge of cultural types and the environment which shaped them. The intended result was a historical document of "Man in the 20th century."¹²⁷ Influential critics praised the book, and even Thomas Mann, who had won the Nobel Prize in 1929, wrote to Kurt Wolff, "I have looked through *Face of Our Time* with great interest and pleasure, and I congratulate you on its publication. This collection of precise and unpretentious photographs is a treasure trove for lovers of physiognomy and an outstanding opportunity for the study of human types as stamped by profession and social class."¹²⁸ Mann's reaction is a common one--the notion that classes and races of people may be physically classified according to certain stereotypical characteristics may be found throughout German popular literature and

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Mann in Ibid.

"scientific" studies that had broad appeal during the Weimar period. Such thinking was standard fare even for writers such as Mann in the 1930s, and it was believed that Sander's photographs, with their 'objectivity', offered a counterpoint to the *völkish* racism of the National socialists, which asserted that "true Germans" descended from a race of superior blonde-haired, blue-eyed Nordic heroes. Each person Sander photographs, from the bricklayer's assistant to the Notary to the Circus hands to the Nazi soldier is afforded the same staring, frontal portrait.

In the introduction to *Face of Our Time*, Alfred Döblin equates looking at the portraits of Sander to the experience of plaster death masks:

but what remains of the face? The result of life-long work and life's work on the flesh and bones, on the contours of the features, on the shape of the forehead, nose, and lips. These remaining faces portrayed in the death-masks, their expressions are the stones which have been rolled and polished by the sea washing on them for decades...two great processes made them individuals and personalities in life: they were moulded by their race and the development of their personal ability--and through the environment and society which promoted and hindered their development.¹²⁹

According to Döblin, Sander's photographs are physiognomic records of that person's existence. Döblin clearly believes that an individual's intellect and physique is shaped by his or her environment. Sander's taxonomic project is positivistic in its attempt to classify human beings according to social types whose appearances physically demonstrate the type of work that they do; they are exemplars of a certain social *milieu*.

But positivism had its critics in the Weimar period. Theodor Adorno rejected positivist content in art, and argued that "the study of social effect [(universalized, 'objective' content)] neither comes close to understanding what is social in art nor is it in any position to dictate norms for art, as it is inclined to

¹²⁹ Alfred Döblin, "Introduction to *Antlitz der Zeit*" in David Mellor ed., Germany--the New Photography, 1927-1933 (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), 56.

do by Positivist spirit."¹³⁰ What is social in art for Adorno was its ability to be critical of society, and thus be in dialogue with that society as a means of society to learn about itself. Sander's project might be considered by Adorno as just such a study of "social effect"--scientific, but perhaps uncritical.

Adorno countered the positivism in art with the concept of the "fissure," an unusual, startling attribute which photographs reveal, contradicting generalizations by offering a complexity that resists taxonomic categorization.¹³¹ Despite being "predicated on fissuredness and thus on the concrete historical situation," any attempt art makes at aping science avoids social truth by science's "demanding that it be shaped" to fit a taxonomy instead of describing the reality of the fissure. The fissure, a trope of material, phenomenal reality, has complex asymmetries that become glossed over by a generalizing, determined descriptive system.¹³² Quality in art for Adorno rests within its critical distance from science: "Art is not an arbitrary cultural complement to science but, rather, stands in critical opposition to it."¹³³

Walter Benjamin remarks upon the positive quality of Sander's project as a scientific study, and compliments the essay by Alfred Döblin included in *Face of Our Time* for its acknowledgement of the scientific aspect. Döblin remarks, "as there is a comparative anatomy by virtue of which we come to a conception of nature and a history of organs, so this photographer pursues comparative photography and thereby achieves a scientific standpoint above and beyond that

¹³⁰ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 228. There are certain instances in Sander's work which seem related to Adorno's concept of the fissure and which seem to erode his own taxonomy from within: Both Raul Hausmann and Erich Sander appear as different character types, although largely within the same broader professional category. Are we to infer that physiognomic social types contained within a larger category are interchangeable?

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

of the photographic details.”¹³⁴ What Benjamin finds most compelling is Sander’s political effectiveness as a “producer” of a positive portrayal of the German people, “not as a scholar nor instructed by racial theoreticians or social researchers, but, as the publisher says, from direct experience.”¹³⁵ Benjamin considers Sander’s project important as a “book of exercises,”¹³⁶ a didactic operation whose *images* reveal an unbiased objectivity that unmasks the ‘true nature’ of the German people, a characteristic Benjamin considers effective in sociopolitical opposition to the racial programme of the National Socialists.

A visual analysis of one of Sander’s photographs may help to illustrate what Benjamin found valuable about them. Sander’s Putzfrau of 1928 (figure 1-28) depicts a middle-aged woman seated within a shallow space in a frontal pose. She grips the handle of what most likely is a mop or broom--the signifier of her trade. She wears a simple pinstriped washdress, somewhat rumpled from a good deal of use. The woman looks directly at the viewer without any shame about her simple occupation; she appears to be self-assured, almost defiant; she wrinkles her brow and opens her mouth slightly as if to offer an opinion on why this is taking so long. Her wiry, muscular arms end in strong hands that appear restless, eager to resume movement. The hands fit the broom as the hands of the stonebreaker fit the raised hammer in Courbet’s famous painting of the same name--with the self-assurance of daily practice. The rigid diagonal with which the woman holds the handle with such strong hands appears almost militaristic, as if she is holding a rifle like a soldier at attention. This strong, confident woman of admittedly low social stature stands in marked contrast to the blonde, blue-eyed, rosy-cheeked Aryan people presented in the idealized genre scenes

¹³⁴ Döblin in Ibid.

¹³⁵ Walter Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography,” in Trachtenberg ed., Classic Essays on Photography, 211.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

produced by the National Socialists. Certainly Benjamin would have found the Putzfrau's proletarian truculence an ideal counterpoint to such genre scenes.

Beyond the Putzfrau's signifiers of class, work, and resistance lies the captured details of Benjamin's optical unconscious: There is something decidedly androgynous about the Putzfrau. Her sinewy forearms, muscular right biceps, large, mannish hands, muscular neck, dark eyebrows, and chiseled features suggest a small wiry man who has put on a washerwoman's smock for a lark. The interplay of male and female attributes captured by Sander, which might not otherwise be so readily available to the naked eye, lend an uncanny quality to the Putzfrau. The ability of the camera to relentlessly record images of things as they are, even physical details that play upon our unconscious, stands in marked opposition to the propagandistic images produced by National Socialism and thus contains social value for Benjamin, even if produced as a commodity. When viewed today, the uncanny quality of the Putzfrau resists her label of "washerwoman" despite Sander's scientific, physiognomic intentions. As I will show, Arbus was interested precisely in this resistant quality of the individual to typologies, yet she shared with Grosz, Dix, and Sander the belief that physiognomy bore the stamp of culture.

V. Coburn's *Men of Mark*

Along with Alfred Stieglitz, Alvin Langdon Coburn (1882-1966) is known primarily for his place within early Modernist photography. Coburn's position as a founding associate of the Photo-Secession, a member of the Linked Ring Brotherhood (1903), his closeness to Symbolism, and his later "Vortographs"-- pictures made with the aid of a kaleidoscope-like mirror attachment in front of

the lens-- closely follows the trajectory of nascent Modernist photography.¹³⁷ During the Vortograph period, Coburn also engaged in portraiture, producing an anglophilic book of 33 famous writers and intellectuals entitled *Men of Mark* in 1913. *Men of Mark* represented a collection of noteworthy individuals literally given the distinction "Men of Mark." Coburn's appearance in this chapter is remarkable for its *distance* from Arbus's work, and serves to illustrate the situation of the honorific portrait gallery within the purely aestheticized context of the modernist practitioner (also a 'man of mark'). However, a different set of circumstances is evidenced in Coburn's photographic style. Despite a new set of criteria for assembling the image and handling the appearance of the individual criteria based upon Symbolist literature and aesthetics, the Modernist frame in which Coburn's work has been historicized effaces lingering nineteenth-century values concerning the consideration of an individual's mental "worthiness" or "genius." Such values were understood by both photographer and viewer, who assessed portraits according to shared cultural conceptions of 'reading' people and making judgements about them according to appearances.

Clarity of image, central to the revelation of physical details for Brady and Carjat in the nineteenth century, gives way with Coburn to an obscuring of the image--a defining characteristic of pictorialism. If Brady's work may be said to be close to the realism of Thomas Eakins's Gross Clinic of 1875, Coburn's work aligns itself with the obfuscations in a portrait by James McNeill Whistler, whose paintings Coburn greatly admired. Through such blurring, Coburn sought to infuse a transitory quality to the image, adding drama and mystery to the sitter.¹³⁸ Before picking up the Rolleiflex in 1962, Arbus's photographs were

¹³⁷ Coburn had friendly contacts among members of the English group of cubists founded by Ezra Pound called "Vorticists." This connection helped to inspire Coburn's Vortographs, in which he attempted to achieve a cubist fragmentation of forms by using reflecting prisms.

¹³⁸ Ralph Bogardus, Pictures and Texts. Henry James, A.L. Coburn, and New Ways of Seeing in Literary Culture doc. diss. (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Press, 1984), 176.

primarily grainy images--perhaps the closest she will ever come to pictorialism (with the exception of some of the *Untitled* series pictures). Coburn's blurriness also acts as an analogue for movement. He sought the spontaneity of facial expression that is possible with the use of faster film. Critic Sadakichi Hartmann said of Coburn that "he knows that the character of a great man cannot be conveyed fully in one portrait; he therefore creates before our eyes an elegant and graceful vision, suggestive by its very formlessness of something subtly intellectual, and lets us add with the help of our imagination what the picture lacks in actual facts."¹³⁹ Coburn printed his negatives on platinotype paper, giving his images a soft, warm luster--a hazy quality recalling the calotype's effect. This style was not limited to Coburn in the first decade of the twentieth century; photographers like Zaida Ben-Yúsuf, Rudolph Eickmeyer, Pirie MacDonald, and Clarence White, among others, also used the platinotype process and other similar methods to achieve a grainy image--imparting, it was believed, a greater sense of subjectivity. Such an emphasis on the surface qualities of the image reflected recent avant-garde trends in photography (the Photo-Secession) and painting (Symbolism, Neo-Impressionism), and represented to artistic photographers a way of escaping what they believed to be an increasingly commercialized clear image. Reflecting a popularly-held sentiment, Hartmann said of Ben-Yúsuf that "she pretends to be a sworn foe to the fashion of popular photography and intends her prints to represent a sort of artistic revolt against the minutiae of detail, the glossy surfaces, and the mathematical precision still displayed in the show cases of Daguerre's successors."¹⁴⁰

Despite the obscuring of the image for artistic effect, critics and portrait

¹³⁹ Sadakichi Hartmann, "Alvin Langdon Coburn: Secessionist Portraiture" in *The Valiant Knights of Daguerre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 260.

¹⁴⁰ Hartmann, *Valiant Knights of Daguerre*, 167.

photographers held the belief that illustrious individuals held some form of significant 'presence' which could be situated in the photograph. As in Brady's time, it was up to the artistry of the photographer to recognize and capture the 'essence' of the character of the sitter. Hartmann says of Pirie MacDonald that "two of his...portraits which it must have been a delight to interpret--I allude to those of General Chaffee and Russell Sage--show his conception of character. It is evident in the massive and erect head of the one and the arrangement of light which forms the setting of the slim, long face of the other."¹⁴¹ With Coburn and his peers, the character of the sitter has become something increasingly subjectivized: no longer readable in the craniometry of the sitter, but nonetheless locatable in the photograph itself.

The clearly-rendered physiognomic features of the sitter in the nineteenth-century portrait gave way to a mutually dependent physiognomy of *space* and *surface* in Coburn's photographs. Influenced by Maeterlinck's neo-platonism in *The Buried Temple* (1902), Coburn felt that character in photography might be something innately recognizable, an *a priori*. With the photograph, Coburn believed that he could "make the 'inner man' visible."¹⁴² Recognition in the viewer was possible with an image already embedded in the mind.¹⁴³ For Arbus, the opposite was true: recognition was constituted by the 'flaw' that we all possess; that flaw separates us from being read as an *a priori* type. In Coburn's portraits, the subjectivity of the photographer in the handling of space and surface is necessary to reveal the "elusive something" of the sitter, what gave the man his "mark," his genius. In his "The Future of Pictorial Photography,"

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 274.

¹⁴² Mike Weaver, Alvin Langdon Coburn: Symbolist Photographer 1882-1966 (NY: Aperture, 1986), 28.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

(1916), Coburn alludes to the subjectivity he sought by quoting the painter Max Weber on technique:

in his new book, *Essays on Art*, Weber says, 'To express moods that stir the emotion from within, as does music, the plastic artist, when he conceives of energetic rhythmic interlaced forms or units, should be much more moved than even by music. It is like cementing a thought, or arresting a perfect moment of time, or like giving body to space, or solidity to air, or colored light to darkness'.¹⁴⁴

Following Weber, Coburn believed that the "plastic artist" needed to "stir the emotions from within," and sought to do so through his portraits.

Coburn's soft, fuzzy images efface the concept of character as something read through a specific set of physical features in favor of a fleeting, cloudy space haunted by the evanescence of the sitter. The grains which compose such elusive images represent Coburn's interpretation of the rare light that surrounds the individual. Coburn's rich tonal scale seems to meld sitter with background, flattening the space of the photograph. The surface presents a unified field, almost as if the photograph was printed on a piece of slate, registering the surface of the stone. This atmospheric quality acts as a corollary for the rarefied air of the genius, and thus an attempt by Coburn to artistically represent the *interior* of the sitter, his mind, what makes him a 'man of mark' in the first place. Coburn's gallery did not require the revelatory clarity and truth provided by the pencil of nature, as with Brady's images; he had no historical project, no national identity to worry about capturing (beyond a certain anglophilia). Coburn was more interested in images which drew closer to the sense of subjectivity demanded by artists and viewers alike in the first decade of the twentieth century.

With a couple of exceptions, the portraits in Coburn's *Men of Mark* are frontal close-ups of the sitter's face and shoulders. Coburn uses a magnesium

¹⁴⁴ Weber in Coburn, "The Future of Pictorial Photography," 1916.

flash to illuminate the features of the sitter, the effect of which casts everything else into a strong *sfumato*. Despite the graininess of the image, the facial features are what reflect the most light. The contrast of light between face and background is reminiscent of the symbolist print by Edvard Munch of the poet Stephane Mallarmé (figure 1-29), in which nothing but the poet's face is visible. In Coburn's photogravure of William Butler Yeats (figure 1-30), for example, the poet's mouth is half-open, as if he is about to speak. His face is bathed in a light that illuminates his features more fully than his clothing. We cannot really tell what he is wearing. In Coburn's other *Men of Mark* portraits, such as those of Le Penseur (George Bernard Shaw) of 1906 (figure 1-31), William DeMorgan, John Galsworthy, J.M. Barrie, and Herbert Trench, a similar light is cast to focus on the head of the sitter. Each photogravure has a certain solemnity about it which is accentuated by the murky, gray halftones: The sitters seem to occupy a rarefied, mystical air in which their 'genius' operates. In Le Penseur, Coburn literally equates Shaw to Rodin's The Thinker, drawing a modern parallel between Shaw's genius and the timeless values of classical form.

In Donald Childs's *Modernism and Eugenics*, Childs persuasively demonstrates how Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot, George Bernard Shaw, and W.B. Yeats believed in eugenics, the science of race improvement, and adapted this scientific discourse to the language and purposes of their literary efforts. Coburn was a contemporary of these writers, operated in similar social circles, and was particularly close to Shaw. Shaw believed that eugenics had a religious mission:

I believe that if we can drive into the heads of men the full consciousness of moral responsibility that comes to men with the knowledge that there never will be a god unless we make one--that we are the instruments through which that ideal is trying to make itself reality--we can work towards that ideal until we get to be supermen, and then super-supermen, and then a world of

organisms who have achieved and realized God.¹⁴⁵

Shaw alludes to the eugenic desire, popular at the time, of encouraging the breeding of the most intelligent in society, and discouraging by any means necessary the breeding of the less fit. The quotidian nature of eugenic thinking is attested to by its support from even progressive social reformers like Shaw. It must be noted however that other people Coburn photographed, such as G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc, openly opposed eugenics.¹⁴⁶ Clearly eugenics was a hot topic.

In the text following the photographs in *Men of Mark*, Coburn suggests his positivist approach: "I have not attempted to do anything eccentric in the way of portrayals, but I have studied my men and their works with enthusiasm, and in each instance I have tried to catch and reveal the elusive something that differentiates a man of talent from his fellows, and makes life worth while, worth struggling with towards ever greater understanding."¹⁴⁷ Apparently, in the time-honored tradition of empirical study, Coburn has carefully observed his sitters for the eugenic manifestations of their genius. For her part, Arbus also sought people who were different from their fellows, but they were largely notable for their *lack* of honorific eugenic standards. From Coburn through Sander and Evans, three of the luminaries of modernist photography, the presence of positivist content in portraits has been almost entirely neglected by critics and historians in their effort to describe the character of their individual pictures as

¹⁴⁵ George Bernard Shaw, "The Religion of the Future," lecture delivered to the Heretics Society, Cambridge, 29 May 1911, in The Religious Speeches of George Bernard Shaw, ed. Warren Sylvester-Smith (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1963), 35, as quoted in Donald J. Childs, Modernism and Eugenics (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7.

¹⁴⁶ Childs, 11.

¹⁴⁷ Coburn, Men of Mark, 30.

exemplary products of their personal vision.¹⁴⁸ Yet Coburn's *Men of Mark*, like the social galleries of Brady, Nadar and Carjat before him, provided evidence of a superior type of human, the Nietzschean "supermen" envisioned by Shaw.

VI. France: Carjat and Nadar

Photographic social galleries were widely popular in France during the 1870s and 1880s. One such example was the *Galerie de la Contemporaine*, a gallery whose precursors may be found in popular French caricature. Arbus's social panorama was markedly different than the *Galerie*, as it lacked an interest in its honorific aura, but was similar in her inclusion of notable cultural celebrities of the period. We might say that the *Galerie* represented the moment when icons of celebrity became mass produced as a commodity; Arbus's work serves to problematize this notion. The *Galerie Contemporaine* followed in the tradition of biographical albums such as Carjat's *Panthéon Parisien* and Disdéri's *Prominent French Figures*. The popularity of this type of illustrated biography was almost immediate, and was exploited further in rival albums by competitors during the 1870s and 1880s. The mass production of celebrity photographs, first made available to the public by Disdéri's carte-de-visite process in the 1850s, was a highly profitable venture for Parisian photographers. Cartes-de-visite were collected like baseball cards are today, and tipped into hardbound albums or framed and presented on a single surface reminiscent of contemporary theater or circus advertisement boards. Often the signature of the celebrity, either the original or a print, would accompany the photograph.

William Ivins observes that, "until photography came into common use[,]
there had been no way of making pictures of objects that could serve as a basis

¹⁴⁸ A notable exception being Alan Trachtenberg, in his "Walker Evans's Message from the Interior," *October* 11, 7.

for connoisseurship of the modern type, that is for the study of objects as particulars and not as undifferentiated members of classes."¹⁴⁹ Ivins was referring to photographic reproductions of individual art objects, but his statement could be applied to photographic portraits as well: physical details of the sitters, like those of details of artwork, could now be reproduced with analogical surety. Light reflected from the subject, acting upon the chemicals of the photographic emulsion, revealed physical details of an individual which nineteenth-century illustration/caricature could not hope to equal. But the analogical assurances contained within the Woodburytypes of the *Galerie Contemporaine* are not as secure, objective, and unbiased as we might imagine. The nineteenth-century French viewer was already familiar with a particular way of looking at people's faces, clothes, and bodies according to certain codes, and making judgements about a person's character according to such codes.

What the *Galerie Contemporaine* constituted for most subscribers was an archive of one's "betters," or those celebrities more famous than one could ever hope to become. What linked these celebrities together as an archive were certain character roles: writer, painter, military hero, composer, poet, etc., and what constituted the physical evidence of such roles was what Sekula has called the "two tightly entwined branches of a single hermeneutic paradigm [that] had gained widespread prestige: physiognomy and phrenology."¹⁵⁰ French physiognomy and phrenology were comparative, taxonomic disciplines, and became two of the columns of French positivism, a sociological, "scientific" method of succession and resemblance whose widespread influence was coeval with the beginnings of French photography. Yet the depiction of physiognomic

¹⁴⁹ William Ivins, "New Reports and New Vision: The Nineteenth Century," in Alan Trachtenberg ed., *Classic Essays on Photography* (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 217.

¹⁵⁰ Sekula, "The Body and the Archive" in Bolton ed., *The Contest of Meaning, Critical Histories of Photography*, 347.

details was important to 19th century French caricature and literature before, during, and after the advent of photography.

Caricaturists, and later photographers, understood the market for images that appealed to Parisian "lovers of physiognomy." The mediums of lithographic caricature and photography overlapped both in terms of the market and its leading practitioners, so much so that the two must be considered in a reciprocal, 'intertextual' context. Both Nadar and Carjat were accomplished caricaturists before they were accomplished photographers. Their production of photographic portraits must be considered within the context of their lithographic caricatures, which contain elements of physiognomy and phrenology just described. A close reading of Nadar and Carjat's photographs contained within the *Galerie* is necessary to determine these conditions, and at which point photography may be separated from caricature.

The physical trace is concentrated upon in the *Galerie Contemporaine* by the inclusion of two things. The first, the Woodburytype, gave the viewer an image of the sitter formed from light reflecting off the subject and being registered by light-sensitive chemicals. The second, a piece of the sitter's handwriting, gave the viewer a copy of the sitter's written work. In each instance, the viewer could reflect on a physical characteristic or set of characteristics and determine that they added up to the "temperament" of the sitter, to the "genius" that produced such physical traces. The biography of the sitter accompanying each photograph served to reinforce his or her importance, and to emphasize the "truth" of the sitter's physical potency registered in the Woodburytype and handwriting sample. It is interesting to note that the process of reproduction is the vehicle for the 'evidence' of such truth. The photograph, the biography, and the signature were all reproduced for a mass audience. That audience, deeply affected by a physiognomic culture of looking, associated physiognomies with reproductions.

The clarity and precision of the woodburytype renders it the closest nineteenth-century technique to Arbus's own--yet as we view it today, the clarity and attention to detail in her work was not meant to confirm, but to question, the connection of physical details to inner attributes.

Both Nadar and Carjat were acutely aware of how their portraits would turn out. They employed natural light filtered in from a skylight or high window which was diffused through a series of manipulatable screens so that precise highlights and subtle shading could be attained. Such machinations make it clear that Nadar and Carjat chose to focus upon the physical details of their sitters, particularly the forehead and facial features. Nadar also emphasized clothing, as did Carjat, but the brightest light seems to be focused upon the countenances of the sitters.

Carjat's photograph of Charles Baudelaire (figure 1-32) is captioned "CHARLES BAUDELAIRE" in block letters and is framed by a double line. Baudelaire's biography begins on the opposite page. This format is common to all of the photographs in the *Galerie*. In the lower right hand corner of the page into which the photograph is mounted, the words "Cliché Carjat" appear. Carjat's lighting clearly emphasizes the forehead and facial features of Baudelaire, whose gaze confronts the viewer. Hands and extraneous details are left out. The poet's velvet collar and bowtie attest to his social standing, but are not as strongly emphasized as the face. Baudelaire's forehead appears to be the locus of the concentrated light, as does his nose, chin ears, and cheeks. Light replaces the pen of the caricaturist, but the two are linked in intention by Carjat's emphasizing of facial features. The accentuation of Baudelaire's high forehead suggests that Carjat wished to display phrenological characteristics of his subject. Carjat captures Baudelaire's image with a glow around the face that fades away as it recedes to the edge of the image, in the manner of a Rembrandt painting.

Such lighting techniques emphasize the physical evidence of Baudelaire's "genius." Baudelaire's thick, brushy, paintlike signature, which introduces the biography, offers complementary physical evidence of his "passionate temperament."¹⁵¹

A photograph of the composer Jacques Halévy (Figure 1-33) by Carjat is similar in intention to the Baudelaire photograph. Halévy's head and facial details are the focal point of the photograph, and, like the Baudelaire photograph, clear focus gradually blurs out as it recedes to the edges. The clear, even light focused upon Halévy's high-domed head accentuates physiognomical and phrenological evidence. Despite the facial emphasis, there is no doubt that Halévy is nattily dressed, evidenced by his fine coat and cravat. Carjat has chosen to pose Halévy in a proud, dignified, almost snooty air with arms folded, the wrist of his left arm visible. Halévy is backlit with a certain luminosity, giving him an added "aura" which is also present in the Baudelaire photograph. This luminosity reads as a palpable, visible physical manifestation (light) that indicates an abstract quality (genius) which begets celebrity and inclusion in the *Galerie Contemporaine*. In a sense, this is an *idealized* Halévy; Arbus would have preferred him at a weak moment, at the juncture between his pose and his flaw. Halévy is idealized by an index of signifiers in which little doubt is left in the viewer's mind as to Halévy's celebrity and high social position.

¹⁵¹ Ironically, Baudelaire disagreed with the popular appetite for physiognomy. He deplored "this class of uneducated and dull minds that judge things only according to their physical shapes." Baudelaire in Gisele Freund, Photography and Society (Boston: David R. Godine, 1980), 78.

VII. Mathew Brady and the Nineteenth-Century Virtue of Character

Photography came into being at the height of what has been called a “physiognomic culture,” in Europe and America.¹⁵² This social phenomenon and its link to photography has been fairly well documented. Arbus may not have been intimately associated with this aspect of American culture, but as we view her work today, it seems that she was well aware of its consequences for the 1960s.¹⁵³ It is also clear that, in the tradition of Mathew Brady, she sought to produce a body of portraits which contained a social message, yet hers is one which subverts the social gallery as a pantheon of almost entirely white male faces.¹⁵⁴

Nineteenth century physiognomic culture, according to Robert Sobieszek, “was hugely responsible for sustaining public and scientific fascination with the pseudoscience of physiognomy and its allied disciplines, phrenology and

¹⁵² Sobieszek, Ghost in the Shell, 17.

¹⁵³ Arbus owned several books by Herman Melville, including Moby Dick, in which the predominant phrenological atmosphere of the mid-nineteenth century was questioned. In Moby Dick, first published in 1851 (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), Herman Melville devotes a chapter to the issue of phrenology through Ishmael's applying its principles to whale heads, decapitated and hung from either side of the bow of the *Pequod*: “To scan the lines of his face, or feel the bumps on the head of this leviathan, this is a thing which no physiognomist or phrenologist has as yet undertaken. Such an enterprise would seem almost as hopeful as for Lavater to have scrutinized the wrinkles on the Rock of Gibraltar, or for Gall to have mounted a ladder and manipulated the Dome of the Pantheon.” Ultimately Ishmael offers the following conclusion: “Physiognomy, like every other human science, is but a passing fable.” 323.

¹⁵⁴ Arbus owned Mathew Brady's The Civil War Through the Camera (Springfield, MA: Patriot, 1912), and Roy Meredith's Mr. Lincoln's Cameraman Mathew B. Brady (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1946).

pathognomy, for most of the last century.”¹⁵⁵ Sobieszek asserts that the idea dominating this “physiognomic culture” was the belief “that a person’s character, subjectivity, or even soul could be read in the features of the face (physiognomy), the shape of the skull (phrenology), or the expressions of the emotions (pathognomy).”¹⁵⁶ The arbiter of human worth in the nineteenth-century photographic portrait was largely predicated upon the notion of “character.”

One of the most essential of nineteenth-century virtues, character was considered to be an innate quality of the individual; part of nature, a process divinely given. To fix a portrait image, photographers argued, should be equivalent to fixing character. The concept of character was essentially class-based. Historian Karen Halttunen argues that mainstream culture in the 1840s had an obsession with “character”; “how to achieve it, how to show it and preserve it, and most of all how to recognize it in others.”¹⁵⁷ Sandra Phillips notes that “even as the nineteenth century progressed and scientists came to realize the psychological complexity of human behavior, most people continued to believe that criminality could be distinguished by physical traits.”¹⁵⁸ Anxieties about “confidence men and painted women,” states Halttunen, revealed a state of mind increasingly alarmed by the “world of strangers” inhabiting American cities, “its hidden dangers and temptations--and fearful that appearances may not reflect real motives and intentions.”¹⁵⁹ Alan Trachtenberg argues that portrait

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Alan Trachtenberg, “Illustrious Americans” in Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 27.

¹⁵⁸ Sandra S. Phillips, “Identifying the Criminal” in Phillips et. al., Police Pictures: The Photograph as Evidence (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 11.

¹⁵⁹ Karen Halttunen, Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 33-55 in Ibid.

photography, "drawing on a rhetoric of sentiment[,]...developed a system of references to meet this 'antebellum crisis of social confidence,' and provided as important and widespread an agency for overcoming such anxieties as popular manuals on character, conduct, and success."¹⁶⁰ From early on, portrait photography developed a relationship to national identity whose arbiter was the evidence of character. Character in the photograph was revealed by its ability to capture light's play over the surfaces of the human body.

Throughout photography's history, a case has been made by some of its practitioners for its pure objectivity as a medium. In the nineteenth century, a desire for scientific knowledge elicited a mania for the categorization and classification of plants, animals, and the natural world. Positivist science sought to know humans and their social interactions through the categorization and classification of visible, and by extension quantifiable, resemblances. The first instance of photography applied specifically to the understanding of crime in the United States occurred in 1846 when Mathew Brady, a recent arrival to New York City, accepted a commission to photograph prisoners in Blackwell's Island prison.¹⁶¹ Phillips points out that Eliza Farnham, the young matron who sponsored Brady, "was a follower of the phrenological reformist Marmaduke Sampson...[and] like Sampson, Farnham believed that a correct reading of criminal features would correlate with a person's true inner character, and that such a person might be curable with appropriate treatment."¹⁶²

Photographs of criminals soon caught the attention of popular culture and entered the realm of mass reproduction. Photographs of criminals were widely

¹⁶⁰ Trachtenberg, "Illustrious Americans," 27.

¹⁶¹ Sandra Phillips, "Identifying the Criminal," 18.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

copied through wood engravings and published in magazines such as *Harper's*.¹⁶³ Criminals could now be seen by a mass audience, and became much-discussed entities of the physiognomic culture. In his *Burning With Desire*, Geoffrey Batchen addresses the central question, "at what moment in history did the *desire* to photograph...shift from an occasional, isolated, individual fantasy to a demonstrably widespread, social *imperative*?"¹⁶⁴ Batchen locates this desire at a new juncture in the consideration of subjectivity in the representation of the human body:

By the early years of the nineteenth century intellectuals across Europe and its colonies have begun to question the presumed separation of observer and observed, locating all acts of seeing in a contingent and subjective human body. The observer is no longer imagined to be the passive and transparent conduit of God's own eye but now is regarded as someone who actively produces what is seen (and if how one sees determines what one sees, then everyone must be seeing a little differently).¹⁶⁵

Noting that the camera obscura could no longer sustain this new worldview of both "reflection and projection, that was simultaneously active and passive in the way it represented things," Batchen argues that early photography fulfilled what Foucault has considered photography's function of "mapping bodies in time and space."¹⁶⁶ Batchen mentions that positivist discourse was largely absent from the writings of early photographers like Talbot and Daguerre,¹⁶⁷ yet it would quickly be instituted by science, art, literature, and even popular culture as a viable means of human classification. The conflation of social sciences such as physiognomy and phrenology with the desire for a method of reproduction that

¹⁶³ Ibid., 19.

¹⁶⁴ Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire: the Conception of Photography* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1997), 36. See also Batchen, "Desiring Production" in *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2002), 3-24.

¹⁶⁵ Batchen, "Desiring Production," 22.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 23.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 22.

appeared to be 'objective' established a vernacular set of circumstances which conferred the desire of scientific objectivity to the photograph.¹⁶⁸

The desire for objectivity in the vernacular photograph produced a set of formal conventions that were adopted by art photographers in the way that they made their portraits. Scientific objectivity and aesthetics often blurred boundaries. Hugh Welch Diamond's photographs of female patients at the Surrey County Asylum, intended as scientific illustrations to a medical journal, have the same frontal pose and soft, sepia-toned, "Rembrandtesque," yet clear, lighting as a portrait by Hill and Adamson.¹⁶⁹ Diamond, an amateur photographer and member of the Calotype Club and Photographic Society, had public exhibitions of his work, including the Universal Exposition of 1855.¹⁷⁰ His work was favorably reviewed by critic Ernest Lacan on a number of occasions.¹⁷¹ It is significant however that the reception of these photographs in publications was not of the photographs themselves, but of engravings made after the photographs. The public grew accustomed to experiencing physiognomic culture in *copies*, not in the original photographs themselves. As engravings after photographs, portraits were further generalized to augment current positivist beliefs about physiognomy and phrenology.

In the nineteenth century, light was commonly given metaphorical substance as "the pencil" wielded by the hand of some larger, sublime force. Soon after its inception, photography was in 1840 deemed the "pencil of nature" by one of its inventors, William Henry Fox Talbot. American daguerreotypist Marcus Aurelius Root dubbed the nascent medium "the pencil of the sun."

¹⁶⁸ See Batchen, Burning with Desire, Chapter 3.

¹⁶⁹ Diamond's work illustrated John Connolly's thirteen-part essay entitled "The Physiognomy of Insanity," Medical Times Gazette 16 (January 1858-Feb. 1859). See Sobieszek, 56, footnote 66.

¹⁷⁰ Sobieszek, 57.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

These ambiguously-worded conceits were not offered without premeditation. By giving 'nature' the status of an artist wielding a pencil, an object with an inescapably human-scaled component, Talbot and Root instilled a *desire* for objectivity in the photograph.¹⁷² Yet as Batchen has pointed out, this desire for objectivity was mediated by the equal desire for subjectivity by the operator, who sought in this apparently odd coupling "the uneasy maintenance of binary relationships...[such as the 'momentary' and the 'for ever'] to represent an impossible conjunction of transience and fixity."¹⁷³ The new photographic image, either in the form of the calotype or the daguerreotype, fixed light's play over surfaces in the light-sensitive chemicals on the plate or sheet of paper. The pencil of light was deemed completely "of nature," a *Deus ex machina* snared by the eye of the photographer.¹⁷⁴

Photography's apparent freedom from the hand of the portraitist or caricaturist encouraged the conviction that a sitter's personality, intellect, and character could be revealed through the depiction of facial and bodily configuration within a photograph. Photographers used the 'truth' of light to fix images of people believed to contain unassailable facts about that person, as light, the manifestation of divine presence in nature, revealed them. Certainly, the belief was held that there were skilled and less skilled practitioners of photography, but the skilled used light as a revelatory process, shedding it upon the truth of what God had created. The capture of light was held to be a corollary for the truth of the sitter's physiognomy. The apparently conflicting desires of subjectivity and objectivity in photography's early practitioners seems to

¹⁷² Batchen locates this desire within what Michel Foucault calls a "*positive unconscious* of knowledge," for an ordering of thought "at a level that eludes the consciousness of the scientist and is yet a part of scientific discourse." Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), ix, xi, in Batchen, 57.

¹⁷³ Batchen, "Desiring Production," 11.

¹⁷⁴ Batchen unpacks the etymological complexity and elusiveness of the term "nature" with early photographers like Talbot; see *Ibid.*, 58-64.

unearth the paradox that lays at the very foundation of the positivist portrait; a truth revealed by nature, on the one hand, but interpreted through the subjectivity of the photographer, on the other. In the dominant positivist popular culture into which photography was thrust, and soon rapidly disseminated, the photograph as a positivist truth won the day.

Marcus Aurelius Root considered photographs to be literal copies of nature, and thought that if a photographer were to transcend the status of a mere mechanic to become an artist, he must handle his subject matter in such a way as to reveal its perfect, ideal essence.¹⁷⁵ Root's *The Camera and the Pencil* (1864) was the first American book that was not merely a technical manual, but a treatise on photography as a fine art. Root believed that he could speak authoritatively about portraits, since he had taken nearly 70,000 daguerreotypes himself.¹⁷⁶ In this tract, Root attempted to integrate photography into a mixture of romantic and academic painting theory. Root thought of his portrait work as being dependent on scientific perception as well as artistic sensibilities. He was a follower of popular phrenologist Johann Kaspar Lavater and a true believer in physiognomy.¹⁷⁷ Root believed that the presence of pictures of great individuals would, merely by their proximity to members of the American household, elevate the moral "character" of the viewer, akin to a benediction:

the great and the good, the heroes, saints and sages of all lands and of all eras are, by these life-like "presentments," brought within the constant purview of the young, the middle-aged, and the old. The pure, the high, the noble traits beaming from these faces and forms--who shall measure the greatness of their effect on the impressionable minds of those who catch sight

¹⁷⁵ Joel Eisinger, *Trace and Transformation* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 15.

¹⁷⁶ Vicki Goldberg, intro. to Marcus Aurelius Root's "The Camera and the Pencil" (1864) in Goldberg, *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 148.

¹⁷⁷ Eisinger, 16. See footnote 38. A more detailed discussion of Lavater's influence takes place in section II of this chapter on Nadar and Carjat.

of them at every turn?¹⁷⁸

Widely distributed portraits of the great would subject everyday experience to a regular parade of moral exemplars.¹⁷⁹ Root argued that

in this fact [the face's revelation of inner character] lies a valuable security for social order, insuring, as it does, that men shall ultimately be known for what they are. In vain do the profligate, the base, the wicked, and the selfish mimic those outward indications which pertain naturally to the pure, the good, and the generous. The inward unworthiness, despite all effort, will glare through the fleshly mask."¹⁸⁰

Thus it was believed by Root and other writers of pedagogical guides that physical features provided direct evidence of the sitter's inner thoughts and emotions. It was the job of daguerreotypists to follow old masters such as Rembrandt in the revelation of such things in a portrait. In 1858, E. K. Hough, writing in *The American Journal of Photography*, argued that "the ability, while watching the changes and expressions of the sitter's countenance when unconscious of the scrutiny, to keep in mind the best, and after the general form was obtained, to paint them from memory...he must remember that every organ and every faculty has a language."¹⁸¹ Hough's statement echoes Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy*, that character is displayed "by the form of the solid and the appearance of the moveable parts, while at rest."¹⁸²

The inductive hermeneutics of Root's moral vision found its expression in

¹⁷⁸ Root, *The Camera and the Pencil* in Goldberg, 149.

¹⁷⁹ Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive" in Bolton ed., *The Contest of Meaning*, 346.

¹⁸⁰ Root, *The Camera and the Pencil*, 43-44.

¹⁸¹ E. K. Hough, "Expressing Character in Photographic Pictures" in *The American Journal of Photography* 1 (Dec. 15, 1858), 212-213.

¹⁸² Johann Kaspar Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy: Designed to Promote the Knowledge and the Love of Mankind*, 9th ed. Thomas Holcroft trans. (London: William Tegg and co., 1855), 12.

the portraiture of Mathew Brady.¹⁸³ Brady's portraits were recognized as important historical documents even in the nineteenth century. But where the physiognomic connection to character is lionized in Brady, with Arbus, it is questioned. Along with taking individual daguerreotype portraits for private clients, Brady's work provided portraits for reproduction by engravers which were then shown in the illustrated press, reaching thousands of readers. It must be stressed that the public knew his portraits as much from engravings in popular illustrated weeklies such as *Harper's* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* as from the daguerreotypes themselves, available at Brady's lavishly appointed studio. Brady once called his studio "the magazine to illustrate all the publications in the land."¹⁸⁴ His studio was widely known as "Brady of Broadway," and came to represent an aura of public distinction in portraits of the celebrated and illustrious.¹⁸⁵ Brady's portraits met the ambitious needs of the middle class, fascinated with physiognomic looking and with celebrity.¹⁸⁶ His cartes-de-visite and portraits entered the collections and private albums found in countless middle-class parlors.¹⁸⁷ Trachtenberg argues that Brady

cast himself in the role of producer and impresario, stage manager of a new kind of theater. With entrepreneurial insight he grasped the mutuality of need and opportunity that lay as a potential source of fortune for photography. The product that

¹⁸³ My use of the phrase "inductive hermeneutics" comes from Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 1960 (2nd ed. New York: Continuum, 2000), 4.

¹⁸⁴ Brady in James D. Horan, *Mathew Brady: Historian with a Camera* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1955), 14.

¹⁸⁵ Trachtenberg, 36. For an in-depth discussion of some of the more than 6,000 recently attributed daguerreotypes and ambrotypes from Brady's Broadway studio in the collection of the New York Historical Society, see Sandra Markham, "Figments of a Mighty Past: Matthew Brady Portraits at the New-York Historical Society" *The New-York Journal of American History* 65, 1(Spring 2003), 80-102. Markham's study provides an interesting cross-section of individuals who visited the studio.

¹⁸⁶ Trachtenberg, 113.

¹⁸⁷ Mary Panzer, *Mathew Brady and the Image of History* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Press, 1997), 2.

bore Brady's name was more than a picture; it was a system of intelligibility. By making his own name a symbol of social power, success, celebrity--and devotion to the nation--he created a structure of meaning for the act of sitting before the portrait lens.¹⁸⁸

In 1858 an enthusiastic review in the *Photographic and Fine Art Journal* alluded to Brady's significance as a producer of images when it acknowledged that when Brady's audience looked at his portraits, they saw a familiar representation of themselves, "a reflexion of one's lineaments, as can never be seen but in the looking glass and his camera."¹⁸⁹ The review attests to the culture of looking at images of the great espoused by Root: "It is no wonder that his gallery should be thronged constantly, and that it should become the very rialto of fashion and elegance. The eminent men who visit New York, are taken at once to Brady's rooms that they may not only see all our great men grouped together there, but that they may see themselves as others see them."¹⁹⁰ His work marks the beginning of the social gallery genre's inseparability from the sense of the historical as a bird's-eye view of the societal values of a people and a time period. The historical portrait gallery becomes linked to human typologies from which distinctions of value are made, separating, for the white, middle-class viewer, the geniuses, people of "character," from "imbeciles," criminals, and slaves.

At the same time Brady was producing daguerreotypes of famous Americans, he photographed criminals for the purpose of physiognomic study. In 1846, Brady's daguerreotypes of criminals from the Blackwell's Island Penitentiary appeared as woodcut illustrations for British phrenologist Marmaduke Sampson's *Rationale of Crime*, enlarged and edited by Sampson's

¹⁸⁸ Trachtenberg, 38. I have used Trachtenberg's concept of a "system of intelligibility" as my title for this section of Chapter 1.

¹⁸⁹ N.A. (initials unknown), "Gossip" in *Photographic and Fine Art Journal* (Feb. 1857), 63 in Panzer, 50.

¹⁹⁰ "Gossip" in Panzer, 50.

American disciple Eliza Farnham, matron of the women's prison at Sing Sing.¹⁹¹ Their purpose was to show how to read a criminal head--to detect and determine a biological source of social behavior, so the behavior might be reformed with reliable predictability.¹⁹²

Further attesting to the quotidian nature of physiognomic looking during Brady's time period is a description of him in the *American Phrenological Journal* of 1858. The emphasis of the "scientific" analysis of Brady's cranial features was on Brady's "great force of character and self-esteem," which "appear to have been greatly increased by use, for they stand out sharply beyond the other organs."¹⁹³ According to Brady's phrenological makeup (which reads like a horoscope), Brady gets the following advice: "Few men are as highly pleased as you with that which is gratifying to your faculties and few, indeed are so deeply exasperated when things go wrong...you are working too hard, and wearing out your constitution. You should husband your powers, take life more easily."¹⁹⁴

Brady's *Gallery of Illustrious Americans* was published in 1850 as a deluxe edition, outwardly a decorative object for the middle-class parlor. In Brady's daguerreotype of Daniel Webster from the *Gallery*, c. 1849 (figure 1-34), Webster is lit from above with a soft natural light which emphasizes the fine details of his facial features. Webster's stentorian expression attests to his public persona as a great orator. But Webster is not evenly lit; his face and forehead seem to be the focal point of the photograph, which not only attests to the "Rembrandtization" of the photographic portrait espoused by Root and others, but focuses the viewer's attention upon the phrenological details of Webster's countenance.

¹⁹¹ Panzer, 9 and Trachtenberg, "Illustrious Americans," 57.

¹⁹² Trachtenberg, 57.

¹⁹³ Panzer, 52-53.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

Webster and his fellow Civil-War era celebrities are clearly photographed to reveal the physiognomical attributes of what it was that made them famous: character, evident in the “truth” of the image.

VIII. Positivism and Art Photography

A subtext of this dissertation is a concern with the history of positivism as it relates to portrait photography. The following section constitutes an evaluation not only of the beginnings of positivism and photography but of the changing scholarly discourse on positivism in portrait photography. Certain significant points of view are discussed and evaluated in terms of their contribution to the scholarship on the social panorama and its point of rupture in the late 1950s and 1960s, evident in the work of Arbus. Paul Feyerabend aptly describes how representations of observable human phenomena insinuate themselves into popular culture:

The new way of looking may intrude to such an extent that recognition becomes impossible without it—it is now ‘part of reality’ or, to turn the argument around, the original ‘reality’ was but another ‘subjective’, but popular, view. Novels, fables (with or without an explicit moral), tragedies, poems,...conceptual considerations, scientific arguments, scholarly histories, newscasts, documentaries initiate, or reinforce, or give content to, similar developments: events are structured and arranged in special ways, the structures and the arrangements gain in popularity, they become routine, intellectuals interested in perpetuating the routine provide it with a ‘foundation’ by showing that and how it leads to important results (most theories of knowledge are longwinded defences of existing or incipient routines)...¹⁹⁵

Feyerabend sees this transformative process most noticeably taking place in history, politics, and the social sciences.¹⁹⁶ Positivism, and its brethren physiognomy and phrenology, transformed the discourse on images of human beings in the nineteenth century, and still does to an extent today.

¹⁹⁵ Paul Feyerabend, *Farewell to Reason* (London and New York: Verso, 1987), 107.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

There were two major proponents of positivism in the nineteenth century: Auguste Comte and Hippolyte Taine. Comte's theory of positivism, in his *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (1830), was an inductive system of reasoning based upon "observation, experiment and comparison," of a scientifically measurable "succession and resemblance" between natural phenomena in order to impose a taxonomic system of classification. Taine's *Lecture On Art* (1877) expands upon the positivist philosophy of Comte to theorize about art in relationship to the sociological phenomena he calls the *milieu*, which suggests a genetic and biological basis for a model that functions to explain art in terms of race, climate, and geography. Taine's theory of the *milieu* contains the notion of art as being in the midst of a social system, not autonomous from it—in other words, a sociology of art.¹⁹⁷ The theory of the *milieu* gave rise to formalism (Wölfflin and Riegl), and "symbolic form" (from Panofsky and Cassirer), both foundations of art-historical discourse. It will be my goal throughout this dissertation to mark positivism's permutations and shifts in relation to the current art-historical scholarship. My intention is to remind the history of portrait photography, and particularly Modernist portrait photography, of its positivist roots.¹⁹⁸

Numerous scholars and critics have discussed the quotidian nature of positivism in photography during the nineteenth century. In *Another Way of Telling*, John Berger states:

The Camera was invented in 1839. Auguste Comte was just finishing his *cours de philosophie positive*. Positivism and the camera and sociology grew up together. What sustained them all as practices was the belief that observable

¹⁹⁷ These ideas come from a class discussion on positivism with Carol Armstrong at the CUNY Graduate Center, 2/10/97.

¹⁹⁸ Influenced by Allan Sekula's call for a study on the relationship of positivism, the archive, and modernism in "The Body and the Archive" in Richard Bolton ed, *The Contest of Meaning*, 374-75. Sekula asks, "to what degree did self-conscious modernist practice accommodate itself to the model of the archive? To what degree did modernists consciously or unconsciously resist or subvert the model of the archive...?"

quantifiable facts, recorded by scientists and experts, would one day offer man such a total knowledge about nature and society that he would be able to order them both.¹⁹⁹

From the beginning, positivism had a certain utopian agenda. Berger argues that this positivist method impacted the global economy of the 20th century: "...the unachieved positivist utopia became, instead, the global system of late capitalism wherein all that exists becomes quantifiable--not simply because it *can be* reduced to a statistical fact, but also because it *has been* reduced to a commodity."²⁰⁰ Echoing this sentiment, Gisele Freund noted positivism's impact on nineteenth-century France:

The simultaneous development of industry and technology, and the growth of science to meet the needs of industrialization, required rational economic forms. This in turn transformed the values of the bourgeoisie. A new awareness of reality led to a hitherto unknown appreciation of nature. Art pushed toward objective representation, a goal which corresponded with the essence of photography. The period found its most characteristic expression in the philosophy of positivism. Art became charged with scientific precision and the faithful reproduction of an objectified reality...this new philosophical trend drew considerable attention to photography.²⁰¹

Carol Armstrong's *Scenes in a Library* draws distinctions between English and French positivism. In her discussion of Sir Charles Ottley Groom-Napier's *The Book of Nature and the Book of Man* (1870), a taxonomic book illustrated with photographs and woodcuts, Armstrong discusses the pseudo-scientific, physiognomical nature of the book illustrations, comprised of "objects as indexical to the invisible, deeply inherent, typologically predetermined truth of Nature."²⁰² The empirically observed external feature, Armstrong argues, "is

¹⁹⁹ John Berger and Jean Mohr, *Another Way of Telling* (New York: Vintage, 1982), 99.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ Gisele Freund, *Photography and Society* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1980), 69. This was the first ph.D. and research on the topic, 1934.

²⁰² Carol Armstrong, *Scenes in a Library* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1998), 37.

where Groom-Napier begins and ends."²⁰³ Thus the positivist "succession and resemblance" in Groom-Napier's photographs is legible through a semiotics of the visual sign.

My method of historical analysis in connecting Arbus's work to a rejection of the history of positivism in photographic portraiture is influenced by the concurrent spirit of the critique of the Enlightenment by authors in the 1960s such as Georges Canguilhem and Michel Foucault. With Foucault, as with Canguilhem, there emerges a critique of systems of classification specific to the 1960s.

In his *Madness and Civilization* (1961) and *The Order of Things* (1966), Foucault engaged in a systematic critique of positivistic science. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault argues that the invention of Reason in the "Classical Age," from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries, institutes a separation between words and things, language and the world, and turns language into a means of representation of a world now conceived as a world apart, as identifiable objects that differ from other separate objects and can be assigned proper names and taxonomies. From this point on, Foucault argues, reason consists of historically evolving discursive procedures, from the classificatory divisions of the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century's emphasis on utility or usefulness or functionality. It is a set of representational techniques or languages, of discursive practices and spaces which form rules of consistency amongst themselves in historically evolving regimes of knowledge, what Foucault called "epistemes."²⁰⁴ Reason created a language of signification which, for Foucault, became a servant of cultural regimes that imposed repressive categorical orders

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, "The Class of 1968--Post-Structuralism *par lui-meme*" in Rivkin and Ryan eds., *Literary Theory, an Anthology* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 337.

on the world.²⁰⁵

Canguilhem takes umbrage with the terms 'normal' and 'pathological' as polarized negative-positive indices of the body's health, effectively arguing, against positivist science, for the real ambiguity behind the terms. Implicit in this separation is normal as both a function of fact and of value, "a value attributed to the person speaking, by virtue of an evaluative judgement for which he takes responsibility."²⁰⁶ Canguilhem questions the lack of concern over a 'normal' state; he argues that "not enough has been deduced from the term *normal* where one is happy to point out its existence rather than see it as a problem to solve...it is life itself and not medical judgement which makes the biological normal a concept of value and not a concept of statistical reality."²⁰⁷ In his critical look at the term 'normal,' Canguilhem sought to disrupt the tautology of the normal/pathological binarism which limits the medical understanding of life itself to contingent factors and indices.

Canguilhem's study had implications for the consideration of patients, and, by extension, their larger social stigmatization. He wanted medicine to better differentiate between anomaly and disease: "an anomaly is a fact of individual variation which prevents two beings from being able to take the place of each other completely. It illustrates the Leibnizian principle of indiscernibles in the biological order. But diversity is not disease; the *anomalous* is not the pathological."²⁰⁸ Canguilhem, as he wrote in *The Normal and the Pathological*, 1966, sought

an effort to integrate some of the methods and attainments of medicine into

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ George Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological* (New York: Zone Books, 1989; originally published as *Le Normal et le Pathologique*, 1966). Intro. by Michel Foucault., 125.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 131.

²⁰⁸ Canguilhem, 137.

philosophical speculation...to set forth our conceptions in connection with the critical examinations of a thesis, generally adopted in the nineteenth century, concerning the relations between the normal and the pathological. This is the thesis according to which pathological phenomena are identical to corresponding normal phenomena save for quantitative variations."²⁰⁹

Thus Canguilhem's study was aimed at the field of medicine, but had larger social implications which paralleled Foucault's interest in understanding power relationships and their effect on the individual. Echoing Foucault, Canguilhem stated that "a human being's forced limitation to a unique and invariable condition is judged pejoratively in terms of the normal human ideal...it is the possible abuse of health which lies at the bottom of the value accorded to health just as it is the abuse of power which...lies at the bottom of the love of power."²¹⁰ Such a binarism clearly has implications for the photographic portrait, and for the delineation of the type.

Positivism, then, created a common language of signification and classification which influenced photographic portraiture. Foucault's non-linear, critical view of history and Canguilhem's critique of medical labels for human beings emerged during a historical moment that questioned established conventions and representations, and seems an apt method for the analysis of the historical background from which Arbus's work emerged. Both French writers and Arbus share a tendency to view the image as a rebus of cultural signs. Foucault sees this as a repressive apparatus, and Arbus as an ultimately arbitrary relationship predicated on the notion of what she calls the "flaw." I do not mean to suggest that Arbus was a devotee of the work of Foucault or Canguilhem, only that their parallel practices take place in a common social and

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 34-35.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 139.

cultural moment from which their work cannot be separated.²¹¹ Positivism functions as an episteme, which created a taxonomic language that insinuated itself into what is considered in the twentieth century to be “fine art photography.”

In the nineteenth century, the reception of social gallery photographs involved a class-based semiotics of typological recognition and repression. From its inception in the 1850s, the genre of the social gallery related to a bourgeois sensibility, a codified way of looking at photographs that both engaged the photograph as scientific evidence of bourgeois success and stigmatized the “other” as inferior. Influenced by Foucault, John Tagg’s work (along with Sekula) represents the stage when Foucauldian analysis first enters into the history of photography. Tagg has located the basic human need to understand his or her fellow human beings within the socio-historical rhetorical structure resulting from the “transparency of the photograph:

the transparency of the photograph is its most powerful rhetorical device. But this rhetoric also has a history, and we must distance ourselves from it, question the naturalness of portraiture and probe the obviousness of each image. As we begin to do this, they must appear strange, often incompatible with one another. Comfortable notions of the history of photography and sentimentalities about the *Family of Man* must be left behind.²¹²

Tagg asserts the importance of questioning the “naturalness of portraiture,”

²¹¹ See Armstrong, “Biology, Destiny, Photography: Difference According to Diane Arbus,” 29-54. Armstrong argues that “I do think it is possible to claim, both with and against the grain, that Arbus’s production is all about the *punctum*--in that it is all about the unintentional, unassimilated detail, and all about a kind of “scrutiny” whose object in particular, the peculiar, and the traumatic, indeed, all about a kind of *studium* (the general aesthetic and information field that is the other crucial term in Barthes’s semiotics of the photograph), which is everywhere “flawed” by the *punctum*. In other words, perhaps more than any others, Arbus’s is a production that *announces* the systemic importance of the antisystematic *punctum* to the medium.” According to Barthes, however, the *punctum* cannot be premeditated by the photographer; it is in and of itself a function of the *viewer* looking at a photograph. I argue in Chapter Three that Arbus’s work is perhaps closer to what Barthes calls, in *Camera Lucida*, the “photographic shock.”

²¹² John Tagg, The Burden of Representation: Essays and Photographies and Histories (Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 35.

something which, to Arbus and others of her generation, became an important goal. Clearly, by the mid-nineteen-fifties, the American middle class had become comfortable with stereotypical images of itself and the Other. This sensibility often was linked to the *space* of the photograph, to the landscape or the interior in which the subject was photographed. This space was mediated by a controlling gaze which contained and stigmatized the subject. Tagg refers to a new sense of space that the "surveillance" photograph engendered:

The asylum, slum, scene of a crime, or farm field,... are confronted with the same frontality and measured against an ideal space: a clear space, a healthy space, a space of unobstructed lines of sight, open to vision and supervision; a desirable space in which bodies will be changed into disease-free, orderly, docile and disciplined subjects; a space, in Foucault's sense, of a new strategy of power-knowledge. For this is what is at stake in missionary explorations, in urban clearance, saintary reform and health supervision, in constant, regularised policing--and in the photography which furnished them from the start with so central a technique.²¹³

Arbus gives us the same spatial clarity in her square-format photographs, but ruptures the viewer's passive voyeurism of the subject by the return of the gaze. The spaces of her subjects are comfortable for them but uncomfortable for the 1960s viewer. Arbus's subjects represented a subversive class who, situated into the interstices between the destitute, the middle class, and the aristocracy, comprised an anti-class, united only by their difference. All of this is enacted within the discursive space of the fashion magazine, and so must be seen as playing with the tropes familiar to the audience of fashion magazines.

Sekula has defined important terrain in reference to particular aspects of nineteenth-century portrait photography, such as with "rogue's galleries" of criminals and the insane.²¹⁴ Sekula grounds his Marxist theory of photography on the semiotics of the nineteenth-century American pragmatist Charles Sanders

²¹³ Ibid., 64.

²¹⁴ See Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive" (first published in *October* 39, 1986) in Richard Bolton ed., *The Contest of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 344.

Peirce. Arguing that photographs are indexical signs, Sekula points to the photograph as a kind of representation linked by a connection of its objects to a referent.²¹⁵ Sekula believed this relationship to be fundamentally socially contingent. The physiognomic nature of the mid-nineteenth-century portrait is a large part of what constitutes such contingency. Sekula aptly describes the effect of this role for portraiture in establishing the "other":

Photographic portraiture began to perform a role no painted portrait could have performed in the same thorough and rigorous fashion. This role derived, not from any honorific portrait tradition, but from the imperatives of medical and anatomical illustration. Thus photography came to establish and delimit the terrain of the other, to define both the generalized look--the typology--and the contingent instance of deviance and social pathology.²¹⁶

Sekula's conception of the honorific/repressive portrait tradition points to a binarism which Model, Weegee, and Frank sought to unsettle, but Arbus's social panorama was perhaps the most complete and sustained manifestation of the deconstruction of the honorific/repressive binarism.

Portraits by nineteenth-century 'art photographers' contain positivist evidence which develops into a kind of unconscious substratum of the photograph in the 20th century, something which remains essentially the same despite shifting aesthetic sensibilities (from pictorialism to straight photography, for example). The formalist discourse of Modernism tends to efface the existence of positivist information in portraiture. Robert Sobieszek argues that,

in the now-classic modernist portrait, the face is customarily isolated from both body and its context; it is pictured as a blank arena or site for external investigation...the modern portrait remains a surface...seen in this context, this type of portrait is truly more indexical than interpretive or penetrative, and the modernist photographer more interested in similarities and differences

²¹⁵ For a good discussion of Sekula in terms of the larger postmodern critical debate of photography, see Geoffrey Batchen, Burning With Desire: The Conception of Photography (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 4-21.

²¹⁶ Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," 345.

among types...²¹⁷

Walter Benjamin's discussion of August Sander's photographs in "A Short History of Photography" links physiognomic readings to the Surrealists' interest in the unconscious.²¹⁸ For Benjamin, Sander's work contained an "optical unconscious" which revealed telling physical characteristics otherwise unavailable to the naked eye. Benjamin argued that Sander's photographs captured the "physiognomic aspects of the world of images" which reside in our unconscious:

photography, however, with its time lapses, enlargements, etc. makes such knowledge possible. Through these methods one first learns of this optical unconscious, just as one learns of the drives of the unconscious through psychoanalysis. Concern with structure, cell forms, the improvement of medicine through these techniques: the camera is ultimately more closely related to these than the moody landscape or the soulful portrait. At the same time, however, photography opens up in this material the physiognomic aspects of the world of images, which reside in the smallest details, clear yet hidden enough to have found shelter in daydreams.²¹⁹

Thus the photograph mimics the processes of psychoanalysis, revealing physiognomic details and aberrations otherwise perceptible only to our unconscious. Where Benjamin sees scientific knowledge as being possible, he also saw social knowledge, inseparable from scientific knowledge in Weimar Germany. Sander's photographs for Benjamin were first and foremost scientific documents, objective "truths" which implied a resistance to the racial differentiation of the Nazis.

The passage from Benjamin may be used to frame the way in which photography is read from the nineteenth to the twentieth century in terms of

²¹⁷ Robert A. Sobieszek, Ghost in the Shell: Photography and the Human Soul, 1850-2000: Essays on Camera Portraiture (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 136.

²¹⁸ Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography" (1931), in Allen Trachtenberg ed., Classic Essays on Photography (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980).

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 211.

physiognomic looking. Steven Jay Gould describes its pseudo-scientific corollary:

The nineteenth century focused on physical measurement of skulls, either the outside (by ruler and calipers, and by constructing various indices and ratios for the shapes and sizes of heads) or the inside (by mustard seed or lead shot, to fill the cranium and measure the volume of the braincase). The twentieth century moved to the putatively more direct method of measuring the content of brains by intelligence testing. In short, from measuring the physical properties of skulls to measuring the interior stuff in brains.²²⁰

Historically contingent, photography seems to follow this scientific shift from measuring exteriors to interiors. Benjamin argues that physiognomic looking is a process which has “found shelter in daydreams,” or has lodged itself within our unconscious. Rosalind Krauss counters, “but what can we speak of in the visual field that will be an analogue of the “unconscious” itself, a structure that presupposes first a sentient being which it operates, and second a structure that only makes sense insofar as it is in conflict with that being’s consciousness? Can the optical field--the world of visual phenomena: clouds, sea, sky, forest--*have* an unconscious?”²²¹ Perhaps not in and of itself alone, but our optical field is ultimately inseparable from the phenomenal perception of visual data and its residence in *memory*. Physiognomic details, then, are *touchstones* to our unconscious, gathered through the looking-glass of the optical field and processed through the screen of memory. I would suggest that what makes such unconscious recognition possible for Benjamin is the twentieth century’s inheritance of the way in which the majority of photographs were read and discussed in the predominant positivist culture of the nineteenth century. Extended to portraiture, such a reading is governed by the physiognomic makeup of the sitter, and the indexical way in which that sitter’s physical

²²⁰ Steven Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co., 1996), 23.

²²¹ Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1993), 178-79.

characteristics were read as essential markers of "character." Today, it seems that Arbus and others of her generation fundamentally challenged the historical determinism whose roots go deep--back to the beginnings of photographic portraiture and the ideologies that shaped its production and reception.

This chapter has traced a line through the history of photography from the beginnings of their destabilization in the 1950s to the positivist and eugenic typologies of the nineteenth century. The conventions of the social gallery of photographs by the 1950s are well established in that they connected the photographic portrait to a preset language of signification which made often unfair or misleading assumptions about individuals based upon specious science. Such assumptions extended into different discursive arenas of photography, from advertising and photo-stories to art photography. Arbus was familiar with these conventions through her mentor, Lisette Model, and friendships with most notable photographers working in New York during her lifetime, such as Weegee, Walker Evans, Robert Frank, and Richard Avedon. She was also close with Museum of Modern Art's Curator of Photography John Szarkowski, and they shared a fertile dialogue about photography. Arbus's library also indicates her own familiarity with the history of photography. The next chapter will be the context with which these photographs call on that history, and form a reaction to the social climate of the 1960s.

Chapter II

Arbus and the Critical Atmosphere Surrounding Portraiture in the 1960s: Some Social and Theoretical Considerations

This chapter situates three interrelated aspects of Arbus's work within a broader cultural and critical condition, prevalent in the 1960s, in which some of the underlying sociological assumptions inherent in photographic portrait galleries (covered in Chapter One) were thrown into question. This critical condition needs to be considered as inseparable from the seeds of social dissent fomented in the 1960s, in particular with the Civil Rights movement, the Women's movement, influential student organizations like the SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society), and the widespread protest of the Vietnam War. As discussed in the first chapter, photographic portrait galleries could be found in both art photography and the mass media--particularly in magazine advertisements. Such galleries, overwhelmingly composed of white male faces, forged a link between the photographic image and the way in which Americans assembled a sense of history and national identity. The work of Diane Arbus, taken as a whole, suggests a critique of the way that social types were formed and disseminated to the popular imagination via magazines. I intend to focus my analysis, then, on the work she published in magazines while she was alive.

Arbus liked to look at photographs by other photographers whom she admired. Numerous friends and acquaintances have mentioned her extensive

knowledge of the history of photography.²²² Arbus would hang out at Helen Gee's Limelight Gallery and discuss photography with photographers whose work she respected, like Louis Faurer and Robert Frank.²²³ Often, there was a copy of *U.S. Camera Annual* on the table. The photographer John Gossage remembered a conversation with Arbus "a few years before her death. We had between us a copy of the 1955 *U.S. Camera Annual* from which she picked out [Louis] Faurer's picture of Eddie [(1948, figure 2-1)]. The fact that Diane Arbus saw Eddie and it was a special picture for her is something. Eddie in the midst of all those mundane photographs, it almost looks like a lucky shot..."²²⁴ Faurer's picture of identical twins in the photograph New York, NY, 1948 (figure 2-2) appeared in *U.S. Camera Annual* in 1951, and will later be compared to Arbus's now-iconic Identical Twins, Roselle, New Jersey, 1967 (figure 2-3). Arbus's work of this kind engages photography's ability to provide evidence of the social type, and acknowledges how the photograph has the power to perpetuate that type. She uses that power against itself.

I. A Close Reading of Arbus's Statements

Seen today, Arbus's statements and written work support the notion of her portraits as a social panorama. An explication of Arbus's Warholian, often

²²² For example, Arbus taught photography at Parsons in 1965, and one of her students, Paula Hutsinger, recalls looking at many different photography books Arbus would bring to class. See Bosworth, *Diane Arbus, a Biography*, 238. Photographer Bruce Davidson mentioned that "Diane started making me aware of the history of photography," and recalls discussing then little-known photographers such as Erich Salomon and Jacques Henri Lartigue. Davidson in Bosworth, 230.

²²³ The documentary photographer Walter Silver remembers sitting at a big table with Arbus, Frank, and Faurer. See *ibid.*, 208. Also Anne Wilkes Tucker, *Louis Faurer* (exh. cat. Houston: The Museum of Fine Arts, 2001), 37.

²²⁴ John Gossage, "Louis Faurer" (unpublished draft of essay written for proposed exhibition at the Lunn Gallery, c. 1980). footnote 42 in *Ibid.*, 44.

deadpan statements is a good starting point in revealing her project as more representative of a social panorama than has been previously considered.²²⁵

Arbus's approach to photographing her subjects is indicated in part in excerpts from interviews published in the 1972 *Diane Arbus* monograph. A key phrase is used opposite the title page of the *Arbus* monograph, although not in the manner in which I intend to discuss it: "Nothing is ever the same as they said it was. It's what I've never seen before that I recognize."²²⁶ When considered in response to her *oeuvre*, the sentence may be taken at face value to mean that one must not accept preconceived notions about people and the places they inhabit as truth before first visiting them. Arbus says that, before going to photograph an event like a beauty contest, "you picture it in your mind a little bit, that there'll be these people who'll be the judges and they'll be choosing the winner from all these contestants and then you go there and it's not like that at all." In these two statements, Arbus suggests a separation between prejudged notions about appearances and the reality of a situation.

In Arbus's Muscle Man Contestant, N.Y.C. of 1968 (Figure 2-4), she has chosen to photograph a contestant in a pose with his back to the audience, but facing the camera. As a contestant, the Muscle Man is part of a social gallery with eugenic overtones, designed to judge the relative perfection of the physical exterior of the subject. The muscle man's face is not visible to the audience in the background, and Arbus has caught him in a moment of concentration as he

²²⁵ In her "America, Seen Through Photographs, Darkly," Susan Sontag uses Arbus's statements published in the 1972 monograph to argue that the photographs form a dark, surreal vision. This section offers an alternative reading. Arbus's photo-stories will receive greater attention in Chapter Four in a comparison with those of *New Yorker* writer Joseph Mitchell.

²²⁶ Arbus in Diane Arbus, An Aperture Monograph, 1-15. According to the book, the text is a transcribed compilation of tape recordings of a series of classes Arbus gave in 1971, as well as interviews with Studs Terkel and with Ann Ray Martin of Newsweek, and from some of her own writings. The following discussion contains quotations from these same sources, unless otherwise indicated.

looks up toward some unseen thing. Upon closer inspection, though, the muscle man has some flaws. His arms seem to be too small in comparison to his thick torso. He has a poorly-trimmed moustache, and a large pimple on his chin. The visible seam in the stage, the cheap trophies, and the somewhat less-than-perfectly muscled contestant suggest a local event, as opposed to a national contest. This muscle man contestant seems uncomfortable on the stage; perhaps this is his first contest.

In the social context of the contest, the muscle man is being judged as a type which defines itself by the symmetry and superior size of muscles. But the Muscle Man's name is obscure. We only know that he is 'number 23' by the handwritten, curling label affixed to his black bikini briefs. Arbus, in photographing him facing away from the audience, captures the muscle man with his 'mask' off. His face is not in the performative expression it would be were he facing the crowd. In other words, he is having a private moment on a very public stage. The slippage between the social event, the body flaws, and the private expression in the Muscle Man Contestant is what critiques positivist looking in Arbus's work. Despite being judged by his physique, by the typology of the flexing, hyper-masculine Muscle Man, Arbus's Muscle Man Contestant is a sentient subject with physical flaws having a private thought. Arbus captures the individuality of the subject, who resists positivist typology.

Returning to Arbus's words, she seems to explicitly reject the notion of looking at people in terms of preconceived criteria. "It's what I've never seen before that I recognize" indicates two things: that Arbus recognizes something larger in the newness of what she sees, and, by extension, identifies certain samenesses of things despite never having seen them before. She plays in the social terrain of our instinctive need to categorize people by observation. For Arbus, recognizability has a surreal dimension, a sense of the uncanny and the

humorous. And she knows we will get a chuckle. But a humanism exists in this recognition of "what I've never seen before" which gives identity to individuals who resist, or complicate, or even expose the fallacy of typologies. For Arbus, these typologies are façades which the individual arranges according to social convention, and do not fully work because of "the flaw" we all possess. She locates this flaw as the principal signifier of the separation "between what you want people to know about you and what you can't help people knowing about you. And that has to do with what I've always called the gap between intention and effect." For Arbus, the "gap between intention and effect" is what effaces the reduction of individuals to types. It reveals the often supercilious ways in which, and sources through which, we construct our social appearance.

Arbus would arrange a photo shoot with an individual she, in most instances, had never met. She liked working from the uneasy and exciting position of seeing someone and their place of residence for the first time. She described the experience as like being on a blind date: "...sometimes I have a sinking feeling of, Oh God it's time and I really don't want to go. And then, once I'm on my way, something terrific takes over about the sort of queasiness of it and how there's absolutely no method for control." Model encouraged Arbus to be as specific in her subject matter as possible. Arbus mentions that Model "finally made it clear to me that the more specific you are, the more general it'll be." The word "general" is telling in terms of intentional social commentary. General may be taken to mean recognizable, on the formal level of the clarity of the picture, but it seems that Arbus refers to the recognizable generality of the social message which a specific individual might bring to a broader audience. Generality is where the art of her images resides, in the transparency of the subject matter. She said, "A photograph has to be specific. I remember a long time ago, when I first began to photograph I thought, there are an awful lot of

people in the world and it's going to be terribly hard to photograph all of them, so if I photograph some kind of generalized human being everybody'll recognize it. It'll be like what they used to call the common man or something." This statement suggests a conceptual affinity for producing a social panorama. Arbus mentions that this kind of specificity entails a looking that requires "a measure of exactitude," which demands "certain evasions, certain nicenesses you have to get out of." For Arbus, these evasions involved not photographing people the way they wished to be photographed. Arbus was not interested in bestowing an honorific aura around her sitters. But her statement reveals two things: the wish to say something larger (more 'general') about humanity (via Model's influence), and an interest in an elision of the type by photographing people contrary to the way they tended to 'arrange themselves' for the camera. Arbus knew that people *became* types by arranging themselves, and she wanted to disrupt that.

Perhaps in response to Edward Weston's notion of the previsualized image, Arbus stated "I never have taken a picture I've intended. They're always better or worse." Following Model, Arbus rejected the idea that a photographer can produce an image visualized *a priori* in the mind: "The thing that's important to know is that you never know. You're always sort of feeling your way." In retrospect, it appears that 'intention' for Arbus is a kind of retrospective projection, a recognition of something she did not know at the time.

Arbus also questioned the insistence on the perfectly-produced print, an aesthetic championed by Ansel Adams and Minor White, among others, which emphasizes the subtle gradation of halftones and the texture of the subject over the identity of the subject itself. This lack of interest in the perfect print is significant in her approach to a social panorama, in that she stresses what the photograph is *of* rather than what it is: "For me the subject of the picture is

always more important than the picture. And more complicated. I do have a feeling for the print but I don't have a holy feeling for it. I really think what it is, is what it is about. I mean it has to be of something. And what it's of is always more remarkable than what it is." For Arbus, "what it's of" suggests that there exists a relationship of the subject to something extraneous to the picture. She intimates that the photograph is not a closed, autonomous work of art, but is predicated on a social referent.

II. Photographic Pastiche as a Critical Apparatus in the 1960s

In his *History: The Last Things Before the Last*, published in 1969, Siegfried Kracauer noted a contemporary historical malaise, a "crumbling of part of our idea-system," which manifests itself in two major aspects: a loss of confidence in the "inherently progressive nature of science," and in ideologies, such as Marxism.²²⁷ Within this sense of ideological decomposition, Kracauer sought to understand how photography and history intersect. Kracauer's *History* was timely in that it appeared at the end of a decade when sharply defined social and political ideologies were under fire and photographers were increasingly critical of photography's function in the dissemination of ideological meaning. As mentioned in Chapter I, certain American photographers grew disenchanted with the use of photography in the service of what they saw to be an outmoded ideological system which suggested a falsely optimistic vision of history and social relations. Some photographers chafed against their work being used by popular magazines without their direct control. The *Magnum* group, and, a decade later, high-profile fashion photographers such as Richard Avedon,

²²⁷ Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The last Things Before the Last* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 5-6. Kracauer's text echoes a larger generational critique which defines the 1960s, and I wish to always have Arbus's work seen within that structure.

sought, and received, more authorial control over the presentation of their work.²²⁸ Aesthetically, they began to question the use of their work in the service of what was viewed by some as a stereotypical masquerade of people rendered in socially-oriented typologies such as the *Family of Man* exhibition. During a social climate in which the dominance of photographs of the kind, decent, happy-go-lucky, white, middle-class American from the pages of *Life* was being questioned, artists and photographers began to produce "critical" galleries that undermined the liberal humanism inherent in photographic typologies.

Photographers like Klein and Frank did not disguise their contempt for the American way of life as presented in popular magazines and the *Family of Man* exhibition.²²⁹ Frank said, "I wanted to follow my own intuition and do it my way, and not make any concession[s]--not make a *Life* story. That was another thing I hated. Those goddamned [*Life*] stories with a beginning and an end."²³⁰ Klein's "Family Album," the first section of his book *Life is Good and Good for You in New York* (1956), presents a snapshot montage of New Yorkers of different ethnicities in a direct, funny, and confrontational manner which departed from the *Family of Man*'s sentimentalized stereotypes. Klein's repertorial "street" style engaged the "look" of documentary photography, but his subjects in the book are not heroic. They are crowded, nervous, violent, and aggressive, and confront the viewer. They attest to the speed, tumult, and crass consumerism of the New

²²⁸ *Magnum Photos*, founded in 1947 by Robert Capa, originally included Henri Cartier-Bresson, W. Eugene Smith, David (Chim) Seymour, George Rodger, William Vandivert, Rita Vandivert, Maria Eisner, and later, Edward Weston, Bruce Davidson, Eliot Erwit, Leonard Freed, Phillip Jones Griffith, Joseph Kudełka, and Sebastião Salgado, among others. See Fred Ritchin's summary, "Magnum Photos" in Michel Frizot, *A New History of Photography* (Cologne: Könemann, 1998), 598.

²²⁹ See James Guimond, *American Photography and the American Dream* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press), 226.

²³⁰ Robert Frank in Eugenia Parry Janis and Wendy McNeil, eds., *Photography Within the Humanities* (Danbury, NH: Addison House, 1977), 56.

York urban experience. Sandra Phillips calls *Life is Good and Good For You* "a deliberately confused, ironic pop book..it is one of the first instances of examining American pop culture in its blunt but empty vitality, and presented in its graphic inventiveness."²³¹ James Guimond points to Klein's ironic use of billboards: "There are commercial signs, billboards, and posters in many of his ["Family Album"] images, and most of them look silly or ironic...products in advertisements are almost always seen as integral parts of clean, orderly, or pristine environments, whereas in Klein's images advertisements for the same products (or their logos) become integral parts of a grimy, debased, urban environment...."²³² For example, in Klein's 29th Street and Second Avenue, New York City of 1954 (figure 2-5), a burly man sits a stocky dwarf on his shoulders--an act of horseplay, perhaps, as the man on the left laughs as he offers further support to the dwarf. The dwarf wears a suit and has a pipe clenched between his teeth, and does not seem the least bit shy about Klein's presence. Behind this unusual scene, a large 'Liquors' sign may be seen. The slightly off-center way in which the image is composed and the crowding of the figures into the foreground, and the presence of the 'Liquors' sign, suggests a lurching quality which mimes the effect of drunkenness or jostling on the human equilibrium. Perhaps this trio is engaged in drunken shenanigans? Klein's photographs began to play within the increasingly ubiquitous terrain of mass media image, reproduction, and repetition as experienced on the street.

The quotidian nature of mass-produced images became fertile ground for a new conception of pastiche grounded in Pop irony and appropriation. This new photographic pastiche was a way for artists in the 1960s to question historical ideologies inherent in portrait galleries. Instead of remaining almost

²³¹ Sandra S. Phillips, Life is Good & Good For You in New York: Trance Witness Revels (Exh. cat. San Francisco, CA: SF MoMA, 1995), 15.

²³² Guimond, American Photography and the American Dream, 229-230.

completely aloof to popular culture, as the dominant Abstract Expressionists had done in the late forties and fifties, some artists (and photographers) started working with photographic images of popular culture. Such a shift echoed the Frankfurt-school theory of Herbert Marcuse.²³³ Marcuse's work was influential in the sixties to a generation struggling to define its identity against that of its predecessors (and parents). Departing from the thought of his senior Frankfurt-School colleagues, such as Theodor Adorno, who believed 'serious art' must 'negate,' or remain aloof from, popular culture in order to be a useful critical voice against it, Marcuse argued for a "sublation of culture" in which art rejected illusion and autonomy in favor of reality.²³⁴ Many people interpreted Marcuse's idea through the screen of Pop art, and believed Pop fulfilled Marcuse's statement that "art must not be illusion but express reality and the joy in reality."²³⁵ Such a statement argued for a shift from abstraction to realism (in Germany, Pop was generally referred to as 'capitalist realism.'). The 'new reality' of Pop was fundamentally expressed in the reproduced photographic image. The reproduced photographic image became the grounds for a new artistic conception of pastiche.

Webster's dictionary offers two possible definitions of pastiche: a deliberate and close imitation of a previous work, or a hodgepodge of different styles and variations.²³⁶ Pastiche in the 1960s was undertaken with the

²³³ See Andreas Huyssen's discussion of the impact of Marcuse's "The Affirmative Character of Culture" in Huyssen's "The Cultural Politics of Pop"; Huyssen, After the Great Divide (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1986), 143-46. For a broader view of Marcuse's impact on the Sixties, and new interpretations of his theoretical legacy, see John Abromeit and W. Mark Cobb, ed., Herbert Marcuse, A Critical Reader (New York and London: Routledge, 2004); also Frederic Jameson, "Periodizing the 60s" in Sohnya Sayres et. al. eds., The 60s Without Apology (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 196-209.

²³⁴ Huyssen, 145.

²³⁵ Marcuse, "The Affirmative Character of Culture," in *Ibid.*, 131.

²³⁶ Webster's 3rd International Dictionary, 1652.

photograph as a common denominator, either by direct copy, as was the case with Andy Warhol and Gerhard Richter, or a thematically recognizable similarity to the original, as found in some of Arbus's work. Warhol's 13 Most Wanted Men of 1964 (figure 2-6) and Richter's 48 Portraits of 1970 (figure 2-7) are examples of the pastiche as direct copy.²³⁷ For Richter, using the formal portrait as the basis of imagery in his painting was a way to critically examine the culture in which it was produced. Benjamin Buchloh argues that Richter's 48 Portraits "result in an instability, if not the actual breakdown of this fiction [that of a cohesive cultural canon], of a transnational, liberal-humanist community [which] was, then, as integral to its constitution as were the careful omissions that guaranteed its success as an acceptable fiction of a paternal history."²³⁸ Buchloh's positioning of the critique of an unstable liberal humanism manifests itself in a new form of ironic, deadpan pastiche that a number of artists were beginning to exploit in the 1960s.

It is important to separate pastiche from parody. Frederic Jameson argues that the use of pastiche in the 1960s by such practitioners as Robert Venturi and Warhol helped to instigate the "postmodern rupture." According to Jameson, their work had two main agendas: the first, a reaction against some sort of entrenched modernist paradigm, and the second, the blurring of some previously firm boundaries separating high culture from low culture. Of the second, Jameson notes that

many of the newer postmodernisms have been fascinated precisely by that whole landscape of advertising and motels, of the Las Vegas strip, of the late show and Grade-B Hollywood film, of so-called paraliterature with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery and the science-fiction or fantasy novel. They no longer

²³⁷ See Benjamin Buchloh, "Andy Warhol's One-Dimensional Art: 1956-1966," in Kynaston McShine, Andy Warhol: A Retrospective (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1989), 39-62.

²³⁸ Buchloh, "Divided Memory and Post-Traditional Identity: Gerhard Richter's Work of Mourning," October 75 (Winter 1996), 75.

“quote” such “texts” as a Joyce might have done, or a Mahler; they incorporate them, to the point where the lines between high art and commercial forms seem increasingly difficult to draw.²³⁹

Jameson distinguishes pastiche from parody. To Jameson, parody “capitalizes on the uniqueness of [styles] and seizes on their idiosyncrasies and eccentricities to produce an imitation which mocks the original.”²⁴⁰ But Arbus’s photographs, and the work of Warhol and Richter, for that matter, resist the moniker of parody. With a couple of exceptions, there is no overall interest in capitalizing on the “idiosyncrasies and eccentricities” found in individual styles to jeer at the original. If there is something that unites Warhol, Richter, and Arbus, it is not the desire to mock, but to effect social commentary through an ironic deadpan. There is also a kinship with the history of their chosen medium: Arbus with the history of photographic social type portraits, and Warhol and Richter with the history of painting. Thus the concept of pastiche in the 1960s departed from its previously pejorative association with kitsch, as indicated by Jameson. It now could be seen as a new form of realism predicated upon the ubiquity of the photograph in popular culture and the contingency of the photograph to popular culture. In 1973 Linda Nochlin aligned an Arbus photograph with a deadpan yet ironic pastiche characteristic of contemporary realism:

In Robert Bechtle’s Christmas at Gilroy and Arbus’s A Christmas Tree in a Living Room in Levittown, Long Island, 1962, the ‘Christmas’ now exists—if it does at all—as an ironic reminder of mundane factuality...the segment of contemporary reality chosen functions as a synecdoche for a larger but no less banal totality. While neither work is in any sense symbolic, each, by merely documenting how things were at a certain time in a certain place, stands as a cool, incontrovertible fragment of a larger reality. And in both cases, the richness of ‘irrelevant’ detail is the very essence of the style. One might almost say that the imagery has become nothing but the contingent relationships existing among the elements. In fact the imagery is held together by nothing but

²³⁹ Frederic Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” in Hal Foster ed., The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 111-112.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

sheer contingency.²⁴¹

Other writers have also considered the new use of pastiche as a stylistic device which heralded a postmodern sensibility. Brandon Taylor has argued that Warhol "became post-modern at the point where he stopped making images about the world and began making images about other images instead...pastiche and second-hand borrowing are post-modern in becoming distanced from the actual world behind a screen of other cultural patterns, other discourses within the culture of art."²⁴² An extended discussion of pastiche and postmodernism is beyond the scope of my dissertation, but it is important to understand Warhol's and Arbus's work as an artistic practice that engages "the actual world behind a screen of other cultural patterns" Taylor mentions.

Rosalind Krauss provides a postmodern reading of Picasso based on pastiche which is important to consider in terms of how I believe it was used in the 1960s. Krauss locates the connection between pastiche and popular imagery before the postmodern moment. In *The Picasso Papers*, she argues for a reading of Picasso's "Ingresque" pencil portraits in terms of a new consideration of pastiche, positioning the reading of his '*rappel a l'ordre*' work within a psychopathology of reaction formation produced by the sometimes harsh criticism he received from his public in wartime Paris.²⁴³ She identifies Picasso's pastiche with the hard, precise graphite pencil line he uses to produce the pencil portraits in the 1920s: "a stubbornly continuous line, the matrix of his

²⁴¹ Linda Nochlin, "The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law" (*Art in America*, 1973) in Richard Hertz ed., *Theories of Contemporary Art* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1985), 45.

²⁴² Brandon Taylor, *Modernism, Post-Modernism, Realism: A Critical Perspective for Art* (Hampshire, England: Winchester School of Art Press, 1987), 8.

²⁴³ Krauss, *The Picasso Papers*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998), 96. My discussion of Arbus's use of pastiche, and the phenomena of pastiche as it relates to the 1960s, stems from her nuanced reading of pastiche via Gerard Genette.

pastiche.”²⁴⁴ Such a process gave the portraits, by virtue of their “Ingresque” line, an instantly recognizable mark of “French” authenticity. Yet Krauss considers Picasso’s line to be automated and depersonalized, serialized and mechanical—quite the opposite of the values of uniqueness and rarity which constitute the ‘culture of the museum.’²⁴⁵ She delineates Picasso’s use of pastiche in terms of the readymade: “It is Picasso’s line itself, then, that ties the knot linking the manufactured object and the pastiched image, revealing them both as simply two orders of *readymade* (my italics).”²⁴⁶ According to Krauss, Picasso’s pastiche is not just a bald, retrograde attempt by the artist to copy the old masters by painting like them. Underlying his work is a more serious attempt at image production based upon the increasing cultural ubiquity of the manufactured object, the *objet trouvé*, and the reproduced image. Like Picasso, Arbus was aware of the reproduced image’s ability to signify, and worked within the familiarity of signification fundamentally constitutive of the pastiche to disrupt its normative readings and associations.

Krauss’s discussion of literary theorist Gerard Genette’s analysis of pastiche is significant in terms of the use of it as a cultural critique. Krauss argues that, “in analyzing pastiche, Genette reminds us that its practice is not a purely stylistic affair; the thematic material of the model is also in question.”²⁴⁷ Krauss suggests that the use of pastiche eschews the mere trace or copy by adopting a critical agenda in relation to exterior circumstances, and may involve larger thematic issues that do not have to do merely with formal style. Krauss’s

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 142.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Krauss, *The Picasso Papers*, 96. My discussion of Arbus’s use of pastiche, and the phenomena of pastiche as it relates to the 1960s, stems from her nuanced reading of pastiche via Gerard Genette., 203.

reading of pastiche via Picasso persuasively situates the practice as a culturally contingent phenomenon.

It is important to trace the nature of pastiche in the 1960s in relation to Pop art. Based on the serial nature of the endlessly reproduced photograph, Pop willfully challenged the tropes of authorship and originality characteristic of Abstract painting. At the level of the image, what was at stake was what Roland Barthes considered to be a shift from a primary to a secondary mimesis, or a shift from 'the copy' to a 'copy of the copy'. By the late 1960s, Barthes saw a connection between the copy and a new realism. In *S/Z*, Barthes had the following to say about the nature of pastiche in terms of realism:

realism...consists not in copying the real but in copying a (depicted) copy of the real: this famous *reality*, as though suffering from a fearfulness which keeps it from being touched directly, is set further away, postponed, or at least captured through the pictorial matrix in which it has been steeped before being put into words: code upon code, known as realism. This is why realism cannot be designated a 'copier' but rather a 'pasticheur': through secondary mimesis, it copies what is already a copy)²⁴⁸.

The "copy of a copy" Barthes speaks of is predicated upon a common language of codes in place and widely disseminated in mass media photography. Warhol, for example, exploited the iconic readability of celebrity portfolio shots of Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, and James Dean that he knew the public would recognize; Arbus engaged in a more subtle dialogue with photographs she knew and felt strongly about, such as those by Weegee, Lisette Model, Bill Brandt, and others. Arbus gave new meaning to similar subjects through allusions to fashion photography and photojournalism. Her work, then, relies upon a new conception of pastiche grounded in a realism that engages a "common language of codes" constituted by the semiotic quality of photography. Arbus, then, saw the surface of the individual as a constructed assemblage of culturally contingent

²⁴⁸ Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000 (1970), 55. Barthes was referring to painting, but what greater realism is there than the photograph?

codes, and sought to show how such an assemblage conflicted with the body of the individual--her gap between intention and effect. Specific examples of Arbus's use of pastiche will be given in Section III of this chapter; for now, I would like to continue my analysis of pastiche in the 1960s.

Other artists explored similar terrain in terms of pastiche as a critical framework. Gerhard Richter's 48 Portraits incorporated "readymade" photographic images of famous individuals from encyclopedias. Such famous men were from both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries--on the surface, clearly an honorific gallery.²⁴⁹ Richter executed this work for the West German Pavilion at the 1972 Venice Biennale, where Arbus's work, the first presentation at the Biennale by an American photographer, was also exhibited.²⁵⁰ The 48 Portraits involved a seriality of presentation. The plan of Richter's installation was based upon a simple formal principle: in the center, a frontal portrait (the Physicist Blackett), while the adjoining portraits to the left, pictured in up to three-quarters profile, all looked, to varying degrees, in that direction; those to the right completed the row of portraits symmetrically, but faced in the opposite direction.²⁵¹ All of the faces, apparently of important white men, appear outwardly to be a gallery honoring their achievements with portrait busts. But, on closer analysis, 48 Portraits starts to slip as an honorific gallery. The close-cropped, black-and-white images, hung closely together, are rendered as part of a larger aesthetic system. They are cut off from the biographical information that renders the photographs part of a historical narrative, and by extension, iconic. The heads become objects in a line of similar objects, not unlike the seriality of consumer products, and are thus depersonalized. Without captions,

²⁴⁹ Buchloh, "Readymade, Photography, and Painting in the Paintings of Gerhard Richter" in Buchloh, Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2000), 370.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 384.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 387.

one head runs into another, rendering the faces more or less anonymous and repetitive. Richter's heads conflate the mechanical nature of serial repetition with the portrait gallery, thus obscuring the focus on the single individual (despite our ability to recognize a couple of faces, such as Franz Kafka). By their relation to a kind of banal, mechanized movement, Buchloh argues that "the grotesque abstraction in the positioning of the figures in Richter's pantheon--their puppet-like, mechanical, or cinematographic movement--instantly dismantles the pantheon's credibility."²⁵² In 48 Portraits, Richter's famous men are turned into anonymous parts in the service of a whole, a transformation that suggests motion--not unlike the repetitions of images in certain Futurist paintings, or in Thomas Eakins's and Eadweard Muybridge's chronophotographs.

In the early sixties, Andy Warhol also explored the terrain of photographic pastiche in relation to portraiture. Warhol's painting Let Us Now Praise Famous Men of 1963 (figure 2-8) presents a sly tribute to Robert Rauschenberg in that Warhol has assembled repetitive silkscreened images of snapshots of Rauschenberg as a child with his family, and as a young man. Warhol's appropriation of the title of James Agee's and Walker Evans's book of the same name links snapshots from Rauschenberg's childhood and adolescence to the myth of the dignity of poverty conveyed by Evans's photographs. Rauschenberg becomes Evans's George Gudger. Warhol both sends up and affirms Rauschenberg's celebrity-artist status and his humble Texas origins. We view Rauschenberg through the screen of documentary photography, or, at least, Warhol's copies of depression-era documentary photography: the Barthesian 'copy of a copy.' Warhol engages the viewer's knowledge of Evans's work (Agee and Evans's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men was re-released in

²⁵² Buchloh, "Divided Memory and Post-Traditional Identity: Gerhard Richter's Work of Mourning," October 75 (Winter 1996), 75.

1961, and had a substantial circulation in the early sixties) to depict Rauschenberg, but the silkscreened image repetitions characteristic of much of Warhol's best work of the period attest to their quotidian value in a period of media saturation. The fading and darkening of silkscreened images suggest a flicker, like short clips of film.²⁵³

Warhol's 13 Most Wanted Men was commissioned by Philip Johnson in 1964 to decorate the façade of the New York State Pavilion at the New York World's Fair.²⁵⁴ The work consisted of twenty-five masonite panels, each four feet square.²⁵⁵ Each panel consisted of a mugshot of an unnamed criminal shown frontally and occasionally repeated in profile. Warhol took the portraits from a booklet issued by the New York Police Department, itself a 'rogue's gallery,' and printed each of his images onto a masonite panel of approximately 4 x 3 feet.²⁵⁶ The white background of the images, coupled with the purposive effect of the roughly-presented silkscreens, with smudges and overapplied ink, served to negate a close reading of physiognomy associated with mugshots. Warhol celebrates and monumentalizes the mug of the criminal by his public presentation at mural scale.

The ironic commentary of Warhol's anti-gallery was not lost on World's Fair officials, who wanted to remove the work. When Warhol was notified of the decision to remove his work, he suggested that the pictures of the criminals be replaced by pictures of World's Fair Director Robert Moses--a proposal that was also rejected.²⁵⁷ Warhol eventually settled for painting over the portraits with

²⁵³ Kynaston McShine, Andy Warhol. A Retrospective (NY: MoMA, 1989), 225.

²⁵⁴ Buchloh, "Andy Warhol's One-Dimensional Art, 1956-1966," in Buchloh, Neoavantgarde and Culture Industry, 54.

²⁵⁵ McShine, 283.

²⁵⁶ Sobieszek, Ghost in the Shell, 134.

²⁵⁷ Buchloh, "Andy Warhol's One Dimensional Art," 54.

silver paint.²⁵⁸ In 13 Most Wanted Men, Warhol conflated the mugshot gallery with the scale of the billboard or mural as spectacle, interrogating not its criminals but the system of classification's ideological foundations.

There exists similarities between Warhol's and Richter's portraits in the critique of the honorific portrait gallery. Buchloh argues that both Warhol's and Richter's work are

critic[al of] these functions of legitimation [the monument as official, state representation], or at least they reveal the historical conditions that foreclose any conception of monuments as significant representations of the social subject and of social collectivity. Richter seems to respond to Warhol's apparently romantic and nihilistic heroicization of the criminal with the emphatic affirmation of a bourgeois liberal-humanist belief in the civilizing presence of historical figures, taken as models of conduct and achievement.²⁵⁹

Thus Warhol and Richter use a pastiche of the honorific gallery to empty out ideologies embedded in photographic galleries whose subjects may be read according to the historically deep practice of assigning a preconceived set of physical criteria to its honorific or 'degenerate' subjects.

Arbus used tropes and formal strategies from particular photographs through which she engaged in pastiche. Historically, literary pastiche has been viewed in less pejorative terms than its artistic equivalent. Generally, literary pastiche is an example of the assumption by one writer of the literary personality of another.²⁶⁰ R.A. Sayce argues that Marcel Proust, for example, pastiched the Goncourt's "tone and texture of writing" in *Le Temps Retrouvé*, carefully reproducing the Goncourt's style with "astonishing accuracy" to caricature its

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Buchloh, "Divided Memory...", 76.

²⁶⁰ R. A. Sayce, "The Goncourt Pastiche in *Le Temps retrouvé*" in Larkin B. Price ed., Marcel Proust, a Critical Panorama (Urbana, Chicago, and London: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 103.

affectations.²⁶¹ Jorge Luis Borges wrote fictional stories about real individuals, based in part upon the form of the popular 'mythmaking' biography in magazines. Such a critical method of production had parallels in 1960s literature. In the 1960s, such pastiche assumed a looser connotation, less overtly reliant upon the original, less caricatural. And yet it still produced what Henry Louis Gates called a "signifying structure" within which the writer or artist could operate. Gates provides a salient model for comparison: he argues that a sensibility exists among twentieth-century African-American writers, who "read and critique other black texts as an act of rhetorical self-definition. Our literary tradition exists because of these precisely chartable formal relationships."²⁶² Gates suggests that the text of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, for example, is a signifying structure because it "identifies key tropes and rhetorical strategies received from precursory texts, such as W. E. B. Du Bois's *A Quest of the Silver Fleece* and Jean Toomer's *Cane*."²⁶³ Arbus, in concert with Gates's assessment of the signifying structure, borrowed tropes and formal strategies from particular photographs.

There seems to be a dual relationship of Arbus's work to pastiche at the level of the image. It is an important dualism, though, as it reveals Arbus's critical intention. This dualism affects the photograph's relationship to its referent. Her work tried to assume the look of a particular well-known photograph, or ubiquitous fashion photograph, but ultimately there is a slippage between intention and effect; we see the reference but we still get an Arbus photograph. Arbus used now well-known twentieth century portrait

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Henry Louis Gates, "The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique on the Sign and the Signifying Monkey" in Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan eds., *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 908.

²⁶³ Ibid., 109.

photographs and responded to the character type in such photographs, such as those showing dwarves, transvestites, circus performers, identical twins, and even the female nude. Her sitters, by comparison, sought to take on a certain look, such as the look of Elizabeth Taylor, in A Young Brooklyn Family Going On a Sunday Outing, N.Y.C., 1966 (figure i-5). They assume the pose and typology of the celebrity because a famous photographer, Arbus, is going to put them in a magazine. Yet in Arbus's photographs, the stock type and the pastiche of celebrity does not entirely work. We are still left with a slightly frowzy mother of two from Brooklyn trying to look like Elizabeth Taylor. Ostensibly this is one reason why Arbus chose her as a subject. Overall, the square format of the Rolleiflex camera Arbus uses retains a look that a 1960s audience would have recognized as that of a fashion photograph.

Arbus's photographic pastiche often related to the slippage between the actual individual in her portraits and the celebrity or social type they were attempting to look like. The pastiche was clearly an unsuccessful one, yet it was the attempt at that pastiche that Arbus exploited with all of her sitters. Pastiche was performed by both photographer *and sitter* and the photograph recorded their exchange as a form of spectacle. Arbus's pastiche registered the uneasy superimposition of nature and culture. Unlike August Sander's sitters, whose physiognomies, according to Sander, are shaped by the type of work that they do, Arbus's sitters were shaped by the pervasive influence of photographic images, the Barthesian "copy of a copy," in mass culture. Thus, in concert with Warhol's 13 Most Wanted Men and Richter's 48 Portraits, Arbus's work operated as an ironic commentary on a taxonomic system of social types. Nature and culture in Arbus photographs were as incommensurate as oil and water. Let us turn to her magazine work for examples.

III. Arbus's use of Pastiche in Relation to Her Magazine Assignments

Instead of being solely about freaks--dwarves, giants, and circus sideshow performers--Arbus's overall production conflates these types with 'normals' from the lower, middle, and upper classes. As such, Arbus's social panorama problematizes the notion of the freak by rendering 'freakish' those not commonly associated with the label of 'freak'. American teenagers, for example, often display the nature/culture binarism that makes them teeter uncomfortably on the edge of a freakish appearance. Arbus returns to teenagers again and again for their naïve, self-conscious vulnerability, and the way that cultural attitudes such as patriotism appear to be freakish when caught in a certain way. In Arbus's Patriotic Young Man With a Flag, N.Y.C. of 1967 (figure 2-9), Arbus captures a pimply, freckle-faced teen who is wearing an "I'm Proud" button with the American flag on it, and carries a flag under his arm. Arbus chose this particular figure as a type under the influence of a Lisette Model photograph of a white male subject at a War rally during the Forties. Arbus's young man's cheap, shiny polyester shirt and wool blazer are oddly offset by a black undershirt and some sort of whitish, curving undergarment--it could be a cloth vest, we are not sure. But the young man's facial expression is the most startling; he looks out and away from the viewer with an open-mouthed mixture of fanaticism and glee. This expression, coupled with the flag and "I'm Proud" button, suggests a kind of frenzied patriotism that seems naïvely dogmatic yet totally devoted. The young man's pimply face and light-colored eyes are further accentuated by Arbus's flash to indicate his youthful, yet almost rabid, state of mind.

In another photograph, entitled Boy With a Straw Hat Waiting to March

in a Pro-War Parade, N.Y.C., 1967 (figure 2-10), perhaps taken at the same occasion as the first photograph, we see another young, well-dressed man with similar buttons; this time they read "Bomb Hanoi" and "God Bless America, Support our Boys in Viet Nam." With his bow tie and straw boater, the young man seems to me to be like the teenage couple; wearing the fashion of an older generation. This young man does not adopt any of the fashions of the 1960s counter-culture--he is dressed as we might imagine Woodrow Wilson used to look. His jughandle ears protrude from the side of his head, and the expression on his face is one of determined, almost fearful, conservatism. Boy With a Straw Hat appeared on the cover of *Artforum* in May of 1971 to accompany a spread called "Five Photographs by Diane Arbus." The photograph was there titled A Patriotic Boy with Straw Hat, Buttons, and Flag, Waiting to March in a Pro-War Parade, N.Y.C., 1967. This title, no doubt supplied by Arbus, is more descriptive than its successor in the 1972 Arbus monograph.

Arbus explored the image of identical twins as a response to and a pastiche of photographs of identical twins she had seen and liked. The subject of identical twins had been covered earlier, most notably, in terms of Arbus's influences, by August Sander's Country Girls c. 1928 (fig. 2-11) and Louis Faurer's 5th Ave., New York, N.Y. of c. 1948 (figure 2-2). Faurer presents two identical twins--two women in their late teens or early twenties with identical clothing, eyeglasses, and hairstyles. The sameness of their self-presentation draws our attention to the subtle differences of the twins. Despite their quizzical expressions, the woman on the left seems slightly more dour, as the corners of her mouth are turned more downward than that of her twin. Her brow is a bit darker. The dour twin's hair is slightly more disheveled. This stylistic doubling is imposed upon them by the culture in which they were raised, their duplication separating them from 'normal' people. The fact that they are wearing the same

clothes makes them more publicly recognizable as twins, and as such, they are more apt to be noticed and commented upon by the throng. Faurer captures the way in which these twins stand out in a public crowd. The twin on the left has a small mole on her cheek. It also seems unusual that identical twins of this age would be wearing the same thing; usually such stylistic choices are made by the parents of identical twins. The twins occupy the foreground of a vertically-framed image of a bustling Fifth Avenue in New York. They are at the forefront of a throng of people. Yet the twins seem to occupy a separate space than the crowd; they are in focus, and the crowd is blurred. The twins almost seem to be photomontaged on to the crowd. the crowd behind seems to be looking at them. To augment this separation, Faurer carefully manipulated the modulations of light and dark during the development process (figure 2-12).

Anne Wilkes-Tucker describes Faurer's printing technique:

when looking at Faurer's printing instructions written on a test print, it becomes clear that he paid attention to every component of the print, not just the principal figures. He cropped almost every negative, sometimes cutting as much as one third of the original. However much Faurer admired the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson, he felt no obligation to print only the full frame of the negative, as the French photographer did."²⁶⁴

Faurer's attention to the printing process in 5th Ave. engages in a dual separation: the suggested psychological separation of the twins from the crowd who looks at them, and the separation of the twins psychically from the crowd. Arbus increases the contrast of her Identical Twins photograph during development, particularly where their two dark dresses meet, to suggest that the twins are psychically inseparable; these are identical twins as the mythology of twins leads us to believe them to be--odd and slightly mystical, sharing secrets and thoughts. Faurer plays on the viewer's myth-like sense of twins as being

²⁶⁴ Anne Wilkes-Tucker, "So Intelligent...So Angry, and Having Such Passion For the World," in Tucker, Louis Faurer (Exh. cat. Houston, TX: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston), 30.

able to communicate telepathically, sharing the same thought and producing the same facial expression. But we experience Faurer's twins in the genre of street photography--ostensibly, Faurer happened upon the twins while documenting life on the New York street.

Arbus's twins, like those of Sander and Faurer, play upon the binarism of sameness versus difference. They stand close together, seem connected physically due to subtle manipulations of printing which bind the twins via the shadow that falls between them, a palpably physical black which makes them appear to be joined at the abdomen like Siamese twins. Yet according to the title of the photograph in "Five Photographs By Diane Arbus" in *Artforum*, Arbus's twins have names: Cathleen and Colleen. Further, the title mentions that the twins are members of a twins' club in New Jersey. The contact sheet of the shoot that contains the now-iconic Identical Twins contains several other images of different sets of twins (figure 2-13). This information suggests an affinity with Arbus's 1963 Guggenheim Foundation grant proposal, in which she sought to document vernacular "ceremonies" containing, in her estimation, contemporary versions of fairy tale characters. Such fairy tale characters operate in the cultural milieu of Twins Clubs in vernacular America.

Identical twins are an identifiable human type, and in the Sander and Faurer photographs, they are perpetuated as such, whether by Sander's scientific objectivity or Faurer's street reportage. These photographs entered the lexicon of photographs comprising photography's history, or, to be more specific, its art history, which at the time was being carefully evaluated and codified by institutions such as MoMA and influential curators such as John Szarkowski. Within this new lexicon of images, the portrait-type was interred and canonized. It is with the intimate knowledge of this climate and an equally intimate knowledge of its photographs that Arbus found her own responses to these

types through what I have argued is a new type of pastiche.²⁶⁵

Using pastiche, Arbus would continue to explore the relationship of the documentary photo-story to the values of white, middle class America by subverting its comfortable assumptions and images of itself. An apt comparison may be made between Arbus's Retired Man and His Wife at Home in a Nudist Camp One Morning, NJ of 1963 (figure 2-14), taken as part of her unpublished series "Notes on The Nudist Camp," and Russell Lee's Couple in Hidalgo County, Texas of 1939 (figure 2-15).²⁶⁶ Lee's photograph represented an iconic image of domestic tranquility that reflected the spiritual humanism of the documentary style. Despite the evidence of hard work manifested in the worn shoes and rumpled, simple garments of the Texan couple, they sit together by the radio, itself a kind of domestic shrine, a spiritual center of the American household. The stockingless feet of the woman and the torn socks of the man attest to their quaint 'simplicity.' Pictures of relatives sit on the large radio, and above it hangs a machine-art tapestry printed on black cloth, depicting a scene from a French rococo court, "with aristocrats in powdered wigs graciously gathered around a harpsichord."²⁶⁷ The couple seated in chairs presents a marked contrast to the kitsch tapestry, yet both offer visions of domestic harmony. The Lee photograph promulgates the myth of the sacred space of the American domestic interior, with signifiers of hard work and an interest in popular culture

²⁶⁵ In 1970, Arbus was hired by John Szarkowski to research photographs for an exhibition of photographs originally intended as News photographs that eventually came to be known as *From the Picture Press* (MoMA, 1973). The exhibition was thematically organized by Szarkowski and Arbus into seven sections: "Ceremonies, Losers, Disasters, Alarums and Conundrums, Good News and the Good Life, Contests and Confrontations, and Heroes" (See Jeff L. Rosenheim, "Biographies," in Arbus, Diane Arbus: Revelations, 315). The thematic organization of this exhibition suggests a continued interest on Arbus's part in the material outlined in her 1963 Guggenheim grant proposal.

²⁶⁶ Southall in Arbus, Magazine Work, 68-69.

²⁶⁷ Janet Malcolm, "Slouching Toward Bethlehem," in Malcolm, Diana & Nikon (New York: Aperture, 1997), 143.

(both on the radio and in magazines, which the man is reading). By 1939, the radio had just gained widespread acceptance in the American home, and in many instances replaced the hearth as the symbolic center of the domestic space.²⁶⁸

There are similarities between the two photographs. The Arbus photograph reveals a scene of domestic tranquility, with the man and his wife seated symmetrically next to a centrally-placed television. The television, by 1963, had just replaced the radio as the center of the American household, a fact clearly not lost on Arbus: like the radio in the Lee photograph, the TV in the Arbus is a shrine of sorts, complete with snapshots of loved ones decorating the top. But some things are different in the Arbus photograph, upending the expectation of domestic harmony we usually associate with such pictures, of which Lee's is a prime example. In the Arbus photograph, clearly the nakedness of two white, middle-class people in their late fifties or early sixties, he overweight and she with drooping breasts, elides the image of the typical american couple at home in their parlor. The man seems quite comfortable to have his small, cigar-butt-shaped penis jauntily peeping out from underneath his paunch. Amusingly the family photos are of nude people as well. Even the kitsch art hanging above the tv is of a nude woman. Arbus's sense of humor resides in these mundane, kitschy details.

But the nudist camp is also a kind of secret society in which the behavior of its occupants, despite adherences to banal suburban American social customs, would be met elsewhere with social derision. Arbus, then, lets us in on the secret. In the text that originally accompanied the article, she says, "for many of these people, their presence here is the darkest secret of their lives, unsuspected by relatives, friends, and employers of the outside world, the disclosure of which

²⁶⁸ Malcolm, 143.

might bring disgrace."²⁶⁹ It is an unspoken testament to Arbus's powers of persuasion that these people allow her in on "the darkest secret of their lives." The ease felt by the couple with Arbus is apparent, and this lends power to the photograph. Arbus has not only infiltrated this secret society but was treated as a nudist guest who had ostensibly come over to watch tv or play pinochle. Arbus's photographs of the nudist colony up-ends stereotypes of nudists as nubile hippies frolicking with abandon; these nudists are as unsexy, unassuming, whitebread, and middle class as the reader of magazines.

In 1968, Arbus, the newly-dubbed 'New Documentarian,' was commissioned by *Esquire* to take photographs of poor rural South Carolinians. The photographs appeared in the June 1968 issue in a photo-essay entitled "Let Us Now Praise Dr. Gatch" (figure 2-16), with text by Bynum Shaw. In this series, Arbus used pastiche to problematize the reading of the documentary photo-story while producing her most social statement to date. The title of the assignment clearly refers to James Agee and Walker Evans's book, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, and bears a direct correlation to the famous 1948 *Life* photo-essay by W. Eugene Smith entitled "Country Doctor."²⁷⁰ The "Country Doctor" featured Dr. Ernest Ceriani, General Practitioner, and his practice in Kremmling, Co (figure 2-17). Ceriani is presented as an underpaid, tireless humanist who has won the affection of his community for his efforts: "Ceriani is compensated by the affection of his patients and neighbors, by the high place he has earned in his community and by the fact that he is his own boss." Dr. Ceriani's efforts are described in terms of marriage: "The union of a general practitioner and his community is in many ways like marriage; affectionate, difficult and long-

²⁶⁹ Arbus in Magazine Work, 69.

²⁷⁰ Life 25, 12 (Sept. 20, 1948), 115-126.

lasting."²⁷¹ The "Country Doctor," then, is surrounded with the tropes of the myth of the American family.

A lengthy photo-story, "The Country Doctor" is broken into five sections of photographs: "He must specialize in a dozen fields," "An Accident Interrupts his leisure," and "He sets a badly dislocated elbow...and amputates a gangrenous leg," and "an old man dies at night," and finally "Community absorbs most of his time."²⁷² The photographs, both large and small, are graphic, disturbing, and often touching. Smith's use of a flash gave these powerful documentary pictures a sense of graphic immediacy. Perhaps the two most shocking pictures are one of the doctor staunching the eye of a little girl who had been kicked in the head by a horse, the fresh, dark stitches in her forehead in stark contrast to the innocence of her expression; and the utterly exhausted doctor having a cigarette and a cup of coffee in the rudimentary hospital kitchen (figures 2-26 and 2-27). Another picture presents the little girl's father attempting to comfort her terrified mother.

Yet throughout "The Country Doctor" there are no non-white faces. Smith's photographs promulgate the myth of wholesome community and domesticity white middle class America had come to expect from documentary photography. Despite the shocking photographs, the piece had the veneer of American sentimentality--the weary doctor the embodiment of honest, hard-working white country folk who epitomized the American vernacular spirit.

In Arbus and Bynum Shaw's "Let Us Now Praise Dr. Gatch," the veneer of American sentimentality has been stripped. The text by Shaw states that Dr. Gatch is a social pariah among the whites of his town in rural South Carolina for his work with poor and malnourished black families. In a 1969 interview with

²⁷¹ Ibid., 126.

²⁷² Ibid.

Studs Terkel, Arbus, speaking about "Let Us Now Praise Dr. Gatch," discusses its relationship to, and distance from, Walker Evans's photographs of Alabama sharecroppers. Terkel says to her, "you saw what Walker Evans saw," to which she replies, "[s]omewhat similar. Yeah. But now I'm seeing with double vision. With what I learned as a kid and what I've since learned. It seems to me the only pleasure about getting old is if you come through with more understanding than you had in the first place."²⁷³ In this statement, Arbus indicates a disconnect between "what she learned as a kid" and "what I have since learned." Given the dislike of Arbus and some of her colleagues' for the *Family of Man* exhibition, this statement could be taken to mean that the values instilled in documentary photographs, which became a part of every American's experience during the late 1940s and 1950s, do not actually represent the unvarnished truth. What Arbus saw was precisely not what Evans saw, because they were looking through different cameras with different subjectivities; where Evans saw rugged individualism and humble, quasi-spiritual determination, Arbus saw poverty, disease, and despair. Where Evans saw a glimpse of heaven, Arbus witnessed a view of hell. Arbus's statement to Terkel attests to a belief that documentary photography is not just the passive recording of truth; that the photographer's personal vision orders the reading of the photograph.

What seems to be at stake is a sense of the ironic reversal of the traditional documentary photo-story. As mentioned in Chapter One, documentary photography became inextricably linked to American identity in the twentieth century. The points at which the public (specifically, the reader of *Esquire*) identified with the documentary photo-story vis-a-vis his or her American identity was thrown into question by Arbus's refusal to comply with the myth of heroic, quasi-religious determination implicit in photo-stories to which the public

²⁷³ Arbus, Interview with Studs Terkel, *Newsweek* (Dec. 1969) in Bosworth, 280.

had become accustomed.

"Dr. Gatch," like most other Arbus magazine assignments, was bracketed by ads for fashionable products for an affluent readership. The June 1968 issue of *Esquire*, "the magazine for men," is, like most other issues, replete with ads to titillate the chic, sporting gentleman: for whiskey, martinis, watches, cars, executive travel luggage--anything the aspiring James Bond might be interested in. Golf ads abound, as does Arnold Palmer, nattily dressed and looking sportily professional in ads for Apeco Super-Stat photocopiers. Despite the tropes of affluent male leisure, though, the magazine had intelligent content. But such content often found itself inextricably linked to the tropes of fashion. Dr. Gatch, photographed outside of the rough-hewn shack of one of his patients, is rakishly dressed in a three-piece suit and, clenching a pipe between his teeth, seems to represent the gentleman reader of *Esquire's* mirror image. Dr. Gatch may be working under difficult circumstances, but he sure looks good doing it.

The purpose of "Let Us Now Praise Dr. Gatch" was to expose both poverty and a system of social injustice that had rendered the "negro" residents of remote Gullah settlements on Dafuskie and Wassau Island in Beaufort County, South Carolina, invisible.²⁷⁴ Clearly the Civil Rights movement and the death of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. had a lot to do with the timing of the piece. Two families were photographed, one white family and one black (only the photographs of the black family were published). Both families lived in absolute squalor in tiny, one-room clapboard shacks. In contrast to Walker Evans's famous photographs of Alabama sharecroppers, in which the spaces are tidy and the people clear-eyed, hopeful, and humble, even heroic, Arbus's two families have nothing heroic about them. Their features are exaggerated into expressions of clumsy naïvete and despair--Arbus seems to confirm the viewer's

²⁷⁴ *Esquire* (June 1968), 108.

expectations of the poor as dirty and stupid by magnifying such conditions. The flash she uses accentuates the abject. Yet she does not mock; filth and overcrowding undergo no metaphoric transformation, they remain in stark contrast to the affluence and material wealth presented in *Esquire's* pages. "Let Us Now Praise Dr. Gatch" engages the revelatory aspect of socially conscious documentary photography, such as that by Ben Shahn and Walker Evans. Like Shahn's and Evans's work, Arbus focuses on images of the poor which presented their abject conditions with what would have been read as a shocking directness to their audiences. It seems quite daring for Arbus (and the editors of *Esquire*) to pastiche the look of these works, as they had become part of an iconic, mythic visual record of the socially conscious aims of the New Deal and liberal humanism (which was currently tied to the Civil Rights movement). Viewed today, the photographs of Dr. Gatch's patients seem to work within the terrain of the documentary photograph's connection to eugenics in the first forty years of the twentieth century, but render the photograph as evidence of the need for eugenics as *spectacle*, particularly in the photograph of Dr. Gatch posing outside of the shack of one of his poor patients (figure 2-16).

Shaw's text mentions that Dr. Gatch had gone against the social fabric by bringing the poor health and malnutrition of abject blacks to the attention of a Columbia (SC) citizen's inquiry investigating hunger and poverty. This action angered Beaufort County Officials. The Beaufort Gazette described Gatch's action as "running his mouth."²⁷⁵ At a hospital staff meeting, Gatch's resignation was hissed for. Fortunately, according to the article, Gatch's actions galvanized the traditionally reticent local South Carolina blacks into civil protest. Gatch became a kind of accidental activist. The photo captions of the article humanize the subjects without heroism: "Pinkie Edwards, whose nickname is Matilda,

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

warms her feet by an old iron stove. She doesn't know how old she is, but, according to the caption, has "lived to a good old age," a "sittin' age." Her home is not far from Dr. Gatch's office in Bluffton, South Carolina.²⁷⁶ The other photograph: "Robert Evans and eighteen children and grandchildren live in this house near Beaufort. One child is hydrocephalic, another blind in one eye, another was scarred at birth. Some show symptoms of worms..."²⁷⁷ Mr. Evans's children and grandchildren exhibit signs of freakishness, as mentioned in the caption (one child is 'hydrocephalic'), but they are not eccentrics or sideshow 'aristocrats'. Their abnormality is caused by poverty and the indifference of a racist society. Arbus situated her "Let Us Now Praise Dr. Gatch" photographs within the history of photography in terms of a pastiche of Smith's "Country Doctor" and Evans's "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men." We see the same clapboard shacks and abject conditions, yet Arbus removes any trace of pathos from her subjects. They are not photographed to display the 'American vernacular' dignity of the poor but to shed public light on their social invisibility. Arbus used pastiche to question the myths of American sentimentality with which the iconic works of Smith and Evans had become infused.

IV. Arbus and Avedon: Two different Approaches to the Social Panorama

In terms of producing a more or less cohesive social statement through a body of portraits, though, there was arguably no greater influence upon Arbus than her close friend, Richard Avedon. Their relationship has been given virtually no attention by the existing Arbus scholarship, yet encompasses many parallels. The influence went both ways, and between them lay a great mutual

²⁷⁶ *Esquire* (June 1968), 110.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

respect. Together, Arbus and Avedon were committed to a socially critical mode of production in their artistic work. Each photographer had a vision of America that contrasted sharply with the sentimentalized images of white, middle-class America found in magazines such as *Life* in the 1950s. Arbus and Avedon each sought a more probing, psychological identification with their sitters. They both conflated fashion and photoreportage into hybrid formal strategies reflecting the magnified *auteur* status of 1960s photographers.²⁷⁸ But Avedon gained earlier success in terms of his artistic work, producing books of portraits, a fact which no doubt influenced Arbus's intentions to assemble a more cohesive body of portraits herself.

Unlike Avedon's panorama, which monumentalized "Freak" counter-cultural icons and political activists, Arbus's social panorama investigated identity through an implosion of the freak typology. Where Avedon sought a stark, literal record of the physical surfaces of sitters in his portraits as a kind of testament to their experience, Arbus sought the individual as metaphor, as representative of an observable incommensurability between individual and type she saw as indicative of a larger social phenomenon. Arbus's social panorama, then, has stronger ties to the romantic tradition, as she looked to the past to frame contemporary manifestations of classic literary types.

Where Avedon photographed subjects like Abbie Hoffman of 1969 (figure 2-18), Janis Joplin (1969, figure 2-19), and David Brothers of the Black Panther Party (1969, figure 2-20) in a manner which emphasized their confrontational

²⁷⁸ The connection needs to be furthered between photographers like Avedon and Arbus, whose work outwardly displays the appearance of a greater degree of authorship and 'directorial' presence, and *auteur* film directors such as Howard Hawks, Alfred Hitchcock, Jean-Luc Godard, and François Truffaut, among others. Both Avedon and Arbus insisted on an active, engaged relationship with their sitters while shooting, in an attempt to get the subject to "drop their mask," to reveal their private selves; to forget the presence of the camera; in other words, to act. See A.D. Coleman, "The Directorial Mode: Notes Toward a Definition," in Vicki Goldberg ed., Photography in Print (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 480-491.

public persona, conferring a sense of honorific aura around his sitters in the form of a 'radical chic,' Arbus sought the moment at which public persona dissolved into a private yet visible existential struggle. With a mutual nod to Sander, both photographers preferred frontal portraits which emphasized the socially confrontational aspect of the sixties. But where Avedon, like Nadar, sought a pantheon of the seminal 'bohemian' characters of his generation, using his close-up style to glamorize artists, rock stars, and civil rights leaders, a fashion photographer on the front lines of the times, Arbus sought to convey the sense of division within the individuals in her photographs, the sense that the sixties produced individuals who, despite their relative distance from mainstream America, reflect the feeling of fear and ennui that lay beneath the social upheavals of the sixties. If Avedon wanted to convey black anger directly on the face of David Brothers, Arbus sought a more subtle route, attacking the positivist foundations of racial ideologies which would have produced Brothers's anger.

An apt comparison may be made between Arbus's and Avedon's photographs of the same subject: one of Andy Warhol's "Superstars," the actress Viva.²⁷⁹ Arbus's photograph entitled Superstar at Home of 1968 (fig. 2-21), which originally appeared in the weekly *New York* magazine in an article entitled "La Dolce Viva" with text by Barbara L. Goldsmith, depicts a nude Viva lying on her couch. In this photograph, Viva displays none of the trappings of the chic underground celebrity to which she had been tied by the media. Goldsmith's article attempted to show the public and private personalities of Viva. Goldsmith begins with Viva's celebrity status as a Warhol filmstar and fashion model. The text is accompanied by a very chic photograph by Lee Kraft of Viva sitting on a stool, wearing a slender, well-tailored black outfit. With its light,

²⁷⁹ Viva was a central figure in Warhol's Factory, and appeared in several of his films, including The Loves of Ondine (1967), Lonesome Cowboys (1968), and Blue Movie (1968).

neutral studio backdrop, the Kraft photograph looks very much like an Avedon. The second half of the article focuses upon the banal realities of Viva's day-to-day existence. She lives in a messy apartment paid for by someone else. Viva speaks candidly and somewhat glibly about the pervasiveness of drugs, sex, and The Factory scene.²⁸⁰ Arbus's photograph of Viva, whose eyes seem to roll up into her head as if she is going into convulsions, looks like she is a doll who has been unplugged. Pale and expressionless as a mannequin, Viva wears a deathlike countenance. In another photograph in the article, Viva reclines nude on her couch, which is covered by a white sheet--the effect is very much like Manet's *Olympia*, but Viva is laughing.²⁸¹ The photograph seems very casual and unposed. Coupled with the Goldsmith article, Arbus's photographs seem to capture not Viva the celebrity and model but Viva the eccentric, a position that suggests the play of surfaces which Viva ordinarily exists behind, but has been uncovered. Viva's eccentricity is manifested in what Edith Sitwell would call a "singularity of vision," which, as stated in the article, is owed entirely to what Andy Warhol wants her to do: "I have Andy now to think ahead and make the decisions. I just do what he tells me to do. Andy has a certain mystique that makes you want to do things for him."²⁸² Instead of photographing Viva in a way which augmented her beauty or celebrity, Arbus deliberately catches her at a vulnerable moment with her honorific mask off.

Avedon's photographs of Viva are radically different than Arbus's. In

²⁸⁰ Barbara L. Goldsmith, "La Dolce Viva" *New York* 1, 4(April 29, 1968), 36-41.

²⁸¹ Arbus's two nude photographs of Viva in the newly independent *New York* magazine so upset the public that, according to Clay Felker, the magazine's editor, over one million dollars' worth of advertising was lost, most of which never returned to the magazine. See Thomas Southall, "The Magazine Years, 1960-1971" in Arbus, *Magazine Work*, 170. Southall argues that "this was the kind of issue that brought out the inherent conservatism of magazine management," and may have cost Arbus subsequent commissions.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 40.

Viva, Actress, New York City, October 2, 1969 (fig. 2-22), a pregnant Viva, hair styled in an insouciant jumble of tight curls and sporting a glamorous cape, is depicted with her naked belly visible. With a theatrical gesture, she grasps her exposed right breast in her right hand, as if she wishes to show the viewer her enlarged nipple. Unlike Arbus's photographs of the actress, Avedon's photographs of Viva are honorific; she is glamorous, performative, and semi-nude (as she frequently was in Warhol's films). In Avedon's life-sized photographs of The Warhol Factory, New York City (fig. 2-23), Viva is again depicted as the ultra-hip, willowy, effete "Superstar," monumentalized in photographs which have the physical scale and visual weight of history paintings.

By 1962, Arbus and Avedon had become close friends. They had a common background; both were from recently wealthy Jewish immigrant families, grew up on Park avenue, and had fathers who both opened fancy clothing stores on 5th Avenue. Both Arbus and Avedon, from an early age, were immersed in the behind-the-scenes world of *haute couture*, and this would later affect their work. Arbus and Avedon were both avid readers of literature, and often formulated their photographic approach in response to what they read, and published images in tandem with writers they admired. In his first two books, Avedon collaborated with Truman Capote and James Baldwin; Arbus published photographs in magazines that also published essays by writers such as Baldwin and Jorge Luis Borges. In 1963, Arbus published four evanescent photographs for a *Harper's Bazaar* piece entitled "Auguries of Innocence" with textual excerpts from William Blake, Lewis Carroll, and Phila Henrietta Case.²⁸³ The two photographers often went out to take pictures together:

Ocasionaly they attended parties...armed with their cameras. They

²⁸³ Arbus, Magazine Work, 32-35.

photographed a reading that William Burroughs gave at which Larry Rivers, Jack Smith, and Andy Warhol were present; they dropped by a fund-raising for Abby Hoffman held on a tenement rooftop—at this gathering the Fugs played obscene songs. They also participated in symposiums at one time or another at the New School along with Cornell Capa and Irving Penn, and they would discuss styles of portraiture.²⁸⁴

Each photographer was comfortable in the avant-garde world of glamorous parties, events, happenings, and hip Sixties artists in New York. The fact that they attended a fund-raiser for Abby Hoffmann (both also photographed Hoffmann) also suggests an interest in social activism and the Civil Rights movement.

By the late 1950s, Avedon had gained success both artistically and commercially. Jane Livingston says of this period in Avedon's career that "by the late 1950s, Avedon had developed his trademark style: emotionally intense studio images, often very close-up, with a white background and strong, artificial light."²⁸⁵ The first collection of his portraits, largely of writers, artists and performers, was published in 1959 as the book *Observations*, designed by Alexei Brodovitch and with an essay titled "Comments" by Truman Capote. In 1964 came a second book, *Nothing Personal*, designed by Marvin Israel (a close mutual friend of Arbus and Avedon) with a text by James Baldwin. *Nothing Personal* presented a wide cross-section of Americans, from an elderly ex-slave to poet Allen Ginsberg, from the Generals of the Daughters of the American Revolution to patients in a mental institution. Avedon's portrait books must have had some influence on Arbus. Like her, he was a fashion photographer with serious artistic impulses. What follows is a discussion of Avedon's two books in relation to Arbus's development. While Arbus may not have commented specifically on Avedon's first two books, significant parallels may be made which deepen our

²⁸⁴ Bosworth, 229.

²⁸⁵ Jane Livingston, The New York School, 351.

understanding of her work.

Avedon's *Observations* would have been important for Arbus as a new model of photographic portraiture. At ten by fourteen inches, *Observations* resembled the size and layout of fashion magazines. The photographs in this book are close-up portraits taken of such notables as Charlie Chaplin (figure 2-24), Marian Anderson, Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Jacques-Yves Cousteau (figure 2-25), The Duke and Dutchess of Windsor (figure 2-26), Ezra Pound, and Marianne Moore. *Observations* presents honorific portraits of famous celebrities, artists, and writers produced by Avedon the *auteur*; he is the director and his subjects the actors. These portraits share in common a white or grey background, and a rather extreme realism predicated on stark tonal contrasts and the larger scale of the photographs. Avedon's black tones are often unpenetrable, physical blacks, voids in which no detail of fabric or hair may be ascertained. These portraits all share a cinematic quality, as if the sitter, caught in motion, is but one of a series of frames capturing a performance. They also share, with the possible exception of the Duke and Dutchess of Windsor, a kind of celebratory sameness, as if Avedon wanted to catch the elusive genius of the sitter within a moment of action--and that somehow such genius might be read within the physical details of the sitter's face and neck. As such, Avedon's photographs in *Observations* consciously share an affinity with the pantheons of Alvin Langdon Coburn and Nadar. Harold Rosenberg says of Avedon's portraits that:

Avedon's photos aim to restore to his subjects the solidity of being. To this end, he has returned to older aspects of portraiture--one might say he has fought his way back to this art through tides of illusionistic effects made possible by photography and by experiments in the accidental and the unpremeditated. His photos depend entirely on prearranged conditions leading to a final leap into the unknown. Avedon has rejected the limitless fecundity of candid shots in favor of the conscious pose--but shorn of photographic hoaxing through mood lighting and stage props. With him, pose means only that the sitter confronts the camera knowingly, thus wearing a face that is a product of nature and his

own act.²⁸⁶

For Rosenberg, Avedon's sitters are frozen in a moment of existential gesture, a phenomenal subject performing in space. Rosenberg alludes to the "act" of Avedon's sitters, and to the recording of motion by Avedon. Concerning *Observations*, Livingston also sees a link between Avedon's work and the portraiture of well-known photographers from the history of photography:

Although some of the more fluid and theatrical images recall Julia Margaret Cameron's dramaturgical photographs, and others remind one of Nadar's tensely immediate figures, the way the book is put together is completely original. Elements of both literary composition and a sort of concerto-like arrangement of parts in the service of the whole inform *Observations*, creating a hybrid whose vocabulary is that of graphic design but whose higher grammar is that of photography itself.²⁸⁷

Livingston's point brings up an interesting connection between Avedon's and Arbus's work, in terms of "the higher grammar of photography itself"; both photographers were acutely aware of the history of photography, and consciously situated their work within certain recognizable tropes from the history of photographic portraiture. But the point about graphic design is significant--Arbus and Avedon's work was originally intended to be bracketed, not by the museum frame, but by art director's layouts and fashion advertisements in magazines. For Arbus, Avedon's *Observations* collapsed the distinction between art and fashion photography; his subjects could be both glamorous and psychologically arresting. Perhaps most significantly, Avedon drew no easy distinction between his commercial and artistic work, often borrowing from one context to suit the other.²⁸⁸ However, Avedon's subjects are almost always performing for the camera, whereas Arbus's, with a couple of

²⁸⁶ Harold Rosenberg in Richard Avedon, *Portraits* (NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1976), 20.

²⁸⁷ Livingston, 33.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 302.

exceptions, are not.

Avedon's *Nothing Personal*, published in 1964, also was conceived as an art photography book of approximately ten by fourteen inches. *Nothing Personal* was a more directly social statement than *Observations*, and with Baldwin's potent, moving essay, provided a testimony to the sordid and hypocritical nature of American racism. Avedon's photographs involve a new approach, a collapsing of the lines between photoreportage and portraiture. By shooting his subjects close-up, and almost always in a frontal pose, Avedon echos the portraiture of August Sander. But what had by now become his signature white background, the signifier of 1960 fashion photography, Avedon removes the context of landscape and setting, of social milieu and social hierarchy that was inseparable from Sander's work.

Avedon's photos, at this point, become more close-up, and critical; with Perle Mesta, Washington Hostess (figure 2-27), we see only her head, neck, and part of her shoulders, and she (literally) looks down at the viewer with a look of dignity and condescension. On the next page, The Generals of the Daughters of the American Revolution of 1963 (figure 2-28), in which eleven older white matrons, dressed in evening gowns cut low at the shoulder and wearing sashes, project expressions of haughty scorn. The large woman in the middle of the photograph with her back to the viewer connotes a closed or rejecting posture. The next photograph is The Reverend Billy Graham, Evangelist and Leander Perez, Judge, Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana (figure 2-29). Perez, with a cigar stuck in his frown, looks truculent, mocking, scornful. After that, Fabian and The Everly Brothers, and then a marked contrast of American ideologies on opposing pages: George Lincoln Rockwell, Commander of the American Nazi Party is pictured with four of his uniformed troops, each giving the 'heil' salute, in a 5 x 5" photograph on one page, and Allen Ginsberg, Poet, a much larger

photograph, on the other (figure 2-30). Ginsberg is naked, hairy, and photographed from the waist up, a hirsute Jewish Buddha/ giant dwarfing the tiny American Nazis. Clearly, here, size matters. With this initial offering of portraits, Avedon provides testimony to the conflicting ideologies of white America's social attitudes about race. For Avedon, the truth of it lies within the pores and creases of the sitter's body and countenance.

Arbus, by photographing freaks, eccentrics, the wealthy, the literati, and the white middle class in a frontal manner and in a square format, seeks to efface the distinction between a photograph's relative scale, the white middle class, and "the other." But whereas Avedon does it literally in *Nothing Personal*, photographing people who are actually on the front lines of the Civil Rights struggle, Arbus keeps it on a more metaphoric level.

Close to the end of James Baldwin's essay in Avedon's *Nothing Personal* is Avedon's extraordinary William Casby, Born in slavery of 1963 (figure 2-31), a full-page shot, adjacent to Adlai Stevenson, a small 5" x 5 1/2" portrait. These two portraits reveal a preoccupation with physiognomy and, as such, are quite different than Arbus's work. Casby's face is itself like a weathered, eroded landscape, or mask, his jaundiced-looking eyes the source of deep emotion; it contrasts sharply with Stevenson, the famous "egghead." To Avedon, both men are defined principally by their exterior appearance, and his photographs, with their close attention to details of the physiognomy, focus upon this fact.

The second-to-last section of *Nothing Personal*, captioned Patients in a Mental Institution of 1963 (figures 2-32 to 2-40), presents grainy images of patients whose contorted physiognomies and odd actions attest to their insanity. These images are not all dark, though; some contain moments of pathos or tenderness. One photo shows two men wearing old sneakers sheepishly holding hands, another 5"x 5" picture is of a middle-aged woman sitting on her bed and

protectively clutching a baby doll. The simultaneous appearance of adult and childlike behavior noted by Avedon is reflected in Arbus's photographs, now called her Untitled series, taken between 1969 and 1971--clearly influenced in part by Avedon's Patients in a Mental Institution.²⁸⁹ Avedon's images are taken from the perspective of the passive witness, capturing moments of terror, poignancy, and humor. With his mishapen subjects either grimacing or holding hands, Avedon's photographs seem to simultaneously confirm and resist the typology of the insane person. Avedon's Patients appear as a sustained series of photographs instead of one picture; Arbus's work in mental institutions perhaps was influenced by this repetitive aspect. But Avedon's influence on Arbus also may be noted in the human ways he portrays the mental patients. A broader consideration of Arbus's Untitled series in relation to Avedon's Patients in a Mental Institution will be undertaken in Chapter Three, Section VIII, in a discussion of the the representation of the body and its relationship to the typology of mental illness.

With the benefit of hindsight, it seems that if we were to look for a very fragile olive branch of redemption in Arbus's work, it would be in her Untitled series. And certainly any redemption found in her work is less explicit than that of her predecessors. Her Untitled subjects, lounging in the grass, holding hands, and peeping shyly out from underneath halloween masks, seem genuinely happy--and the source of that happiness, as suggested by the Arbus photograph, lies precisely in their *distance* from contemporary culture. Unsullied by social ideologies, Arbus's mentally challenged individuals feel no need to 'arrange themselves.' The terror is gone. Arbus's last subjects perhaps bear the cause of human happiness in a new direction; maybe they have it right, according to

²⁸⁹ This comparison will be systematically analyzed in chapter III, under the section "The Body of Madness."

Arbus, and we ought to learn from that.

Chapter III

Arbus and the Representation of the Body in the 1960s

How did you 'join' the movement [the new left]? An old-fashioned question from unhip reporters and congressmen, to which the answer was: You put your body on the line. Actions were believed to be the guarantees and preconditions of ideas. The New Left's first *raison d'être* was to take actions which testified not only to the existence of injustice but to the imperative--and possibility--of fighting it.²⁹⁰

~Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties*

The Goya who painted The Madhouse must have experienced before that grovel of flesh in the void, that nakedness among bare walls, something related to a contemporary pathos: the symbolic tinsel that crowned the insane kings left in full view suppliant bodies, bodies vulnerable to chains and whips, which contradicted the delirium of the faces, less by the poverty of these trappings than by the human truth which radiated from all that unprofaned flesh.²⁹¹

~Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

I. The Centrality of the Body in the Sixties

A photograph of Arbus by one of her pupils, Eva Rubenstein, taken in 1971, strongly suggests Arbus's interest in the human body as a kind of metaphoric assemblage (fig 3-1). The photograph, taken in her Westbeth apartment, reveals a portion of Arbus's 'collage wall' behind her. Arbus is seated on a large, ornately-carved wooden armchair, not unlike a kind of throne. Approximately eight photographs are tacked to the wall, each one showing a closeup of a different person's body part, or parts. Two photographs are of backs, one of legs, and one is of someone spreading the cheeks of their gluteus

²⁹⁰ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1987), 84.

²⁹¹ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* (New York: Random House, 1965), 279.

maximus apart in a violent way. One disturbing photograph, partially obscured, is of a woman's naked torso with a gaping round hole in the middle, perhaps an autopsy photograph, or one taken while the subject was in surgery. The hole in the torso, coupled with the subject's breasts, outwardly resemble the eyes and mouth of a face. Another pair of photographs behind Arbus reveal a twisted corpse in two different stages of decay. Collectively, these photos reveal a sense of the human body reduced to fragments, and seem to emphasize the abject and the morbid. Why was Arbus interested in these shocking photographs of the human body in parts? In this chapter, I would like to look at Arbus's troping of the body as a dual mechanism: the physical body as an assemblage, and its connection to *identity* as an assemblage. Arbus's *oeuvre* itself will be considered in this chapter as a synecdoche, as part of a complex social climate in which ubiquitous images of the body, in photographs and on the TV screen, were ciphers for many of the social and artistic issues played out in the 1960s.

This chapter also discusses Arbus's social panorama in terms of other artists of the 1960s working in a similar thematic terrain in reference to photography and the human body. I do not wish to claim that Arbus was a performance artist, or a conceptual artist, yet her work and what is now considered under the rubric of 'performance art' and 'conceptual art,' have some significant parallels that gave shape to the artistic landscape in which she worked. I hope to bring the historicization of artists and photographers together to come to terms with the hybridity of ideas about the body and representations of the body characteristic of the artistic production of a period in which formalist debates about Minimalism and linear art-historical teleologies have, until recently, dominated art-historical discourse. In the critical spirit of Susan Sontag's *Against Interpretation* (1966), an essay about the pitfalls of interpreting an artist's intentions, I would like to situate Arbus's work within like-minded

conceptual and theoretical works of the period.²⁹²

In the sixties, the body and its representation in the mass media became a central site of political and social change. Of the body's multivalent, metaphoric relation to society, Amelia Jones claims that:

The body is perhaps the primary metaphor for a society's perception of itself. The individual and spoken language are what make up the social body; the physical body is a kind of boundary between biology and society, between drives and discourse. Man can only know himself through his environment. Our awareness of self heightens our awareness of the world around us. Through a deeper understanding of what it means to live within one's own body, we understand better that we are all connected and related to one another...[the body is] the site where questions of sexuality and its categorization in terms of power, biography, and history, are played out.²⁹³

Writing about photography and the body in the 1960s, photography historian John Pultz notes the visual ubiquity of the human body:

...many crucial events of the decade were defined by the human body: the American Civil Rights movement by the racial body; political assassinations by the physical body; the war in southeast Asia by the dead and wounded bodies of soldiers and civilians [defined and tabulated in public by the terms 'body bag' and 'body count']; the anti-war movement by the collective bodies of pacifist protesters, and the unrest in May 1968 in France and throughout Europe by the bodies of students.²⁹⁴

In terms of photography and changing public perception, Pultz points out that "the immediacy of television, the ever-growing availability of low-priced 35-mm and instamatic cameras, and the teaching of photography in universities, rather than in art schools, suggested to the generation of the 1960s that they make photographs of their own that would be at once records of the world around

²⁹² Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation" in Sontag, Against Interpretation (New York: Dell, 1966), 13-23. Sontag is to my mind the first American critic to signal the importance of Barthes and Benjamin. Sontag calls for a new structural emphasis on form, and I consider this in relationship to form both in Arbus's individual photographs and their collective effect as a social panorama.

²⁹³ Amelia Jones, "Body Boundaries," in Tracey Warr ed., The Artist's Body (London: Phaidon, 2000), 230. Jones echoes the words of critic Nelly Richard, in her "The Rhetoric of the Body" Art and Text 21 (May-July 1986), 65-73.

²⁹⁴ John Pultz, Photography and the Body (London: Orion, 1995), 114.

them and a means of self-expression."²⁹⁵ The mass dissemination of cheap means of photographing and the academicization of photography, along with exhibitions by MoMA's photography department under John Szarkowski, made both artists and photographers reconsider the role of the history of photography in relation to their work. For our purposes, the focus will be on works which collectively foster a critical reappraisal of the representation of the body and its relation to portraiture.

In the sixties, the traditional roles of 'artist' and 'photographer' became much less distinct. Yet today, art historians have largely reasserted this separation. In 1974, Italian scholar Lea Vergine noticed a more interdisciplinary artistic engagement with the body, something most current historians seem to have moved away from:

The body is being used as an art language by an ever greater number of contemporary painters and sculptors, and even though the phenomenon touches upon artists who represent different currents and tendencies, who use widely differing art techniques, and who come from a variety of cultural and intellectual backgrounds, certain characteristics of this way of making art are nonetheless to be found in all of its manifestations.²⁹⁶

Taking an international view of the phenomenon, Vergine argues that one of the main characteristics of artists using the body is the exploration of the terrain of the "Other": "The individual is obsessed by the obligation to exhibit himself in order to be able *to be*. The over-riding desire is to live collective *ethos* and *pathos*, to grasp the *existent* in all of its brutal physicality..."²⁹⁷ She goes on to note the

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 113.

²⁹⁶ Lea Vergine, Body Art and Performance: The Body as Language (Milan, Italy: Skira, 2000) (1974), 7. Vergine's psychoanalytical methodology is occasionally convoluted, but her point about the breadth of 'body discourse' in art of the late sixties and seventies is a valuable position that addresses the historical complexity of the period. Also to my mind she seems to be the earliest art historian engaging Gilles Deleuze (briefly, on 'symptomatology'), 12.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 8. Jean Paul Sartre wrote extensively about the Other, the Body, and the gaze in Being and Nothingness, Hazel E. Barnes trans. (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956 (1943), 221-379. Sartre's seminal work must be seen as the substrate of most subsequent forays into the subject.

coalescing of artist and subject: "instead of giving us a story and a character, these artists become both story and character. They are looking for the human being who isn't castrated by the functionalism of society--the man who lives outside of the laws of profit."²⁹⁸ It is not surprising that Vergine's analysis was overlooked by scholars and critics who still adhered to more rigidly codified models of modernist historicism--which separated art movements into narrowly drawn spaces. Yet a look back on the period in question reveals movements like Fluxus, and seminal artists like Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, Carrollee Schneemann, Dan Graham, and Robert Smithson, to name a few, who wished to problematize, and to work in the interstices between, such movements and classifications.

The Vietnam War was the first major war that was consistently broadcast on television, and watched by a mass audience.²⁹⁹ Shocking, uncensored photographs and videos of wounded, flayed, and traumatized bodies of multiple ethnicities and on both sides of the war were brought right into people's living rooms for the first time. The physical horror and trauma of war on the body had an unprecedented visual immediacy which strongly impacted audiences. One of the most memorable was Huynh Cong (Nick) Ut's now-famous photograph of a young Vietnamese girl, Phan Thi Kim Phuc, whose clothes had been burned off. Kim Phuc runs screaming naked down a rural road, her village having been napalmed in error by a South Vietnamese plane. A wall of smoke looms ominously behind her. Kim Phuc's young body and terrified expression represent a contemporary image of gross inhumanity--an emotional intensity

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 9.

²⁹⁹ For a good critical overview of photography's relationship to this period, see "The period 1960-1980" in Diana Emery Hulick and Joseph Marshall, *Photography 1900 to the Present* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1998), 175-192. The section on Arbus is particularly insightful, as it deals with issues like identity, process, and fragmentation in Arbus's work.

reminiscent, perhaps, of Edvard Munch's The Scream (1893). Italian artist Gianfranco Baruchello, in his *perforce* statement of 1968, poetically described the emotional impact of this photograph: "The flesh of children, the bodies of children, children in the ritual mechanics of sacrifice. The ring-a-ring o' roses of the tiny bird disappears in a blaze of napalm...."³⁰⁰

Eddie Adams's shocking photograph of a South Vietnamese police chief executing the suspected leader of a Vietcong commando unit with a pistol shot to the head at close range, taken in February 1968, seemed brazen, almost casual, done right in the street in broad daylight, evidently without due process of law. Such photographs placed the body at the center of international political and cultural upheavals. By inference, they connected American policies to such gross mistreatment of the human body. Body and brutish ideology coalesced in the space of the photograph, and the body's fragility, its evanescent beauty, was thrown into sharper relief.

Mahatma Ghandi urged that the body be used directly in the line of nonviolent civil protest, a mantra adopted by the American Civil Rights movement and taken up by student activist organizations and the New Left. Artists whom we tend not to think of as Arbus's contemporaries, such as Schneemann, Yayoi Kusama, Alan Kaprow, Yoko Ono, and European artists like Jurgen Klauke, among others, began using the body, either their own or someone else's, as a primary medium. These artists used their bodies to challenge Modernist formalism, traditional relationships between artist and medium, the representation of gender, and the boundaries between artist, spectator, and mass culture. Like Schneemann and other artists, Arbus's photographs complicate the way in which the body is commodified in pop

³⁰⁰ Gianfranco Baruchello, excerpt from *Perforce*, 1968, in Lea Vergine, Body Art and Performance, 38.

culture. She photographed people who appear to contradict consumer-oriented typologies by blurring accepted boundaries of gender, and the representation of 'The Other.' Her subjects meet the gaze of the viewer directly, appearing quite comfortable with their marginalization from society's norms.

In earlier chapters, we have seen that Arbus's work engages in a critique of social typologies. As such, her work needs to be situated within the broader range of synchronic art practices by a diverse range of artists committed to effacing the boundaries between art, activism, and culture, and whose central interface was the human body--and its cultural mirror, the photograph.³⁰¹ In a chapter entitled "The Body in Photography," Graham Clarke, in his *The Photograph* (1997), aptly describes the methodological background from which my arguments in this chapter emerge:

so much recent criticism and theory, drawing on recent developments in the understanding of social and cultural codes, as well as on psychoanalysis and gender theory, has increasingly viewed the depiction of the nude and of the body in relation to a complex series of social and cultural structures and values, in which sexuality is not so much a given as a construction in which are reflected other values and relationships; especially in terms of gender difference, the image of women, and homosexuality.³⁰²

Clarke's statement encapsulates a now-familiar litany taken from postmodern discourse. In retrospect, it may be ascertained that Arbus's photographs of the body constitute part of the ground of what is now considered postmodern photography.³⁰³ Summarizing the postmodern perspective about the

³⁰¹ Kristine Stiles lists the diverse range of practices in the 1960s now called "Performance art": concrete art, Happenings, Fluxus, action, direct art, ceremonies, demonstrations, kinetic theater... process art, interactive art, actual art, activities, guerrilla art, guerrilla theater, guerrilla art action, street theater, live art, event art, eventstructure, consciousness raising, survival research, and many more."Kristine Stiles, "Uncorrupted Joy: International Art Actions" in Paul Schimmel et. al., *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object* (exh. cat. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), 229.

³⁰² Graham Clarke, *The Photograph* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 123.

³⁰³ This topic deserves broader scholarly treatment, but is beyond my scope here. Some possible connections will be made in the conclusion.

intersection of the body with the camera in the Sixties, Pultz claims that:

postmodern theory argues against essential definitions which assume that categories such as "male," "female," or "the body" are understood to mean the same things in all cultures or at all periods. These terms are historically and culturally variable. Neither the body nor photography has any set meaning, any absolute or unchanging essence; rather the meaning of each is determined by social, historical, and cultural contexts.³⁰⁴

Arbus's photographs of the human body need to be interrogated in terms of a time in when the body operates against its definitions, in which "issues of personal identity, sexuality, gender, and sexual orientation but also issues of power, ideology, and politics" are being written about and discussed for the first time in relationship to photography.³⁰⁵ Perhaps a work like Lisette Model's Coney Island Bather, New York of 1938-41 (figure 3-2) presages such a reading (Arbus owned a copy of this work, given to her by Model in 1968).³⁰⁶ In the iconic Model photograph, the burly, monumental body of the subject subverts the pinup pose of the slender bathing beauty and the demure receptivity of the classical reclining nude.

Indeed, the street photography of Model, Klein, and Faurer signaled a modern collision of body and a kind of immediacy of the urban experience. In reference to 1960s street photography, Pultz echoes this claim for a broad-based analysis of the body:

It was, in fact, just this 'here-and-now' quality that legitimized street photography as art within the aesthetics of the 1960s, which held direct, bodily experience as paramount. Street photography shared with Minimalism, Pop, Happenings, and such experimental artists as the Fluxus group not only immediacy, but also a disregard for history, tradition, and anything else that could be seen or felt.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ Pultz, Photography and the Body, 8.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Arbus, Revelations, 192. Arbus responded with the following note: "dear Lisette, I have been staring at it and staring at it. Makes me feel good. I want to give you one too."

³⁰⁷ Pultz, 122.

Pultz's view represents a good starting point for a broader and more complete understanding of the intersection of traditional art practices (painting, sculpture) and photography that increasingly seems to define the period.

But Arbus's mature work is not street photography, despite her being linked to its primary practitioners, Garry Winogrand and Lee Friedlander.³⁰⁸ Arbus's *oeuvre* is among the first to consistently engage the body of the subject as a part of a larger system of classification within a matrix of social and mythological connections, 'as representation,' as opposed to the traditional 'body-as-object'. Arbus was drawn to photographing the naked human body in all of its *imperfections*, whether genetically or socially imposed, effacing the hierarchies that series like Sander's had constructed.

A contact sheet from 1966 gives evidence of an encounter between Arbus and a couple of mixed ethnicity (figure 3-3).³⁰⁹ It underscores Arbus's commitment to a palpable, and performative, interface with her subjects. The twelve frames of the contact sheet reveal the intimacies of a couple sitting on a couch together in various stages of undress. In one frame, Arbus has substituted her own naked body, draped over the lap of the smiling man, who clearly is enjoying the *mise en scene*. At the time this roll of film was shot, Arbus photographed orgies in which she was a participant, and some of her own individual sex partners were shot afterward.³¹⁰ Arbus was not thrilled with the results, and never printed them. But the fact that she engaged in such activity speaks both to her sense of commitment to a subject, demonstrated earlier in her

³⁰⁸ I intend to discuss this misperception further in the epilogue. The most up-to-date of these misreadings is an exhibition at the Geffen Contemporary, MoCA, entitled "Street Credibility," curated by the artist Mike Kelley (March-June 2004).

³⁰⁹ Arbus, *Revelations*, 180.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 178.

becoming a nudist to enter and photograph the nudist colony, and to what she called "secret rites," in an era in which sexual experimentation and the excesses of the body were being undertaken by increasing numbers of Americans.

There is almost always a relationship in Arbus's photographs between the body and its socially contingent manifestation. Given Arbus's love of metaphor, of finding the mythical in the contemporary, it is not surprising that she participated in orgies. She saw them as being connected to an ancient cultural tradition, such as in classical Rome, whose cosmogony and pantheon of gods was grounded in myth, *and* as a sixties fad linked to attitudes of less inhibited sexual behavior. No doubt she would have been amused by the tawdry and uncomfortable realities of the orgy which popular romantic tales and historical accounts tended to leave out.

As performance art is documented through photography, film, video, and text, so is Arbus's work a document of her own "performance" (at this point, however, I wish to distance myself from the reading of her work as narcissistic, inherently "about Diane Arbus," in a psychological sense). Again, Arbus's interest in the body was in its interface with culture, and how the body (often clumsily) wore the signifiers of culture. Whether she photographed The Human Pincushion, Ronald C. Harrison, (1962), A Naked Man Being a Woman, N.Y.C. (1968), or A Husband and Wife in the Woods at a Nudist Camp (1963), to name but a few examples, the body of the subject was at the center of Arbus's desire to capture "the gap between intention and effect," the locus of meaning, the surface upon which individual eccentricity and cultural conditioning collided. Arbus scholar Diana Hulick sees in work such as her Jewish Giant the interest in a record of the transformative process of a body over several photo shoots (she first met Eddie Karmel ten years prior to her now-famous photograph). Discussing the social mechanism evident in Arbus's representation of the body,

Hulick points out that “the grotesque human body may be seen as an individualized symbol for a decaying social structure...thus, Arbus manages to both confuse our emotional expectations and forge an uneasy link between the viewer and the subject.”³¹¹ This statement supports the fact that Arbus saw her subjects as socially contingent bodies, whose “grotesque” quality was mediated by the expectations of the viewer of the photograph. In this way, Arbus may be said to be in the same category as Frank, Friedlander, and Winogrand in her wish to disrupt the comfortable expectations and ingrained stereotypes of the viewer.

II. Arbus’s Subjects and the New Documents Exhibition

Arbus’s treatment of the body suggests a divergence from the unified thematic premise of the 1967 *New Documents* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, NY. Curated by John Szarkowski, the exhibition, which featured work by Arbus, Friedlander, and Winogrand, ostensibly addressed the interrelationship between photographer and subject in terms of a new and more personal, subjective development in photographic practice. These practitioners supposedly “directed the documentary approach to more personal ends.” In the exhibition leaflet (there was no published catalogue), Szarkowski frames the premise of the exhibition within the rubric of documentary photography, claiming that “most of those who were called documentary photographers a generation ago, when the label was new, made their pictures in the service of a social cause. It was their aim to show what was wrong with the world, and to

³¹¹Diana Emery Hulick, Photography 1900 to the Present (Upper Saddle river, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998), 190.

persuade their fellows to take action and to make it right.”³¹² Szarkowski then links the social reform-minded, FSA-era documentary photographer with three from the present day: “in the past decade a new generation of photographers has directed the documentary approach toward more personal ends. Their aim has been not to reform life, but to know it.” This statement seems to place all three photographers at a remove from any kind of pathos associated with the documentary subject. Yet if we view Arbus’s work as a social panorama, a common thread of empathy is evident, linking her more closely to 1930s works like Walker Evans’s *Alabama sharecroppers* and August Sander’s *Face of Our Time*. Like Evans, Arbus wished to humanize her subjects. We must remember that Evans did not consider his work “documentary,” but an artistic project (see chapter One). Also, in terms of Arbus’s relationship to pastiche, she retains the rhetoric of the documentary pose in the straightforwardness of her framing of the subject. So in this sense, Szarkowski is correct in her calling her work a ‘new document.’ Yet her work is closer to what constitutes a critique of portraiture; as an ironic response to the history of photographic portrait galleries rather than merely a new approach to the documentary tradition.

Peter Bunnell argues that framing the exhibition against the backdrop of documentary photography produced a case of mistaken comparison between the work of the three photographers. Bunnell thought that the viewer linked the work of the three photographers unnecessarily to that of the men and women of the depression era, “who, according to the narrow definition of documentary photography, attempted in their photographs to show actuality and subsequently, through their photographs, to alter the course of events.”³¹³

Bunnell goes on to differentiate the aims of the documentarians and the ‘new

³¹² John Szarkowski, “New Documents” exhibition leaflet, 1967. n.p. Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent quotations in this section are from the leaflet.

³¹³ Peter Bunnell, “Diane Arbus,” *Print Collector’s Newsletter* (Jan./Feb. 1973), 128.

documentarians' by arguing that a class-based materialism was at the root of the concern of the 1930s photographer, but the 'new documentarians' were interested in "the redefinition of the freedom of contemporary life."³¹⁴ The *New Documents* exhibition, without ever saying so, unearths a bifurcation in the definition of documentary photography: on the one hand, that of the portrait, in terms of Arbus's work, and on the other, that of street photography, in terms of Winogrand's and Friedlander's. Arbus's work retains a vestige of empathy for the subject, whereas Winogrand's and Friedlander's does not.

Acknowledging a rather general thematic organization, Szarkowski asserts his three photographers' differences and similarities: "what unites them is not style or sensibility...each has a distinct and personal sense of the uses of photography and the meanings of the world. What they hold in common is the belief that the commonplace is really worth looking at, and the courage to look at it with a minimum of theorizing." This somewhat nebulous description continues with his description of how Arbus's work fits the triumvirate: "The portraits of Diane Arbus show that all of us--the most ordinary and the most exotic of us--are, on closer scrutiny, remarkable."

The exhibition leaflet says that the works were selected by Szarkowski, but from their correspondence, it is clear that Arbus and Szarkowski chose her photographs for the exhibition together. Recovering from a bout with hepatitis, Arbus writes to Szarkowski:

Dear John I looked in the box and maybe I was still sick that first time or something but I don't like a lot of the pictures so...[could we meet] please for dinner (or breakfast or lunch) so we can come to an understanding. I am in no particular hurry though because I fancy that what I am doing now is better than most of what I have done but its [*sic*] true I haven't even seen it yet.³¹⁵

The box Arbus refers to is one which contained images she and Szarkowski had

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Arbus, postcard to John Szarkowski dated November 8, 1966 in *Revelations*, 183.

initially selected, but she felt some of her current, as-yet-unprinted work needed to be considered as well. Arbus's prints chosen for the exhibition vary in size, the largest at 16 x 20 inches. Most are square format, but one, Miss Venice Beach Beauty Contest, an early work from 1962, is a horizontal image. There are twenty-six images in the exhibition, and they are framed but unmatted in slender Kulicke plastic boxes the same size as the prints themselves.³¹⁶ The visual effect was that the prints looked tacked to the wall. Some of the works included in the exhibition were Exasperated Boy with a Toy Hand Grenade (1962), Married Couple at Home, Nudist Camp, New Jersey (1963), Widow in Her Bedroom, 55th Street (1963), Young Man in Curlers, West 20th Street, New York City (1966), and the iconic Identical Twins, Roselle, New Jersey (1966).³¹⁷

Describing the layout of the exhibition, Szarkowski said that "[t]he exhibition space... is on the ground floor [of MoMA] and consists of one discreet room and a contiguous long hall that opens on to a second room about twice the size of the first. Early on it is decided that Diane's work will occupy the first room, while Friedlander's and Winogrand's photographs are to be hung in separate areas of the larger one."³¹⁸ In a 1972 interview with Doon, Szarkowski claimed that the exhibition layout was partially a response to the differences in format, style, and subject matter of Arbus's work, which would look odd paired with the work of either Friedlander or Winogrand.³¹⁹ Christopher Phillips notes a drastic change in exhibition design from Steichen to Szarkowski, from "chock-a-block displays" with "mural-sized enlargements" characteristic of Steichen's

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ titles are given as they appeared on the *New Documents* leaflet. The leaflet, which indicates "all works are lent by the photographers," a fact which underscores the newness of the work, lists only 20 Arbus works, but there were 26 total in the exhibition.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

1950s exhibitions to “an orderly march of prints of uniform size” which characterized Szarkowski’s preference for display.³²⁰ Indeed, *New Documents* presented works like framed snapshots and developed by the photographers themselves.

Arbus’s work in the *New Documents* exhibition reads as a collection of bodies, as a portrait gallery of contemporary types which seem to confront the viewer’s traditional expectations of honorific photographic typologies. In the *New Documents* exhibition, twenty-six Arbus photographs had a room to themselves, the first room the viewer entered. Hung relatively close together, Arbus’s photographs read collectively as a series of portraits, as a separate gallery. However brief, Szarkowski’s *New Documents* exhibition continues to frame Arbus today. With certain exceptions, most of Arbus’s subjects are regionally specific, representing people from New York City, New Jersey, and a nudist camp in Pennsylvania. Winogrand’s and Friedlander’s work, on the other hand, is taken all over the country, suggesting a closer kinship to the American road-inspired visions of Jack Kerouac and Robert Frank. Arbus’s regional specificity has little to do with the photograph as the record of a personal journey through the American landscape, as Winogrand’s and Friedlander’s work suggests; instead, the work reads as a compendium of eccentric urban types. The nature of the titles of the photographs in the exhibition further attest to this thematic difference. Arbus’s titles refer specifically to individuals *in* places, whereas Friedlander’s and Winogrand’s titles refer just to places, such as Friedlander’s Street scene (1963) or Winogrand’s Central Park, New York City of 1966. Person and landscape (or cityscape) in Friedlander’s and Winogrand’s work are a testament to a public experience which can be funny,

³²⁰ Christopher Phillips, “the Judgement Seat of Photography,” 35. Phillips critiques John Szarkowski’s exhibitions of photographs as evidenced of a shift in “cultural packaging” which sought to distance the art photograph “from the encroachments of mass culture.”

uncanny, or alienating; either way, the landscape, coupled with the horizontal format, ultimately defines the actions and social relations in their pictures. Arbus's work, on the other hand, is straightforward, about the individual, a characteristic augmented by the square format of the picture.

Initially, the critical reception of the *New Documents* exhibition did not emphasize Arbus's "freaks." In fact, contemporary critics saw her as a sympathetic eye. David Vestal wrote that "she photographs individuals who in one way or another depart from conventional behavior or appearance, but she does not emphasize their "abnormal" or "freak" character. Instead, she concentrates on showing--with dignity, seriousness, and sympathy--how much they have in common with the "normal" people around them."³²¹ Vestal suggests a connection in Arbus's work to the attempt at an unvarnished realism reminiscent of Gustave Courbet. Jacob Deschin of the *New York Times* noted stylistic differences between the three photographers:

Mr. Winogrand and Mr. Friedlander complement each other. The former moves in rhythm with human activity to capture groupings and motion that almost have the quality of a frame from a movie film. They have a mood of climax, of a moment stopped at the peak of a situation. They also have the feeling of a snapshot, as opposed to Miss Arbus's fairly studied, deliberate efforts.³²²

Deschin was on to something which he did not elaborate upon further, but he nonetheless correctly points to quite different sources for each photographer's work. Winogrand and Friedlander's work recalls a kind of cinematic speed, a feeling produced with a 35-mm Leica, in which both the photographer and his subjects were in motion. Thus, Winogrand and Friedlander might be said to be closer to Cartier-Bresson's notion of the "decisive moment." On the contrary, Arbus's approach, which I termed an 'inverted decisive moment' in Chapter One, is the moment at which the subject is photographed departing from the

³²¹ David Vestal, "New Documents," *Infinity* (April 1967), 26.

³²² Jacob Deschin, "People Seen As Curiosity," *The New York Times* (Sunday, March 5, 1967).

socially programmed manner to which they had become accustomed to posing for photographs. Once again, Arbus called this separation of intention the “gap between intention and effect”; she said, “...something is ironic in the world and it has to do with the fact that what you intend never comes out like you intend it.”³²³

Despite the initially positive critical reception, though, Arbus’s work, as the most frequently discussed in the *New Documents* exhibition, shocked the public. Fearful of public misperception, Arbus attended her exhibition almost every day to hear people’s reactions to her work.³²⁴ Many negative reactions contributed to Arbus’s lapse into a depression, a condition that plagued her throughout her lifetime. Arbus felt the public was misreading her work, and she did not want to be known simply as “the photographer of freaks” who exploited her subjects.³²⁵

It was not until after her death, at the 1972 retrospective exhibition at MoMA, and the 1972 Venice Biennale, that Arbus’s reputation as a dark, haunted “freak photographer” would become solidified. Susan Sontag, in “America, Seen through Photographs, Darkly” (1973), argued that Arbus’s was a dark vision of humanity, a “sharp-eyed, witty program of despair.”³²⁶ Sontag disagreed with earlier arguments that noted a sympathy to Arbus’s subjects, and said acidly, “anybody Arbus photographed was a freak.” Hilton Kramer’s review of Arbus’s work at the Venice Biennale was titled “The Powerful Freaks of Diane

³²³ Arbus, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*, 2.

³²⁴ Bosworth, 249.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 250.

³²⁶ Sontag, “America, Seen Through Photographs, Darkly” in *On Photography*, 48.

Arbus."³²⁷ Kramer's short essay was positive, and mentioned her sympathy for her subjects. His pithy analysis of her work is cogent:

Her work rejects our customary notions of social normality. It rejects them in two ways—first and foremost, by dwelling on subjects (transvestites, nudists, giants, identical twins) that exist on the margin of the social norm, and then also by dealing with conventional subjects (suburbia, for example) as if they were bizarre. But the power of these pictures does not derive from their subject matter alone. It derives in equal degree from the style Arbus developed to deal with them. This style, which lavishes an extraordinary candor and sympathy on her subjects, is almost an anti-style.³²⁸

Despite Kramer's analysis, though, the title of his article ultimately reinforced the perception of Arbus as a "freak photographer" in the early seventies. Since 1972, and particularly now in 2004, we are prone to think about Arbus's work as individual works of art hung in a row in the sanctimonious spaces of the museum.

Arbus's letters, however, indicate that she was reticent about having her work shown in a museum context. She was worried that her work would be misunderstood. In a 1967 *Newsweek* interview, Arbus told Anne Ray Martin that "I always thought I'd wait until I'm ninety to have a show or...[do] a book because I figured I was good for only one shot—that I wanted to wait until I had it all done."³²⁹ Arbus's quote suggests two things: that her work as of the *New Documents* exhibition was a work in progress, and that it had a greater thematic coherence than was indicated there. Szarkowski stated that "Diane was not at all eager to exhibit her work...when [the pictures] were exhibited or published she wanted to be certain that it was at the right time and in the right way and under the right circumstances, so that the pictures were not in violation of her personal,

³²⁷ The same article appeared in the *New York Times* under the title "Arbus Photos, at Venice, Show Power." Hilton Kramer, "The Powerful Freaks of Diane Arbus," *International Herald Tribune* (June 18, 1972).

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Arbus, *Revelations*, 80.

moral commitment...in addition to that, she was conscious of the fact that what she was doing was quite different from what other photographers were doing, and she wanted a chance to complete it...before getting it out in public."³³⁰ One of the lingering effects of Szarkowski's *New Documents* exhibition is the removal of the work from the context of the magazine photo-story for which each photograph was originally intended. In the sections that follow, I want to remind the reader of the context of her work--both in magazines and in the larger cultural context of the 1960s.

III. The Record of an Encounter: Parallels with Performance Art

"A photograph for Diane was an event," Marvin Israel said in a 1972 television interview. Israel emphasized Arbus's love of the encounter itself: "it could be argued that for Diane the most valuable thing wasn't the photograph (the result), it was the experience--the event. She was absolutely moved by every single event, and she would narrate them in detail."³³¹ An artistic mentor to Arbus who knew her work perhaps better than anyone else, Israel suggests an experiential aspect to Arbus's photographic practice, one which involved not just capturing a photograph, but culling a 'story' as well. This has obvious connections to photojournalism, yet it is clear that Arbus meant to inject new artistic meaning into this process. No longer a passive observer, Arbus herself was now a part of the story. Israel's use of the term 'event' in 1972, then, suggests an analysis of Arbus's work in terms of artists' performances, often called 'Happenings' or 'events,' which took place while she was alive. Arbus refers to Happenings in her notebooks, but as one category among a list of

³³⁰ Szarkowski, "An Interview With John Szarkowski," by Kelly Wise, in *Views: The Journal of Photography in New England* 2,4(1982) in *Revelations*, 184.

³³¹ Marvin Israel, interview on CBS TV's *Camera Three*, Nov. 12, 1972 in Bosworth, 193.

others, a new kind of social ritual worth a look.

Early on in her career, Arbus was connected to American avant-garde painters and photographers. She and her husband Allan attended many parties with some of the leading figures of Abstract Expressionism present, and went to underground film screenings.³³² Allan obtained a bit part in *Pull My Daisy* (1959), a film by Robert Frank, Alfred Leslie, and Jack Kerouac—a film about the members of the Beat Generation, such as Kerouac and poet Allen Ginsberg.³³³ Often, Arbus would attend these events alone or with Allan, and occasionally with Mary and Robert Frank, whom the Arbuses often saw socially in the late 1950s.³³⁴ By the mid-1960s, Arbus was seen everywhere in New York—at art gallery openings, Happenings, at the Judson Memorial Church, a leading center of avant-garde dance. Photographer Bob Adelman, who documented the Civil Rights movement for *Look* magazine, said “Diane was at every spectacle, every parade, right up to the Gay Rights Liberation March of 1970.”³³⁵ Arbus never explicitly claims allegiance to these events, but she attended many of them, and was involved socially with the artists who comprised the avant-garde art scene in the 1960s.³³⁶ It is important then to discuss resonant *leitmotifs* between her work and other works of the period.

Arbus’s use of time in her photo-shoots and the chronological makeup of performance art have some interesting parallels. Allan Kaprow and other performance artists emphasized the *discontinuity*, or chronological open-

³³² Bosworth, 145.

³³³ Jack Kerouac wrote the screenplay, and the film starred Mooney Peebles, Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Peter Orlovsky, and Larry Rivers.

³³⁴ Bosworth, 146-47.

³³⁵ Bob Adelman in *Ibid.*, 224.

³³⁶ See Chapter Two, page 137.

endedness, of the performance. Arbus's photographic experiences, regulated by what may be viewed as a chronological discontinuity, engage both the encountered human body and the evidence of that encounter, the photograph, to produce meaning. Arbus's photo shoots, of which which we now are able to look at the contact sheets, involve the culling of a particular story in order to emphasize the social meanings behind eccentric thoughts and actions performed by the subject. If we might apply the concept of chronological discontinuity to Arbus's work, a parallel may be found in that she meant to have no specific duration for the shoot--and she liked it that way. This has some interesting parallels with performance art that deserve further analysis.

Performance artists sought a new relationship to art through the body. This new relationship was often mediated by photography, as the photograph provided the only evidence of the performance or event having taken place. Often, the photograph of the performance was the intended result of the action, as with some of Carolee Schneemann's work. Kristine Stiles points out that the photographs of Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions of 1963 (figure 3-4), taken by Schneemann's friend, the Icelandic photographer Erró, were "taken in private for the express purpose of producing photographs."³³⁷ Schneemann wanted her body to be a literal extension of the artwork, to engage her flesh as the *matière*, the tangible substance, of the work. In Eye Body, Schneemann built an environment of large panels, broken mirrors, glass, lights, and motorized objects such as umbrellas. This was closely related in scale to her own body.³³⁸ Schneemann said of this work that "I wanted my actual body to be combined with the work as an integral material--a further dimension of the construction."³³⁹

³³⁷ Kristine Stiles, "Uncorrupted Joy: International Art Actions" in Paul Schimmel ed., Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-79 (Los Angeles: MoCA, 1998), 296.

³³⁸ Amelia Jones in Tracey Warr ed., The Artist's Body (London: Phaidon, 2000), 61.

³³⁹ Schneemann, "More than Meat Joy" (1979) in *Ibid.*

In a conceptual *tour de force*, Schneemann collapsed the metaphoric distance between sculpture and the female subject, rearticulating it not in clay or paint but in her own (female) body: "Covered in paint and plastic, I establish my body as visual territory. Not only am I an image-maker, but I explore the image values of flesh as material I choose to work with."³⁴⁰ Amelia Jones reminds us how subversive this performance was at the time: "for a female artist to use her naked body in her work as an extension of the traditional practices of painting and sculpture/construction was an extremely radical act in 1963...."³⁴¹ Schneemann cannily engaged the issue of gender both in relation to her persona as a female artist working against a then male-dominated art world, and in response to the objectification of the female body as visual representation. In a sense, she undoes the traditional binarism of subject and object.

Some of Arbus's work may be said to share this sensibility. I have already mentioned Arbus's work at a nudist colony in 1965, when she herself became a nudist for a few days. Arbus's commitment to photographing nudists seems to be a hybrid form of photojournalism in which the photographer, no longer a passive observer, is instead an artist at the center of a "performance" which has no specific chronological sense of duration. The photograph is of course the intended result. The comfort of the subjects with her presence partly stems from the fact that they also are being photographed by a nudist.

Arbus's own body is absent from the nudist photographs, and indeed almost all of her work, yet the photographs were nevertheless a record of her 'performance' as a nudist. The comfort her nudist subjects feel with her presence is tangible in their expressions. These photographs illuminate the cultural and gendered constructions in the presentation of the nude body. In Nudist Lady

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

With Swan Sunglasses, 1965 (figure 3-5), Arbus presents a nude in both classical contrapposto and twentieth-century pinup pose. The woman's pose is that of a contestant in a beauty contest; the woman sucks in her stomach and relaxes her left leg slightly as if posing for an audience. The woman is illuminated by a flash against a lush background, making her appear a kind of mythic woodland creature. The image brings together the frontality of Sander's pictures of farm people with the look of the posed snapshot. The Nudist Lady's medallion necklace, flower petal bathing cap, flowered beach towel, and cheap swan sunglasses, together with a slightly forced smile and self-conscious pose (for clearly she is proud of her body, despite her age), remind the viewer of the inescapability of the body's collision with pop culture.

Yayoi Kusama's work also utilized the ideological terrain of the body. In some of her work, Kusama sought to investigate the relationship between the photograph, the representation of gender, and public display. Her work challenged and complicated issues of gender and identity. In her Naked Event (figure 3-6), staged at several sites around Manhattan, such as the New York Stock Exchange, on July 14, 1968, Kusama engaged naked, dancing bodies of young people which sharply contrasted with the institutions which served as the backdrop of the performance (such as a large bronze statue of George Washington). Jones argues that Kusama's work was fundamentally influenced by issues related to social ferment in the 1960s:

Kusama's artistic strategies were inseparable from her identity politics and social politics; her work makes explicit the connections...among social and identity politics and the deep interrogation of subjectivity characterizing this period. Kusama activated her always already marginalized body/self in a classically 1960s protest against bourgeois prudery, imperialism, racism, and sexism. Many of her public events were posed as demonstrations against the Vietnam War, and her strategic use of self-exposure was intimately linked to the openness urged by the sexual revolution: like Schneemann's body art works, Kusama's are both enactments and effects of the sexual revolution and antiwar

movements as well as the women's movement.³⁴²

As an Asian woman, Kusama exploited her own "otherness" to challenge the assumptions of audiences. On her use of the body, Kusama said:

I find myself being put into a uniform environment, which is strangely mechanized and standardized. I feel this strongly in highly civilized America and particularly so in New York. In the gap between people and the strange jungle of civilized society lie many psychosomatic problems. I am deeply interested in the background of problems involved in the relationship of people and society. My artistic expressions always grow from the aggregation of these.³⁴³

Performative artists utilizing the body were not limited to the United States in the 1960s, but had international practitioners, from France, Italy, Japan, and Germany, as well as other countries. In the early sixties in Austria (1962-63), the performative concept of *Aktionismus* (an activist gesture pertaining to the body) was initially carried out by the *Wiener Aktionisten* (Vienna Actionists) Hermann Nitsch, Günter Brus, Otto Muehl, and Rudolph Schwarzkogler. In the mid- and later sixties, influenced in part by the *Aktionisten*, German artists like Peter Weibel, Valie Export, Rebecca Horn, Jürgen Klauke, and Arnulf Rainer used their own bodies in performances.³⁴⁴ Weibel and Export, in particular, deconstructed the body's relationship to technical media, specifically photography, film, TV, and video.³⁴⁵ Beginning around 1966, Weibel and Export investigated the body in terms of its functions and taboos associated with it.

Works such as their joint performance *Aus der Mappe der Hundigkeit* (From the

³⁴² Amelia Jones, Body Art/Performing the Subject (Minneapolis and London: UMN Press, 1998), 8.

³⁴³ Yayoi Kusama, "Artist's Statement on WABC Radio" (1965) in Tracey Warr ed., The Artists Body (London: Phaidon, 2000), 202.

³⁴⁴ Kristine Stiles, "Gesture and the Object, Liberation as Aktion: A European Component of Performative Art," in Schimmel ed., Out of Actions, 170-72. the first public *Aktionen* were staged by Muehl and Nitsch between 1962 and 1963.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

Portfolio of Doggishness) of 1968, Export's *Tapp und Tastkino* (Grope and touch Cinema), also of 1968 (figure 3-7), Weibel's space of Language (1973) and Klauke's *Physiognomien* of 1972-73 thematized the body as the vehicle of the specific theme under investigation.³⁴⁶ It is not certain whether Arbus knew of such works, but their exploration of issues related to the social construction of the body resonated with Arbus's work, and gives further testimony to the importance of such issues during late 1960s and early 1970s.

Jürgen Klauke's work problematized gender distinctions while exploring the role of the artistic persona. In his series *Physiognomien* of 1972-73 (figure 3-8), Klauke included a series of photographs of himself dressed as a woman, in which his masculinity is left visible in the form of protruding chest hair. Klauke's work provided an ironic commentary upon the way physiognomies are read and produce meaning. Like Arbus, Klauke sought to portray identity in a state of flux, mediated by the gendered signifiers of the pose. Of this series, Stiles remarks that "Klauke, in photographs from 1972 and 1973, dressed as a woman but left his hairy chest visible, questioning conventional definitions of gender and masculinity. Rather than make pictures in which he could "pass" as a woman, Klauke included signs that marked him as masculine; in this way he explored the representational and psychological spaces at the intersection of male and female gender."³⁴⁷ Klauke's obvious artifice of transvestitism exposes the inherent otherness of the physiognomic subject and the pose. Sayre points out that "It could be argued, I think, that the inherent femininity of the pose is a function of photography itself--that the posed photograph is always Other, even if it is of ourselves. Especially after Arbus, the portrait photograph marginalizes us, defines us--or at least the self we see there, in the photograph--as outside the

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 172.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 141.

discourse of the moment. It inscribes, that is, difference upon being."³⁴⁸ What Klauke's work shares with Arbus's is the uncomfortable play, written on the surface of the body, between the physical makeup of the body and the cultural construction of gender the individual tries to pull off. The result in the photograph is an image of shifting, unstable identity which may be said to effectively trope a broader cultural identity crisis at work in the sixties and early seventies in Europe and America.

Arnulf Rainer's Face Farces of 1969 (figure 3-9) also explored the terrain of performance, the self-portrait, and the issue of physiognomy. Taking photo-booth portraits of himself with over-exaggerated facial expressions, Rainer sought to deconstruct readings of physiognomy in terms of identity:

Facial tension and physiognomical expressive strain imply not only a formalistic change of character, communication-addiction and nervous exertion, but also a summoning of dormant, or psychopathic, reserves of energy...these anti-yoga tragi-comic poses, mannered clowneries and tired gestures without grace, chic or charm do not ask for a harmonious physical expression, but search for the unlimited possibilities and the unlikely people who are concealed in all of us.³⁴⁹

The appearance of works like Klauke's and Rainer's attests to the need for a broader examination of interrelated themes this chapter has sought to address. Such works have "sought to demonstrate that the represented body has a language and that this language of the body, like other semantic systems, is unstable."³⁵⁰ The trajectory of such work from start to finish was begun by the action performed by the artist and finished with the document of that action, the photograph. With the aid of hindsight, I think it is possible to deepen our understanding of Arbus's work, and that of her contemporary Richard Avedon,

³⁴⁸ Sayre, The Object of Performance, 76.

³⁴⁹ Arnulf Rainer in Warr ed., The Artist's body, 98.

³⁵⁰ Tracey Warr, "Preface" in Warr ed., the Artist's Body, 13.

as a kindred spirit to body and performance art. The photographer, as an acknowledged artist/author, facilitates the encounter between author and subject. Arbus and Avedon collapsed previously firm boundaries between performance, the fashion shoot, documentary photography, and the portrait. Despite obvious differences in approach, similar thematic tropes may be ascertained which may augment our understanding of their use by artists in the 1960s.

IV. A New Exchange with the Viewer

The increased authorial presence implicit in Arbus's photographs engendered a new exchange with the viewer, one in which the viewer's comfortable assumptions about portraiture and the viewing of the body were thrown into question. On performance art, what she calls "an art of actions," Kristine Stiles remarks that:

Art could be simultaneously representational and presentational, simultaneously claiming the primacy of the body as metaphorical content and as concrete presentational form. Such an art has made more concrete the metonymic relationship of exchange that exists between the viewer and the work of art. But it has further altered that relationship by presenting an acting subject in real exchange with another acting subject: in short, action art presents *two human beings who negotiate meaning with one another, however complicated that mode of communication might be* [my italics].³⁵¹

This statement seems to me to be a good way to draw a parallel between action art of the 1960s and Arbus's approach to her subjects. Her photographs are not merely passive observations but the *record of an encounter* that speaks to a greater degree of 'closeness' to the subject than we have seen in earlier photography. Arbus's photographs are the evidence of a moment between herself and her subjects, both parties being complicit in 'negotiating meaning.'

³⁵¹ Ibid., 228.

This is manifested in how comfortable her subjects look in the photograph. Her photographs are records of an exchange, but, in contrast to performance art, often reveal private lives and intimate encounters.

In Lauro Morales, a Mexican Dwarf, in His Hotel Room in New York City, 1970 (figure 3-10), Arbus captures Morales in closeup, sitting upright on an unmade bed, leaning against a dresser, wearing nothing but a fedora; his nude upper body is visible, and a towel is draped over his lap.³⁵² In the extreme foreground of the image, Morales's foot appears, suggesting the shortness and unusual curvature of his legs under the white hotel towel. Morales's relaxed pose and calm, slightly bemused, yet lustful expression lends the photograph a feeling of intimacy, as if he had just made love to someone, perhaps even Arbus herself. This feeling is augmented by Arbus's inclusion of the unmade bed and rumpled towel in Morales's lap. Nonetheless, Morales's body seems to be an assemblage of different people. His handsome face, fedora, and oversized head seem to belong to another body. There is something decidedly phallic in the positioning of his stunted arms and short, thick, tapered fingers. Arbus engages with the trope of the dwarf, a very old one in the history of art, and humanizes him once again, as did Velázquez and Goya.

Despite what initially appears to be a photojournalistic intentionality, the record of an encounter, Arbus's photographs, to remind the reader of a by-now-familiar litany, use the body in a novel manner as a metaphor or parable for the collision of culture and the body in the 1960s. Her bodies are surfaces upon which culture and artifice are displayed, with startling frankness, as we saw in Nudist Lady with Swan Sunglasses. Arbus's subjects reveal the body at a new

³⁵² The title is taken from Arbus's own title from "Five Photographs by Diane Arbus" in the May 1971 issue of Artforum. The title of the photograph in the 1972 Diane Arbus monograph reads "Mexican Dwarf in His Hotel Room in N.Y.C. 1970." Arbus's own title speaks more to the theme of identity (a man named Lauro Morales, not just a dwarf) which is important to her, and it is odd that the title of the photograph in the monograph would be different than Arbus's own.

cultural nexus with many artists engaging the body to critique the politics of representation. Such a critique often involved the intersection of photography and language. It is important to read Arbus's texts and captions carefully to parse more informed analyses of meaning in her work, as the example of Lauro Morales indicates.

Arbus's photographs of bodies may be said to question the positivist relationship of the photograph to classificatory systems of a sociological nature. She achieves this through the dual mechanism of acknowledging the body's constitution of what Roland Barthes called a 'language of signs,' while also acknowledging the fundamentally subjective, shifting nature of those signs, what Barthes called the "message without a code."³⁵³ Barthes's point was that, despite the photograph's position as a perfect analogue to its referent, its signifiers are always contingent upon the language system (captions, text) that accompanies the photograph. In retrospect, we can see how shifts in captioning, even by the well-intended, engender subtle yet important changes in meaning in Arbus's work.

Arbus's bodies also may be said to consciously reveal what Barthes postulates, in *Camera Lucida*, as the "photographic shock":

The essential gesture of the operator is to surprise something or someone (through the little hole of the camera),...this gesture is therefore perfect when it is performed unbeknownst to the subject being photographed. From this gesture derive all photographs whose principle (or better, whose alibi) is 'shock,'; for the photographic "shock" (quite different from the *punctum*) consists less in traumatizing than in revealing what was so well hidden that the actor himself was unaware or unconscious of it. Hence a whole gamut of surprises (as they are for me, the *Spectator*; but for the photographer, these

³⁵³ Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," (1961) in Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 16-17. In 1968, Susan Sontag, in the preface for Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero & Elements of Semiology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), xi, summarizes Barthes's impact, and unequivocally states that "I would argue that Barthes is the most consistently intelligent, important, and useful critic--stretching that term--to have emerged anywhere in the last fifteen years."

are so many 'performances.').³⁵⁴

Barthes suggests a link between surprise, shock, and a kind of photographic 'performance' in which the photographer orchestrates the encounter (this connection between Arbus and Barthes makes further sense in light of the fact that one of Barthes's most consistent metaphors about his own writing involves a type of performance).³⁵⁵ Arbus seems to fit this description with some of her work, particularly that of people sitting on park benches and closeups of older female pedestrians. She liked to photograph people as they let down their guard, loosened their defenses--she would surprise the subject by clicking away rapidly, like a paparazzi. Arbus engenders the Barthesian 'shock' in terms of a subject who directly engages with the Spectator. But that subject does not see his or her role as a possible metaphor, or 'fairy tale' with a social message. The 'shock,' unbeknownst to the subject, involves the viewer's sense of the body as representation. The body of the subject facilitates the shock in the viewer, as we have an intimate, interiorized, and unconscious body of our own (and photographs of ourselves) to measure against the one in the photograph.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty argued that "it is not to the physical object that the body may be compared, but to the work of art."³⁵⁶ Consider for example the now-iconic A Husband and Wife in the Woods at a Nudist Camp, N.J. of 1963 (figure 2-22). Arbus, who was herself nude when she took this photograph, captures this naked couple in a moment in which they seem comfortable with her presence, with the encounter, with their being photographed. They could not have known that Arbus saw in them a closeness to archetypal

³⁵⁴ Barthes, Camera Lucida, 32. For Barthes, the point of differentiation for the *Spectator* between the 'shock' and the *punctum* is that the *punctum* is contingent upon the individual subjective mechanism of each viewer, whereas the shock is a possible aspect of the *studium*, or social meaning, of the photograph.

³⁵⁵ Sayre, "Critical Performance," in The Object of Performance, 252.

³⁵⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty in Tracey Warr ed., The Artist's Body, 235.

representation. As with the classical contrapposto of the Nudist Lady with Swan Sunglasses, Arbus, in Husband and Wife, saw a contemporary Adam and Eve, linking their image to a long history of representations of the first Old Testament couple (perhaps most famously by Albrecht Dürer and Lucas Cranach).³⁵⁷ His pack of cigarettes, her lower abdominal scar and flip-flops, are all premeditated by Arbus as signifiers of Adam and Eve's collision with contemporary culture. Even the landscape background, their 'Garden of Eden,' seems hardly edenic. It is, as Arbus puts it, "mangy"; she says, "it gets to seem as if way back in the Garden of Eden after the Fall, Adam and Eve begged the Lord to forgive them and He, in his boundless exasperation had said, 'All right, then. Go ahead. Stay. Stay in the garden. Get Civilized. Procreate. Muck it up.' And they did."³⁵⁸ The imperfections of A Husband and Wife's bodies also add to the 'shock' of the image; compared to the idealized nudes and pinups of popular culture, their bodies seem oddly mishapen. Yet as we view them today, their reality seems to contain a monumentality that speaks to a kind of naïve utopian belief in communal living prevalent in the 1960s. The earnestness of their expressions lends the couple a delicious goofiness, or dorkiness, which Arbus registers in the stark gender differences of their bodies.

³⁵⁷ Arbus sent a postcard of Lucas Cranach's Adam and Eve to Marvin Israel in January 1960. She wrote, "of course you knew that I very much loved the ladies of Cranach. I wish I had the Adam and Eve for you. I had cut them out once, but they got torn." Arbus, Revelations, 151.

³⁵⁸ Arbus, Diane Arbus, An Aperture Monograph, 5.

V. Conceptual Photography in Magazines and the Critique of the Documentary Photo-story

In general, art historians have classified the work of artists and photographers into two wholly separate categories.³⁵⁹ I want to draw them a bit closer together by aligning Arbus's work with the conceptual photography that appeared in magazines in the 1960s. In this context, the reader of magazines such as *Esquire* and *Harper's Bazaar* was subject to a kind of schizophrenic view of magazine content, one which blended serious, often shocking art photographs and texts with fluff pieces and adds for luxury items and *haute couture*. We must remember that Arbus's work was part of this 'schizophrenic' magazine experience, and would have appeared more shocking then than on the walls of the museum today. Again, my interest is not in making definitive claims about Arbus's intentions, but to discuss the effect of her work by situating it within a larger cultural context that does not rigidly separate the work of 'artists' and 'photographers.' Certainly, given Arbus's keen interest in contemporary currents in art, she was no doubt aware of the latest artistic ideas.

Art and fashion magazines for an affluent and largely liberal audience were used as an alternative to the traditional gallery system of artistic reception. Two main points of commonality between the realms of art and photography reveal themselves: a critique of the model of the photojournalistic 'photo-story,' and an acknowledgement of the odd coupling, in magazine layouts, of the

³⁵⁹ Geoffrey Batchen refers to this "myopia of the present" in his essay entitled "Cancellation" in Douglas Fogle ed., *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography 1960-1982* (exh. cat. Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 2003), 177. In this essay, Batchen, using the example of the work of Thomas Barrow, argues that "American photography was in fact continually being ruptured from within," and that artists using photography and photographers who were artists shared many common concerns.

ironic/critical use of photography bookended by ads for clothing, alcohol, and other accoutrements of 'high living.'³⁶⁰

In his essay on American conceptual photography and the neo-avant-garde, photographer Jeff Wall makes a salient point about the reception of documentary photography, and its subversion, in the 1960s:

this introversion, or subjectivization, of documentary photography was manifested in two important directions. First, it brought photography into a new relationship with the problematics of the staged, or posed, picture, through new concepts of performance. Second, the inscription of photography into a nexus of experimental practices led to a direct but distantiated and parodic relationship with the art-concept of photojournalism.³⁶¹

Wall refers to the photographic work of Richard Long and Bruce Nauman as representative of the first issue, and the work of Dan Graham, Douglas Heubler, and Robert Smithson of the second. Wall's statement refers only to artists using photography, yet could be expanded to include *photographers* using photography. In the sixties, the previously firm boundaries between artist and photographer were blurred. Thus, Wall's discussion of this condition could be extended to include Arbus's work as well.³⁶² Arbus's work may be seen as characteristic of Wall's first condition, as her relationship to her subjects, evident in the photograph, is the result of her own 'performance.' Of this performative character she assumed, Arbus said:

Actually, they tend to like me. I'm extremely likable with them. I think I'm kind of two-faced. I'm very ingratiating. It really kind of annoys me. I'm just sort of a little too nice. Everything is Oooo. I hear myself saying, 'how terrific,' and there's this woman making a face. I really *mean* its terrific. I don't mean I

³⁶⁰ Frederic Jameson postulated that the schizophrenic consumer experience which characterizes the contemporary is one of "isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence." See Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" in Hal Foster ed., The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 119.

³⁶¹ Jeff Wall, "Marks of Indifference: Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art" (1995) in Fogle ed., The Last Picture Show, 36.

³⁶² Ibid.

wish I looked like that. I don't mean I wish my children looked like that. I don't mean in my private life I want to kiss you. But I mean that's amazingly, undeniably, something. There are always two things that happen. One is recognition and the other is that it's totally peculiar.³⁶³

Arbus's work also may be seen as critical of the concept of photojournalism in the sense that she is not a passive observer. Her photographs are documentary evidence of a particular 'event' which she controlled. Wall argues that the use of reportage "is withdrawn from the social field and attached to a putative theatrical event...," and that "the social field tends to be abandoned to professional photojournalism proper, as if the aesthetic problems associated with depicting it were no longer of any consequence...."³⁶⁴ Arbus's photo-stories oscillate between Wall's postulation of the old and the new, as her work does not wholly embrace a 'putative theatrical event,' nor does it abandon the 'social field.'³⁶⁵ In other words, her images are not completely staged *tableaux-vivants*, despite her obvious influence on the subject. Together with an ironic subversion of the photojournalistic photo-story, in most instances Arbus retains the sympathetic view of the subject characteristic of 1930s reportage, particularly through her claimed interest in Wegee.

In an era when the increasing conceptualization of photography was being made manifest, the shift away from the traditional documentary form signaled the picture's presentation, according to Wall, "by means of a new kind of photographic *mise-en-scène*." [T]hat is, it exists and is legitimated as continuous with the project of reportage by moving in precisely the opposite direction, toward a completely designed pictorial method, an introverted masquerade that

³⁶³ Arbus, Diane Arbus, 1.

³⁶⁴ Wall, 37.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

plays games with the inherited aesthetic of art-photography-as-reportage."³⁶⁶

Bruce Nauman is one artist whose work echoes such a shift. Working within the relatively new framework of performance art, Nauman, argues Wall, "carries out photographic acts of reportage whose subject matter is the self-conscious, self-centered 'play' taking place in the studios of artists who have moved 'beyond' the modern fine arts into the new hybridities."³⁶⁷ In Nauman's works such as Self-Portrait as a Fountain of 1966 (figure 3-12) and Failing to Levitate in the Studio (1966), the artistic value of the photograph is subsumed, becoming merely the document of an artistic act, as opposed to the record of a social phenomenon. Hence, with Nauman, we witness a coalescing of two previously distinct genres of photography: that of the studio portrait and reportage.

Wall's text also looks at the work of Robert Smithson and Dan Graham in terms of how each artist's photographic works problematize photojournalism. Their work has little to do with the actual representation of the body, yet a comparison of some of their work to Arbus's is nonetheless instructive. Like Arbus, both Smithson and Graham used magazines as a medium of dissemination--for providing what Kristine Stiles called an "alternative framing device," a "support...[capable] of collapsing the gallery into the space of criticism" found in two now-iconic works.³⁶⁸ Smithson mimics the documentary photo-story in his mock-travelogue, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey" (figure 3-13) which appeared in *Artforum* (December, 1967). Dan Graham's "Homes for America" of 1966-67 (figure 3-14) appeared in *Arts*

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁸ Kristine Stiles, "Language and Concepts" in Stiles and Peter Selz ed., Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1996), 805. For a more complete discussion of conceptual photography in 1960s magazines, see Melanie Mariño, "Disposable Matter: Photoconceptual Magazine Work of the 1960s" in Fogle, The Last Picture Show, 196-203.

Magazine (Dec. 1966-Jan. 1967), parodying the popular form of the photo-story (with all of its literal and implicit ideologies) on suburban architecture.³⁶⁹ Both works were photographed *and* written by the artists, and were in a sense "anti-photographic," as they sought to engage the model of the photo-story to attenuate the traditional photo-story's ideological hegemony.³⁷⁰ Such an approach was predicated upon the photograph's mass dissemination in the media, not upon the "aura" of the original work. Realizing this, Carl Andre condemned the reproduction of artworks in magazines: "The photograph is a lie. I'm afraid we get a great deal of our exposure to art through magazines and through slides, and I think this is dreadful, this is anti-art because art is a direct experience with something in the world and photography is just a rumor, a kind of pornography of art."³⁷¹ Andre's critique, then, called for a return to the actual, physical experience of the autonomous art object, and was thus at odds with such magazine work--but the magazine work for Smithson and Graham *was* the 'actual object.' It is through this 'low' object status, argued Benjamin Buchloh, that Graham's "Homes for America" explicitly lodged a critique of Minimalism:

Graham inverts Andre's disgust with the media and turns it into a basis for his own artistic strategies...the serial order of the cubic house-forms, their permutational principles of single but repetitive elements (whose sum constitutes the 'wholeness' of a given formation) reflect in an obviously ironic and ambiguous manner the formal and stylistic principles of Minimal sculpture.³⁷²

Graham works within the signifying structure of the magazine layout and the

³⁶⁹ Wall, 38.

³⁷⁰ See Stefan Gronert, "Alternative Pictures: Conceptual Art and the Artistic Emancipation of Photography in Europe" in Fogle ed., *The Last Picture Show*, 88. Also Nancy Foote, "The Anti-Photographers," *Artforum* 15 (September 1976), 46-54.

³⁷¹ Carl Andre, interview with Willoughby Sharp (1968), *Avalanche* (Fall 1970) in Benjamin Buchloh, "Moments of History in the Work of Dan Graham" (1978) in Buchloh, *Neoavantgarde and Culture Industry*, 199.

³⁷² Buchloh, *Ibid.*, 181.

photographic illustration, but disrupts its comfortable associations. Like Arbus, Graham was interested in amateur photographs, and strove to replicate the look of the amateur snapshot.³⁷³ It may be said of some of Arbus's magazine work that she engaged in a similar activity by employing the formal structure of the photo-story, and its appearance, bookended by magazine advertisements, to question the legitimacy of its sociological implications. Yet while Graham's *Homes for America* focused upon the repetitive architecture of suburbia, Arbus looked for individuals who departed from imagery of the social landscape considered characteristic of the suburbs.

A 1964 *Glamour* photo-story by Arbus entitled "The soothsayers" involved photographs that juxtaposed contemporary American soothsayers with their rather banal personal surroundings. Photographed at the center of Arbus's square-format picture, soothsayers such as Leslie Elliot, Doris Fulton, and Dr. George Dareos (figs. 3-15 to 3-17) are presented, posed frontally and somewhat stiffly in comfortable surroundings, such as their living room, or backyard. The surroundings are notable only for their ordinariness, and unremarkable furnishings, suggesting little about the individual's powers--these spaces could be anywhere in America. The soothsayers do not wear damasked robes, babushkas, or pointy hats, but very nondescript, everyday clothing. Dr. George Dareos, for example, dressed like a businessman in summer attire, stands in his garden in Venice, California next to his plastic heron, plaster lion, and ceramic deer.

The soothsayers claimed to have supernatural powers of premonition or divination, and in the text, written by Arbus, she seems to strike a balance between mysticism and American popular culture. Arbus began the piece with

³⁷³ See Birgit Pelzer, "Double Intersections: The Optics of Dan Graham" in Beatriz Colomina et.al., Dan Graham (New York and London: Phaidon, 2001), 38.

the definition of a soothsayer, as “one who claims to have supernatural insight or foresight; a diviner...a truthful person.”³⁷⁴ Arbus’s text is then separated into four vignettes about each individual, and in each, she uses a deadpan, descriptive prose to mention the different qualities of each soothsayer. In particular, each makes a prediction about 1964, and Arbus mentions their quirky personal statements, which are often humorous. Leslie Elliot, for example, is described as “feel[ing] suspended above the world, floating and weary, and he will be ready to die on fifteen minute’s notice.”³⁷⁵ Also, Elliot “has no pleasures except the pleasures of making astrological charts (which sometimes affect him so deeply that he vomits or faints).”³⁷⁶ Dr. Dareos, a soothsayer of the lives of celebrities, says that “Elizabeth Taylor was Cleopatra in another incarnation and she is destined to go down in history as the greatest actress in the world,” and that he “told Jayne Mansfield not to marry Mickey Hargitay.”³⁷⁷ These eccentric, physically and sartorially mundane-looking individuals look like average Americans but are anything but; based upon the mystical and ethereal rather than on social conformity, their lives are in marked contrast to the glossy, stylish images (and readers) of *Glamour*. Of course, Arbus’s, Graham’s, and Smithson’s projects were quite different, but the fact that they used magazines as a mode of display clearly held in common a desire to produce meaning against the grain of the viewer’s experience of the photograph on the magazine page, where readers did not expect to be confronted or conceptually challenged with artistic images.

³⁷⁴ Arbus, Magazine Work, 36.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁷ Arbus in Magazine Work, 36.

VI. Happenings, the Spectator, and the Haptic Body

As performance art changed the evidentiary nature of the photograph of the artist from traditional portrait to document, Happenings also marked a significant shift in the relationship between artist and viewer. Happenings in New York were pioneered by artists such as Allan Kaprow, Jim Dine, Red Grooms, Claes Oldenburg, and Robert Whitman. Since Kaprow's 1959 18 Happenings in 6 Parts, Claes Oldenburg's "Ray gun Show" and collaborative "Ran Gun Spex" of 1960 and The Store of 1961, the organization of the Fluxus group in 1961, and the important interdisciplinary dance events initiated at the Judson Church in 1962, Happenings had been an integral part of the art scene of the late fifties and early sixties.³⁷⁸ Kaprow described the uneasy sense of dislocation experienced by the viewer that was characteristic of the Happening:

Happenings are events which, put simply, happen. Though the best of them have a decided impact--that is, one feels, 'here is something important'--they appear to go nowhere and do not make any particular literary point. In contrast to the art of the past, they have no structural beginning, middle, or end. Their form is open-ended and fluid; nothing obvious is sought and nothing is won, except the certainty of a number of occurrences in which one is more than usually attentive...a happening is *generated in action* by a headful of ideas or a flimsily-jotted-down score of 'root' directions.³⁷⁹

Kaprow emphasized the role of chance in the viewer's experience of the Happening: "chance (in conjunction with Improvisation) is a deliberately employed mode of operating that penetrates the whole composition and its character...the word 'chance,' then, rather than 'spontaneity,' is a key term, for it implies risk and fear (thus reestablishing that fine *nervousness* so pleasant when

³⁷⁸ Henry M. Sayre, The Object of Performance (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 13.

³⁷⁹ Allan Kaprow, "Happenings and the New York Scene" ArtNews 60, 3 (May 1961), 36-39.

something is about to occur)."³⁸⁰ Arbus was also conscious of the quality of chance in her assignments, and sought to 'arrange herself' to suit its sudden shifts and discontinuities. She said, "I work from awkwardness. By that I mean I don't like to arrange things. If I stand in front of something, instead of arranging it, I arrange myself."³⁸¹

In 1966, Susan Sontag noted the new treatment of the audience in Happenings, which literalized a sense of viewing discomfort:

Perhaps the most striking feature of the Happening is the treatment...of the audience. The event seems designed to tease and abuse the audience. The performers may sprinkle water on the audience, or fling pennies or sneeze-producing detergent powder at it. Someone may be making near-deafening noises on an oil drum, or waving an acetylene torch in the direction of the spectators...The audience may be made to stand uncomfortably in a crowded room, or fight for space to stand on boards laid in a few inches of water. There is no attempt to cater to the audience's desire to see everything. In fact this is often deliberately frustrated...³⁸²

Sontag notes the thematic centrality of the body in Happenings: "Much of the action, violent and otherwise, of Happenings involves...[the] use of the person as a material object. There is a great deal of violent using of the physical persons of the performers by the person himself (jumping, falling) and on each other (lifting, throwing, pushing, hitting, wrestling)."³⁸³ Sontag aptly cites the influence of the Surrealists in the production of Happenings, in terms of their wish to 'shock' being about the radical juxtaposition of disparate elements.

It has been noted of the 1960s that Body art and performance-based art focus upon the *haptic* image. It is an art that, by definition, "belongs to a system of perception based on contact values, or touch. Haptic images tend to occur in

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Arbus, Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph, 12.

³⁸² Susan Sontag, "Happenings: An art of Radical Juxtaposition" (originally published in The Second Coming, 1962) in Sontag, Against Interpretation (New York: Dell, 1966), 267.

³⁸³ Ibid., 269.

shallow space and suggest touch by emphasizing the surface textures or outlines of things.”³⁸⁴ If Arbus’s work may be said to formally engage the haptic, then, it is through her use of a flash or a strobe, which renders bodily surfaces in precise detail. In her February 2004 *Artforum* essay on Arbus, Judith Butler equates the bodies of Arbus’s subjects with the photographic surface:

Most of the well-known pieces record a nearly successful transformation of flesh into gloss or shine, the near eclipse of flesh by shiny materials, the synthetic embrace of the body that closes it off from the possibilities of touch, the transformation, through muscle building, of the body itself into a formidable and impermeable surface. If Arbus has been accused of objectification, perhaps it is because she works with and against that surface...the fact that her figures remain stubbornly on the surface can be understood as a resistance to capture, a refusal of invasion.³⁸⁵

Butler was on to something, but she did not flesh it out further--this matter of surface and tactility acting as a kind of resistance, a “refusal of invasion.” It is particularly acute in Arbus’s photographs of transvestites, such as A Naked Man Being a Woman of 1968 (figure 3-18) or A Young Man in Curlers at Home on West 20th Street, N.Y.C. of 1966 (figure 3-19). Arbus captures them at a moment of transformation from male to female, in which both genders are in flux. They are not quite object or persona, but are in the process of construction. The boundary of subject and object is here decidedly less clear than usual. For example, in her Young Man in Curlers, Arbus’s closeness to the subject and her use of a flash reveal the physical nature of gender construction--the plucked, penciled eyebrows, pancake makeup, mascara, eye shadow, lipstick, and long, manicured nails. Yet the young man’s acne scars, beard stubble, and large hand holding a cigarette reveal flaws in his female mask, things that Arbus said that “you can’t help others knowing about you.” A Naked Man Being a Woman shows a man with his genitalia squeezed behind his legs to resemble a woman’s

³⁸⁴ See Robert Witkin, *Art and Social Structure* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), 64.

³⁸⁵ Judith Butler, “Surface Tensions,” *Artforum*, 120.

privates. The man's legs are shaved and his face makeup is still on, and we see the lines impressed into his torso and upper thigh where perhaps a girdle or corset was recently worn. Clothes lie strewn about the bed behind the man, and he stands in between the two curtains of his bed. Behind the shallow space of the curtains and bed, shadow is allowed to provide one half of the figure with a dark outline, the other with a light. A beer can and a hotplate and various bits of refuse are strewn about the floor in what looks like a cheap, seedy apartment. Curtains and dramatic shadows lend the image a kind of ironic theatricality. The haptic surface of the body is accentuated through the impressions left in that body by undergarments designed to construct a female identity. In both of these photographs, individuals are frontally posed and looking directly into the camera, aware of the visual availability of their bodies, yet returning, and thus resisting, the gaze.

Other performance-based works limn a corresponding sensibility. Kathy O'Dell discusses the haptic sensation of photographs in reference to performance art, locating them in terms of the sphere of the domestic (photo-albums) and physiognomic, via their banal, snapshot-like quality:

Since the domestic site is the context in which the unconscious is originally forged, one's visual and haptic experience of a performance photograph--especially photographs that disturb a normative sense of domestic life or physiognomy, as these do--lends itself to a complicated review of the formation of one's own psychical identity, a review that is actually in progress, I believe, in the performances being documented...³⁸⁶

Such a description echoes certain themes also found in Arbus's work. She consciously took photographs that purposefully engaged the amateurish qualities of the snapshot by disrupting a quotidian visual reading of the domestic, of physiognomy, and the representation of identity. In Arbus's

³⁸⁶ Kathy O'Dell, "Displacing the Haptic: Performance Art, the Photographic Document and the 1970s" *Performance Research* 2,1 (1997), 81.

Transvestite on a Couch, N.Y.C. of 1966 (fig. 3-20), her subject relaxes unposed on a couch that appears to double as a bed. The image is not centered, and the door frame plunges down at a steep angle, lending the photograph a slightly vertiginous quality. Arbus's flash exposes the seedy details of the transvestite's apartment--its dirty walls, and a cheap vine-patterned cover for the couch. The transvestite appears to be captured in a moment between male and female identity: shaved legs, plucked eyebrows, and a brassiere, juxtaposed with visible dark roots, no makeup, and burly arms. These haptic details, coupled with the unkempt apartment, disrupt comfortable associations of the domestic and aid in the complication of traditional associations of gender.

VII. The Body of Madness

Some of Arbus's last work, now known as her *Untitled* series, dealt with images of the mentally retarded. In a letter to Allan Arbus of Nov. 28, 1969, she indicated the significance of these works, writing "FINALLY what I have been searching for."³⁸⁷ But what was she searching for? Why was Arbus so enthralled by this particular subject matter? In terms of my earlier discussion of pastiche, Arbus's *Untitled* series is categorically related to historical groups of photographs of the mentally retarded or insane, between which, in the eyes of *pseudo-science*, there was little difference. In terms of a sustained category, Arbus may have looked again to August Sander--he had taken sensitive, frontal photographs of the mentally ill--for example, in his Inmate of an Asylum of 1930 (figure 3-21). Avedon's photographs of the mentally ill in his book *Nothing Personal* also are a precedent (these works will be considered in greater detail later in this section). But this only seems to be part of the equation.

³⁸⁷ Arbus, Revelations, 203.

In the same letter quoted above, Arbus mentioned the desire to produce a book showing her images of the mentally retarded: "the book about the retarded ladies really excites me. I could do it in a year...it's the first time I've encountered a subject where the multiplicity is the thing. I mean I am not just looking for the BEST picture of them. I want to do lots...and I ought to be able to write it because I really adore them."³⁸⁸ But the book was never begun. Only much later were these images published (1995), in a book called *Untitled*.³⁸⁹ From 1969 to 1971, Arbus visited homes for the mentally retarded, taking pictures at dances, festivals, picnics, and at Halloween parades. Arbus read a number of texts related to the subject. In her personal library, she owned *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* by Erving Goffman, *Sanity, Madness and the Family: Families of Schizophrenics* by R. D. Laing and A. Esterton, Laing's *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*, and *Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl* by Marguerite Schelhaye.³⁹⁰ Yet her intentions in terms of the publication of this series she was so excited about ultimately remain unclear. We may never know which images Arbus would have included in this book, what the titles may have been, or what she may have written. Only her notes about some of the mentally retarded people she photographed still exist.³⁹¹ What is certain, however, is that this body of work represented a change in her conceptual method. In the same letter to Allan, Arbus states that "I am not

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Arbus, *Untitled*, afterword by Doon Arbus (New York: Aperture, 1995).

³⁹⁰ Robert Sobieszek, Curator of Photography at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, was kind enough to provide me with a registrar's list of 337 books from Arbus's personal library shown in the *Diane Arbus Revelations* exhibition at LACMA from February 29 through May 31, 2004. This was a boon to my research, as the books were dimly lit in the exhibition and placed above the head of the viewer on shelves, making a large number of the titles impossible to see. The Arbus estate had previously refused my request to review Diane's full library. The 337 books in the exhibition represents a selection chosen by the Arbus estate.

³⁹¹ See *Revelations*, 204.

looking for the best picture of them," meaning one, or possibly two, standout photographs; she says, "I want to do lots." This work, then, was to be read in terms of a "multiplicity," a greater number of photographs than her mainstay, the photo-story format, which averaged around five published pictures.

What seems fairly radical about this conceptual shift, and what constitutes one of her most lasting critiques of typologies, is that these touching, evanescent photographs may be said to dislocate the stigma of madness associated with "freakish" physiognomies in photographic galleries. Sander's Inmate of an Asylum, and Richard Avedon's series of photographs of the mentally ill, entitled Patients in a Mental Institution (figs. 2-32 to 2-40), taken in 1963 and appearing at the end of *Nothing Personal*, represent the ground from which Arbus's *Untitled* series emerges. Analysis of this connection will follow a brief historical discussion of the representation of madness, and how it shifted in the 1960s.

There is a long history of the representation of madness in portrait galleries, from Géricault's Monomania portrait series (1821-24) and Goya's sketches of madmen from Bordeaux (1824-28) through nineteenth-century photographers like Hugh Welch Diamond and Duchenne de Boulogne through Sander and the present day.³⁹² The photographic galleries were almost always accompanied by publications, which they illustrated.³⁹³ Antonin Artaud was one of the first voices recognized by the parallel *avant-garde* practices of art and literature to question interpretations that made photography the veristic document of madness. Writing about the 'state of mind' that constituted insanity,

³⁹²Arbus owned a copy of Aldous Huxley's The Complete Etchings of Goya (New York: Crown 1943). For an excellent discussion of nineteenth-century depictions of the insane, see Sander L. Gilman, Seeing the Insane (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982).

³⁹³ Such as John Connolly's use of Diamond's images in "The Physiognomy of Insanity" Medical Times and Gazette (January 2, 1858). Detailed analyses of such sources are beyond the scope of my dissertation, and seem to repeat the point about the culture of physiognomy I make in the first chapter, so I will not bore the reader with their repetition. For a more complete discussion, see Sobieszek, Ghost in the Shell, 51-79.

Artaud introduced an awareness of the subjectivity involved in expressing emotions as well as in reading them, rejecting the standard theories of physiognomy, and shedding new light upon the representation of madness.³⁹⁴ Arbus was aware of Artaud. She herself owned a copy of an Artaud text by Jack Hirschman, entitled *Antonin Artaud: Anthology*.³⁹⁵

In this context, some of Michel Foucault's arguments in his *Madness and Civilization* (1961) provide a salient theoretical model for the discussion of the trope of madness in the sixties. First published in English in 1965, Foucault's book echoed a larger literary trend of the period 1955-65: Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1955), Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969) are perhaps the most popular examples of texts in which the institutionalized concept of madness was questioned. According to the trope of the madman, redolent with irony and black humor, an absurdist reversal takes place: the inmates are depicted as the sane ones, and their wards, the madmen. At the heart of this trope was a scathing indictment of social institutions and policies indifferent to suffering, humanity and the individual. Even psychologists got in on the act. Psychoanalyst Thomas Szasz's book *The Myth of Mental Illness* (1960) questioned his own training, and argued that the concept of psychiatric illness was 'scientifically worthless and socially harmful.'³⁹⁶ In R. D. Laing and A. Esterton's *Sanity, Madness and the Family: Families of Schizophrenics* and Laing's *The Divided Self: A Study of Sanity and Madness* (1960), a widely read book (Arbus being among those readers), Laing argued that the schizophrenic patient often pantomimed being mad as a

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 75.

³⁹⁵ Jack Hirschman, *Antonin Artaud: Anthology*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1965).

³⁹⁶ Thomas Szasz in Robert Faggen, "Introduction to Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*," in Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (40th anniversary ed. London: Viking, 2002), xi.

mechanism to combat social fear.³⁹⁷

Furthering this *zeitgeist* was Peter Weiss's play *The Persecution and Assassination of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum at Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*, which opened in London in August 1965 (it moved to New York shortly thereafter). The play garnered critical attention and was reviewed by Susan Sontag in the *Partisan Review* of that year.³⁹⁸ Sontag noted the coupling of theatricality with insanity in the play, and cited the broader influence of Artaudon theater and the arts, such as with Happenings.³⁹⁹ Artaud saw mental hospitals as instruments of social suppression that used electroshock therapy to pacify their victims' desire for revolution.⁴⁰⁰ In a text entitled *Madness and Black Magic* (1946) which condemned mental hospitals, Artaud described them as factories of magical torture. The human body for Artaud was a central trope in his writings and drawings. According to Artaud scholar Stephen Barber, Artaud's discussion of the body engaged it as:

a wild, flexible but flawed instrument that is still in the process of being forged. The body suffers malicious robberies (by society, family, and religion) which leave it fixed and futile, smothered to the point of a terminal incoherence and inexpressivity. Throughout his life, Artaud worked through ideas and images which explore the explosion of that useless body into a deliriously dancing,

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ See Sontag, "Marat/Sade/Artaud" in Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 168. Stephen Barber notes that Artaud's conception of madness as something defined by language influenced Foucault, and impacted some of the other major voices of what is now considered postmodern philosophy: See, for example, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) and Jacques Derrida (with Paule Thévenin), in *The Secret Life of Antonin Artaud* (1986). Artaud also was important to the so-called 'anti-psychiatrists' of the period, such as David Cooper and R.D. Laing (whom Arbus read and admired). Barber claims that Cooper and Laing were drawn to a "special sensitivity in Artaud's writings towards a pervasive social complicity in individual repression." See Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs* (Boston and London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 8.

³⁹⁹ Sontag, 168.

⁴⁰⁰ Artaud in Barber, 130.

new body, with an infinite capacity for self-transformation.”⁴⁰¹

Despite Artaud’s condemnation of the current system of dealing with madness, he sees redemption in rediscovering the traumatized body’s capacity for renewal. Arbus’s *Untitled* series, as we shall see later, also envisaged a positive redemption through the body.

Foucault was a seminal voice of the sixties regarding the theorization of the collision of the body and the state. Sekula engaged the writing of Foucault (primarily *Discipline and Punish* of 1975) to analyze and historicize the photograph in terms of its use for surveillance, and the need to classify individuals by institutions with power over them.⁴⁰² My choice of *Madness and Civilization* as a model avoids the pitfalls of overarching theoretical frameworks by attempting to flesh out thematic similarities only in terms of Arbus’s *Untitled* series, instead of as a model to analyze Arbus’s overall *oeuvre*. As such, this approach attempts to draw not just theoretical parallels between the individual in society labeled “mad” (a stigma whose subjective interpretation may be extended to cover the mentally retarded) and the photographs of Arbus, but to engage in an analysis of like-minded projects sharing, and informed by, a contemporaneous field of thought.

For Foucault in *Madness and Civilization*, as, I believe, for Arbus, the body represents a kind of chimera, what Foucault called the “the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas).”⁴⁰³ The body is the “locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity),” and a “volume in

⁴⁰¹ Ibid, 3.

⁴⁰² See Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive” in Richard Bolton ed., The Contest of Meaning (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1989), 346.

⁴⁰³ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon trans., Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: selected Essays and Interviews (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 148.

perpetual disintegration."⁴⁰⁴ This description of the body as an "inscribed surface" echoes Arbus's desire to present "the gap between intention and effect": the body's surface is constantly altered by cultural forces of which the subject is not always conscious. Foucault's description of the body suggests the fracturing of identity between competing social and personal forces, a body composed of signifiers which shift and disintegrate according to time and language. In her desire to capture "the gap between intention and effect," Arbus's photographs explicitly focus upon 'the illusion of a substantial unity', or the inability of Arbus's subjects to effectively portray who they want to be, due to 'the flaw.' Foucault's text seems to shade toward the *effect* of Arbus's photographs: "[T]he body itself...is both physical and psychical. This understanding of the body as a hinge or threshold between nature and culture makes the limitations of a genetic, or purely anatomical or physiological, account of bodies explicit."⁴⁰⁵ For Foucault, as it seems for Arbus, madness was worth looking at in terms of what he called its "inaccessible primitive purity"; such individuals contained a consciousness largely wild, free, "primitive" (a kind of *ur-force*, not unlike Sartre's Giacometti, scrawling on the walls of his studio), and thus, perhaps, was instructive to the viewer (this position echoes Artaud's notion of the transformative body).

Why, though, did Arbus and Avedon go to mental institutions to photograph the inmates, and what were they looking for? Let us remind ourselves of a by-now familiar position of Arbus's: by photographing both "freaks" and "normals" in the same format, Arbus sought to further eliminate the invisible boundary between traditional representations of the white, middle-class protestant and the Other, and to depict the fragmentation of identity.

In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault critiques the institutional practices

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, "Notes Toward a Corporeal Feminism," in Australian Feminist Studies 5 (Summer 1987), 8.

which stigmatized the “other” in society as mad, defective, or degenerate--a “freak.” In terms of photography, the otherness of madness was characterized by the physiognomy of the subject, and classified according to a gallery of typologies not unlike police mugshots, used by the institution to codify the mental patient.⁴⁰⁶ Foucault’s method, which compares to that of Arbus, is to historicize the subject in an anthropological manner by questioning the legitimacy of the ways in which the subject has been classified as “defective” by bourgeois society:

We have yet to write the history of that other form of madness, by which men, in an act of sovereign reason, confine their neighbors, and communicate and recognize each other through the merciless language of non-madness; to define the moment of this conspiracy before it was permanently established in the realm of truth, before it was revived by the lyricism of protest.⁴⁰⁷

Like photographers who began to mistrust the ideological apparatuses behind documentary photography, Foucault sought to examine madness as it related to the history of positivist science and the emerging disciplines of scientific psychology and clinical psychiatry.

Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization* examines what he terms the “archaeology of madness” from roughly 1500 to 1800. Yet he connects his project to the 20th century: “this madness that links and divides time, that twists the world into the ring of a single night, this madness so foreign to the experience of its contemporaries, does it not transmit--to those able to receive it, to Nietzsche and to Artaud--those barely audible voices of classical unreason....”⁴⁰⁸ Foucault speaks of a need to return to a “zero degree” in the historicization of madness (a trope engaged earlier by Sartre as a kind of existential *tabula rasa* following the catastrophe of World War II):

⁴⁰⁶ See Sandra Phillips, Police Pictures: The Photograph as Evidence (exh. cat. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1997).

⁴⁰⁷ Foucault, Madness and Civilization, ix.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

We must try to return, in history, to that zero point in the course of madness at which madness is an undifferentiated experience, a not yet divided experience of division itself. We must describe, from the start of its trajectory, that "other form" which relegates Reason and Madness to one side or the other of its action as things henceforth external, deaf, to all exchange, and as though dead to one another.⁴⁰⁹

Despite the time frame in the book, though, Foucault knew his readers would receive it as both a new type of philosophical historicism and a kind of contemporary parable of the highest of French virtues, 'Liberty'.⁴¹⁰ Foucault describes the current view of madness as being guided by a confining determinism:

we have got now in the habit of perceiving in madness a fall into a determinism where all forms of liberty are gradually suppressed; madness shows us nothing more than the natural constraints of a determinism, with the sequences of its causes, and the discursive movement of its forms; for madness threatens modern man only with that return to the bleak world of beasts and things, to their fettered freedom."⁴¹¹

For Foucault, the image of madness took two forms: one, of a kind of human 'animality' (which should be connected to the popular anthropomorphisms of nineteenth-century caricature), and, two, as the evidence of an inferior moral mind on the part of the subject. The 'scientific' evidence for such an animality, argued Foucault, had unfortunate divine consequences: "despite the contemporary effort to constitute a positivist zoology, this obsession with an animality perceived as the natural locus of madness continued to people the hell

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid. Sontag reminds us that the origins of the notion of zero-degree, in literature of a "neutral, colorless writing--first discussed by Sartre in 1943, who called it *l'écriture blanche*, in his famous review of Camus's *L'Etranger*--enters Barthes's argument [in Writing Degree Zero] only briefly: in the introduction (p. 4-5) as the "last episode of a passion of writing, which recounts stage by stage the disintegration of bourgeois consciousness," and again at the end (p. 76-78) as *one* solution to the disintegration of literary language." Sontag in Barthes, Writing Degree Zero, Preface, xxi.

⁴¹⁰ Foucault's book was also taken as a critique of Soviet policy, and therefore of the French Communist Party. See Foucault's "Truth and Power" in Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Writings 1972-1977, Colin Gordon ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 110.

⁴¹¹ Foucault, Madness and Civilization, 83.

of the classical age. It was this obsession that created the imagery responsible for all the practices of confinement and the strangest aspects of its savagery."⁴¹²

In the nineteenth century, the image of the madman as an animal, believed to be degenerate of mind, body, and spirit, was promoted by the vehicle of photography as evidence of a defect of 'character,' of the psychological 'interior' of the subject.

Such an identification gives madness a new content of guilt, of moral sanction, of just punishment which was not at all a part of the classical experience. It burdens unreason with all these new values: instead of making blindness the condition of possibility for all the manifestations of madness, it describes blindness, the blindness of madness, as the *psychological effect of a moral fault*. And thereby compromises what had been essential in the experience of unreason. What had been blindness would become unconsciousness, what had been error would become fault, and everything in madness that designated the paradoxical manifestation of non-being would become the natural punishment of a moral evil. In short, that whole vertical hierarchy which constituted the structure of classical madness, from the cycle of material causes to the transcendence of delirium, would now collapse and spread over the surface of a domain which psychology and morality would soon occupy together and contest with each other...[thus] the "scientific psychiatry" of the nineteenth century became possible...it was in these "diseases of the nerves" and in these "hysterias" which would soon provoke its irony, that this psychiatry took its origin.⁴¹³

Foucault's repositioning of madness allows, as a rhetorical function, for the contemporary reader to make a connection with his or her consideration of the multivalence of the term 'madness' and its shifting cultural positions. Foucault may be talking about the "classical" and the nineteenth century, but he knows that his readers will consider it within the emerging critique of Freudian

⁴¹² Ibid., 77.

⁴¹³ Foucault, Madness and Civilization, 158.

psychoanalysis.⁴¹⁴ It is well known that what is considered by psychoanalysts 'normal,' 'reasonable' is centered on bourgeois values and morality. Thus in the early 1960s those who do not fit within the image repertoire familiar to the "other-directed" white bourgeois audiences who read *Life* and *Look* take the position of Other, and, by extension, the position of "non-reason." The physical attributes that comprise a 'freak' can only be freakish if there is a notion of 'normalcy' against which their freakishness may be measured. Paralleling *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault's teacher Georges Canguilhem, in his *Normal and Pathological*, fundamentally challenged the institutional logic of what constituted 'normal' in terms of the history of medicine.⁴¹⁵

Viewed alongside contemporary works like Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*, and Canguilhem's *Normal and Pathological*, Arbus's work engages in a dialogue with the different dominant tropes of photography (art photography, still photography, photo-journalism, the documentary, etc.) to plumb the depths of their history, to critique their legitimacy, perhaps in search of a "degree zero" of photography which laid bare all of its positivist and physiognomic blind spots, rendering the photographic portrait an "undifferentiated experience."⁴¹⁶ But what does this unpacking of tropes mean for the representation of the mentally ill? Essentially, it throws its historical classification into question. In Foucault's

⁴¹⁴ I do not find this situation such a stretch, given the broad intellectual discussion of these critical positions. For example, see Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), a philosophical critique of psychoanalysis that was widely read among academics and intellectuals. Foucault noted the initial importance of psychoanalysis in opposition to theories of degeneracy and eugenics, but cautioned against its being co-opted by the state as an instrument of power, as it had in Stalinist Russia. See Foucault, "Truth and Power" in Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Writings 1972-1977*, 110. Foucault noted that, prior to 1968, this line of inquiry was met "with great silence among the French intellectual Left." Ibid., 111.

⁴¹⁵ George Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological* (New York: Zone Books, 1989; originally published as *Le Normal et le Pathologique*, 1966). Intro. by Michel Foucault.

⁴¹⁶ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, ix.

The Order of Things (1966; first published in English, 1970), he provides a response, and an answer, to some of the larger implications of *Madness and Civilization*, by recounting the classification of human beings under the aegis of official culture (and its ordering of history). Foucault undertakes an "archaeological inquiry" of what he terms certain paradigmatic "knowledges": "the knowledge of living beings, the knowledge of the laws of language, and the knowledge of economic facts," and he seeks to relate them "to the philosophical discourse that was contemporary with them through a period extending from the 17th to the 19th century."⁴¹⁷ To this end, Foucault is interested in uncovering what he calls the *positive unconscious* of knowledge, a "level that eludes the consciousness of the scientist and yet is a part of scientific discourse, instead of disputing its validity and seeking to diminish its scientific nature."⁴¹⁸ Foucault does not wish to uncover the 'dark heart' of science; instead, like Canguilhem, he seeks to uncover the rules of formation in scientific theories, mediated as they have been by cultural blind spots. What is significant for Foucault's *Order of Things*, and as we look back, what links it to Arbus's *oeuvre*, is that he is interested in determining "the basis or archaeological system common to a whole series of scientific 'representations' or 'products' dispersed throughout the natural history, economics, and philosophy of the classical period."⁴¹⁹ But where Foucault's larger aim is to employ a theory of how discursive practice relates to the historical analysis of scientific discourse, Arbus's is to efface boundaries between 'normal' and 'Other.'

The link between these aims is stated by Foucault in his preface to *The Order of Things* via Borges, someone Arbus greatly admired. Foucault mentions

⁴¹⁷ Foucault, Foreword, *The Order of Things* (New York: Random House, 1994), x.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁴¹⁹ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xi-xii.

the appearance in Borges of a "Chinese Encyclopedia" in which animals are classified according to a non-linear, seemingly fantastic taxonomy which seems wholly removed from the one we are accustomed to in terms of Western positivistic science. It is a taxonomy that causes us to comprehend "in one great leap, the things that, by means of the *fable* [my italics], is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*."⁴²⁰

VIII. Books on Psychoanalysis

Arbus owned a number of texts which offered different positions regarding psychology and psychoanalysis.⁴²¹ Several of her books indicate an interest in a collective statement about psychology in relation to the social. She owned works that undertook a kind of umbrella study of human beings. One such work was P.D. Ouspensky's *A New Model of the Universe: Principles of the Psychological Method in its application to Problems of Science, Religion, and Art* of 1931.⁴²² Ouspensky, a Russian author whose work echoes themes found in Wassily Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, tackles such diverse subjects as esotericism, esotericism and the Christian gospels, the fourth dimension, yoga, 'the superman,' the study of dreams and hypnotism, the Tarot, and mysticism. In his introduction, he describes himself as a kind of traveler in

⁴²⁰ Ibid., xv.

⁴²¹ Perhaps the most significant of these texts are Norman O. Brown's *Love's Body* (1966), Sigmund Freud's *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Edward Podolsky's *Encyclopedia of Aberrations*, George Bataille's *Death and Sensuality: A Study of Eroticism and Taboo* (1962), Erving Goffman's *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), and R.D. Laing's *Sanity, Madness, and the Family: Families of Schizophrenics* (1964), *Self and Others* (1971), and *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (1959).

⁴²² P.D. Ouspensky, *A New Model of the Universe: Principles of the Psychological Method in its application to Problems of Science, Religion, and Art* (New York: Knopf, 1931).

search of esoteric knowledge, wishing to understand the unity that underlines the wisdom of Eastern and western thought outside of positivist, empirical science.⁴²³ Ouspensky professes doubts about comparative anatomy and current scientific givens, such as the theory of evolution.⁴²⁴

It is impossible to regard the ordinary state of consciousness, in which we are capable of logical thinking, as the only one possible and the clearest...on the contrary it had been established that in other states of consciousness, which are rare and have been studied very little, we can learn and understand what we cannot understand in our ordinary state of consciousness. This in turn has served to establish the fact that the "ordinary" state of consciousness is only a *particular* instance of consciousness, and that our "ordinary" conception of the world is only a *particular* conception of the world.⁴²⁵

Ouspensky's argument suggests that what is considered 'ordinary' or 'normal' in a state of consciousness in which we are capable of logical thinking is only one particular experience of consciousness which ought not to dictate the primacy of one worldview over another. This has implications for Arbus's subversion of 'normal' subjects in her work. Norman O. Brown's aphoristic *Love's Body* (1966) also provided a kind of worldview, mediated by a critique of psychoanalysis. In this work, Brown, a professor of classical literature, lodged a neo-Nietzschean critique of Freud's theories, which, he argued, are rooted in problematic classical notions of patriarchal orthodoxy, and the struggle of father against son. Brown returns to the classical roots of Freud's theories to dismantle Freud's ideas concerning social relations, sex, gender, and identity.

Erudite and metaphor-laden, Brown's text calls for a more symbolically-aware person. He covers themes Arbus mentioned in relation to her work: transvestitism, the body, secret societies, rituals, myths, masks, duality, and madness. He reminds the reader that these themes, while situated in the

⁴²³ Ibid. Ouspensky calls positivism "a bare and arid desert." 4.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 22-23.

⁴²⁵ Ouspensky, 24.

classical, are universal--and their time would again come about: "periodization involves periodicity. The world's great age begins anew, the golden years return, and a new beginning; and revolution also is circular."⁴²⁶ In these rituals, secret societies, and subcultures which challenged the "normal," Brown envisioned the stuff of psychological redemption.

Brown also had problems with the psychoanalytical notion of the reality principle and its relation to schizophrenia. He turns this theory inside-out: "it is not schizophrenia but normality that is split-minded; in schizophrenia the false boundaries are disintegrating...schizophrenics are suffering from the truth...the schizophrenic world is one of mystical participation...."⁴²⁷ The appearance of Brown's text in Arbus's personal library lends further credence to her interest in social relations and the critique of certain ingrained ideologies which stigmatized certain individuals. In her Untitled work, for example, she sought the elusive, innocent beauty of the otherwise grotesque 'schizophrenic' or mentally challenged person. Also, given Arbus's interest in contemporary manifestations of classical subjects and their social relations, Brown's book would seem a valuable foil. If there is an Arbus photograph that may be considered 'Brownian,' it must be A Naked Man Being a Woman of 1968 (figure 3-18). By posing in a classical contrapposto, Arbus's Naked Man draws allusions to classical sculpture, and its system of idealized form and beauty. By clenching his penis between his legs, Naked Man parodies the Freudian notion of penis envy. But the expression on the man's face is one of comfort, almost of pride, despite the fact that he is only wearing makeup--he is halfway between man and woman. The wall behind the man, divided into two equal halves of light and dark, alludes to the dual nature of gender and identity. The subject of Naked Man Being a Woman is

⁴²⁶ Brown, 204.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 159.

clearly comfortable with the presence of Arbus, and with his own supposed otherness.

Arbus owned a copy of a book by Edward Podolsky, M.D. entitled *Encyclopedia of Aberrations: A Psychiatric Handbook*. An encyclopedia of terminology alphabetized from A to Z, the *Encyclopedia of Aberrations* is based on Freud's psychoanalytical theories and contains explanatory/ diagnostic texts by a long list of M.D.s. It is informative to see what constitutes an 'aberration'; things that are contingent upon existing social mores, such as 'Homosexuality, Genesis Of.' The explanation of the 'aberration' of homosexuality is couched in Freudian language. The description mentions the afflicted as "show[ing] a regression to infantile norms of sexual gratification, that emotions engendered by castration fears are avoided and that sexual gratification becomes possible without the anxieties engendered by the Oedipal or castration complexes."⁴²⁸ There are additions which retain a closeness to myth, such as Lycanthropy, "the delusion that one has been transformed into an animal, such as a wolf," and all kinds of unusual phobias and afflictions, such as Paralipophobia, a condition in which is manifested the "dread of responsibilities because of real or fancied lack of ability."⁴²⁹

Other aberrations include nymphomania, gambling, frigidity, vagrancy, vampirism, transvestitism, and telepathy. Under "Regression, Complete Schizophrenic," there is a case study of "The Woman Who Became a Child"; "...at the age of sixty-one, she acted like a girl of seven...."⁴³⁰ Arbus professed an interest in this woman/ child dualism, which she encountered in her trips to institutions for the retarded and mentally ill. Specifically, the passage in the

⁴²⁸ Edward Podolsky, *Encyclopedia of Aberrations: A Psychiatric Handbook* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 110.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 288, 326.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 475.

Handbook of Aberrations is reminiscent of Arbus's Untitled (#13) of 1971, a photograph of an older woman holding a child's dolls (figure. 3-23). Echoing Podolsky's passage, Arbus's subject, perhaps in her late fifties or early sixties, clutches her dolls in a manner that suggests a child's fragile state of emotional development.

Arbus said of R.D. Laing that "he seems so extraordinary in his empathy for madness that it suddenly seemed he would be the most terrific guide."⁴³¹ In *The Divided Self*, Laing uses the language and methodologies of existential and phenomenological philosophy to better understand schizophrenic behavior. He argues that issues lived out by schizophrenic individuals need to be looked at outside of the clinical methods of psychiatry and psychopathology.⁴³² Echoing a larger literary trend, Laing expresses a dissatisfaction with the technical language used in psychiatric and psychoanalytic analyses of patients.⁴³³

Laing's "divided self" bifurcates human identity into self and Other. As the Other, the human being has two manifestations: the 'organism,' or systemic, physical body, and the 'person,' who "is seen by...[Laing] as responsible, as capable of choice, in short, as a self-acting agent."⁴³⁴ This dualism is predicated upon our experience of other individuals as the Other. It echoes Arbus's statement about representing the "gap between intention and effect" we notice about people; despite what they intend for us to see, we can't help but notice the flaw everyone possesses. With Laing, this gap could be called 'the gap between organism and person.' Also, Laing says of the schizophrenic person that:

The individual reacts and feels towards oneself only partially in terms of the

⁴³¹ Arbus, letter to Peter Crookston, 1969 in Revelations, 197.

⁴³² R.D. Laing, The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness (New York: Penguin Books, 1959, 1990), 18.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

person one takes oneself to be and partially in terms of his phantasy of what one is. One tries to make the patient see that his way of acting towards oneself implies a phantasy of one kind or another, which, most likely, *he does not fully recognize [my italics]* (of which he is unconscious...)⁴³⁵

Laing refers to this state, which fluctuates in the individual from recognition to a complete lack thereof, as a "self-body dualism."⁴³⁶ Perhaps the gap between intention and effect that Arbus sought to capture involves this aspect of schizophrenia. And like Laing, her stance in relation to her subjects is empathetic. The photograph which I believe has the most in common with Laing's themes is the iconic Identical Twins, Roselle, N.J. of 1967 (figure i-11), a photograph with which the reader is by now no doubt familiar, but whose multiple layers of meaning clearly indicate its centrality to Arbus's *oeuvre*. Identical twins literalize the concept of self and other, Laing's "divided self," the dual nature of identity. Of course, the twins are separate individuals, yet the photograph is composed so that the imaginary line separating the twins is in the exact center of the photograph. If the paper could be folded, the twins would be almost perfect mirror images of each other, like a rorschach blot. Their identical clothing and haunting grey or blue eyes lend the impression that they are thinking as a single organism (this is further augmented by the popular folklore concerning twins in which they can communicate telepathically). In the development of this photograph, Arbus experimented with different tonalities to make the space between the twins seem indistinct, to suggest that they were joined at the hip like Siamese Twins.⁴³⁷

Laing also opposes his argument about identity to eugenic, positivist sciences. He notes the persistence of the scientific classification of individuals

⁴³⁵ Laing, The Divided Self, 35.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴³⁷ See Neil Selkirk, "In the Darkroom" in Revelations, 267-275.

along either honorific or repressive lines:

It seems extraordinary that whereas the physical and biological sciences of 'it-processes' [that of the Other as 'organism,' a complex system of biological processes] have generally won the day against tendencies to personalize the world of things or to read human intentions into the animal world, an authentic science of persons has hardly got started by reason of the inveterate tendency to depersonalize or reify persons.⁴³⁸

In terms of visual interpretation, Laing rejects the positivist claim of physical traits and 'observable behavior' as a key to analysis: "[t]he clinical psychiatrist, wishing to be more 'scientific' or 'objective,' may propose to confine himself to the 'objectively' observable behavior of the patient before him. The simplest reply to this is that it is impossible. To see 'signs' of 'disease' is not to see neutrally."⁴³⁹ Laing's critique of a positivist analysis, coupled with Arbus's statement about Laing as a "guide," provides further credence to the idea that Arbus photographed people with this understanding in mind. She may not have read Taine or Comte, but had in her library sources such as Ouspensky, Brown and Laing who were clearly critical of the positivist tradition.

Like Brown, Laing was critical of the stigma associated with the label 'schizophrenic.' Laing's *Divided Self* presents a contemporary consideration of identity which is itself 'schizophrenic,' that is, fractured, according to prevailing social mores:

The term schizoid refers to an individual the totality of whose experience is split in two main ways: in the first place, there is a rent in his relation with his world and, in the second, there is a disruption of his relation with himself. Such a person is not able to experience himself 'together with' others or 'at home in' the world, but, on the contrary, he experiences himself in despairing aloneness and isolation; moreover, he does not experience himself as a complete person but rather as 'split' in various ways, perhaps as a mind more or less tenuously linked to a body, as two or more selves, and so on.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁸ Laing, *The Divided Self*, 23.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

This description of the schizoid individual mirrors Arbus's statement about the gap between intention and effect, between the social construction and the flaw: "there is a rent in his relation with his world and, in the second, there is a disruption in his relation with himself." I do not mean to suggest that Arbus saw her subjects literally as schizophrenics. However she may have taken the schizoid condition Laing speaks of as a metaphor for the existential isolation of the contemporary human condition which she sought to convey in her portraits.

Laing sees a fundamental hypocrisy in the current diagnoses of the schizoid condition, which, he suggests, have negative social ramifications:

In the context of our present pervasive madness that we call normality, sanity, freedom, all our frames of reference are ambiguous and equivocal. A man who prefers to be dead rather than Red is normal. A man who says he has lost his soul is mad. A man who says that men are machines may be a great scientist. A man who says he *is* a machine is 'depersonalized' in psychiatric jargon. A man who says that Negroes are an inferior race may be widely respected. A man who says his whiteness is a form of cancer is certifiable.⁴⁴¹

In light of Laing's arguments concerning identity and its relation to the social body, and given the preponderance in her library of texts of a similar nature, such as Brown's *Love's Body*, it is further evident that Arbus's *oeuvre* can be justifiably read as a broader statement about the contemporary individual. As Laing offered a selective counter to prevailing scientific and psychoanalytical theories about the mental health of an individual in western society, Arbus's work may be seen in a similar light, offering a counter to the firmly encoded physiognomic social panorama.

Generally, Laing's books address the broader philosophical issue of the individual's relationship to society. In Laing's *The Politics of Experience* (1967), he speaks about the current alienation of humanity as the result of what Daniel

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 12.

Boorstin called "pseudo-events."⁴⁴² He insists that humanity has distanced itself from itself in terms of understanding real, interpersonal human relations. Seeking to understand this current malaise, he argues for a need to understand relations between individuals from a methodology of "social phenomenology": "the science of my own and of others' *experience*. It is concerned with the relation between my experience of you and your experience of me. That is, with *interexperience*. It is concerned with your behavior and my behavior *as I experience it*, and your and my behavior *as you experience it*. Since your and their experience is invisible to me as mine is to you and them, I seek to make evident to the others, though their experience of my behavior, what I infer of your experience, through my experience of your behavior. This is the crux of social phenomenology."⁴⁴³ It seems that Laing's analysis of interpersonal relationships and Arbus's approach to photographing her subjects share a common ground along the concept of *interexperience*. This concept negates the idea of predetermination as a guiding principle for social relations; the presentness or 'now' of experience is what mediates the interpersonal relationship.

VIII. Avedon's and Arbus's Bodies of Madness

Richard Avedon's Patients in a Mental Institution (1963) appear in his second published book, *Nothing Personal* (1964). Eleven pictures in total (figures 2-32 to 2-40), they are grainy images which, like the rest of the photographs in the book, are subject to drastic changes in scale and layout: 10 1/2 inches x 14 1/4 inches is the typical size of the image, representing a full half-page of the book, and these are juxtaposed with images the size of snapshots, at 5 x 6 inches

⁴⁴² Daniel J. Boorstin, The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America (New York: Vintage, 1987, first published in 1961).

⁴⁴³ R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience (NY: Pantheon, 1967), 19.

in a horizontal format, or 5 x 5 inches square. Some of the photographs are a full, two-page 14 1/4 x 21 inches, while some others, at 15 x 14 1/4 inches, comprise approximately two thirds of the two pages. With the book's designer Marvin Israel's penchant for drastic changes of scale in magazine layouts, Avedon's *Nothing Personal* markedly departs from works like Robert Frank's *The Americans*, and is perhaps closest to William Klein's *Life is Good and Good For You in New York* in terms of the grainy, black and white images, abrupt, documentary-style croppings, and frequent shifts in scale.

Avedon's Patients project a wide range of different countenances. Some are ghastly; certain photographs show patients physically disfigured by mental illness, with exaggerated grimaces of anguish, fear, or ennui. Others smile, or shyly hold hands like children. One burly yet timid woman sitting on her bed looks directly at the camera, clutching a baby doll. What Avedon seems to capture in these powerful images is the odd sense of coupling these subjects display between adult physiognomies and childlike or irrational behavior. This is a characteristic Arbus also focuses on in her *Untitled* series. Yet in her pictures, body movements are as powerful and expressive as any dancer attempting to convey meaning through gestures.

As Arbus's letter to Allan suggested, her *Untitled* photographs involved a change in thematic conception from the single photograph to the multiple. With the exception of A. D. Coleman's vituperative review of the *Untitled* book in the *New York Observer*, it has been generally agreed upon by critics and scholars that these works portray a greater sympathy for the subject than had her previous work. That is certainly the case. More than ever before, these photographs engage the body as a new assemblage of identities, such as old lady, woman, girl, and child. In Untitled (#13) (Figure 3-23), a woman of approximately fifty years of age with a somewhat grotesque face scratches her back self-consciously

like a child. She clutches a baby doll and a stuffed toy mouse close to her breast, as if some maternal instinct remains underneath her mental condition. Arbus captures this woman as simultaneously a little girl, a mother, and an older woman. This means of representation ran counter to the typical photographic galleries of the mentally retarded or the insane, which historically viewed subjects according to a positivist taxonomy of expressions. Thus, Arbus's pictures of mentally retarded people deconstruct the positivist structures of body classification by representing identity as multiple, fleeting, and fragmentary. Prior galleries of the insane or mentally retarded, from such nineteenth-century photographers as Hugh W. Diamond, Henri Dagonet, and Sir James Crichton Browne focused upon the sameness of individuals whose photograph represented a generalized type.⁴⁴⁴ In contrast, Arbus's *Untitled* series underscores the uniqueness of each individual (despite the fact that many of them wear masks).

As a group, Arbus's *Untitled* series reads as a collection of idylls. Eight of the photographs appeared at the end of the 1972 monograph, and to contemporary readers, suggested a more sustained project. The subjects of these photographs are extraordinary in their lack of self-consciousness, especially when considered against the background of an unusually self-conscious era. Physiognomies in the series are startling and grotesque, but do not serve to illustrate a scientific corollary between physical and mental deformity. Nor do they become a kind of grotesque caricature, a masquerade of innocents for audiences to laugh at. Janet Malcolm says of the *Untitled* series that "the flaws of preening vanity, pomposity, complacency, fatuity which force themselves upon the journalist's attention as he moves about the world of the normal are absent

⁴⁴⁴ See Sander Gilman, "The Origins of Psychiatric Photography" and "Darwin's Influence on Seeing the Insane" in Gilman, *Seeing the Insane* (Lincoln, NB and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 164-179.

from the world of those who don't worry about knowing enough."⁴⁴⁵

The *Untitled* photographs forego the sense of irony in Arbus's previous work. Outwardly, the gap between intention and effect seems to have been effaced in this series; with completely un-self-conscious subjects, these pictures appear to be *all* effect. The ladies from mental institutions seem to have no sense of social arrangement for the camera. Yet there is more to these images than social naïveté. Arbus seems to tackle the representation of identity using a literalness that allows multiple layers of identity to be fused. One extraordinary photograph, entitled *Untitled (#1)* of 1970-71 in the *Diane Arbus* monograph (fig. 3-24), is of two retarded women, arm in arm, laughing. The women both wear ridiculous costume bonnets, and Arbus's flash, throwing the two figures into sharp relief, reveals a childish lack of attention to the appearance of clothes. The two women appear to be a paradox: physically middle-aged women who think like children dressing up as adults. This simultaneous appearance of adult and child presents an odd coupling of identities. Arbus makes this theme more explicit in *Untitled (#12)* (figure 3-25), in which two middle-aged women are photographed at a swing set, their body positions resembling the naïve positions children like to assume. The two women are just alike enough to suggest an association with her famous twins photograph, in which the theme of sameness vs. difference is made explicit. In fact, shadows of Arbus's interest in types still persist in the *Untitled* photographs: the bathers, the dwarf, identical twins, the masked figure. But the *Untitled* photos are now shadows of Arbus's own types; we might say that she engages in a bit of self-reflexive pastiche.

The *Untitled* works also indicate a new formal direction that emphasizes landscape, natural light, and an attempt to make the image look amateurish. Of

⁴⁴⁵ Janet Malcolm, "Aristocrats" in Malcolm, *Diana and Nikon* (New York: Aperture, 1997), 187.

her *Untitled* series of photographs, Arbus, in a letter to Allan Arbus, written on Nov. 28, 1969, stated that "I seem to have discovered sunlight, late afternoon and early winter sun light. Its [sic] just marvelous. In general I seem to have perverted your brilliant technique all the way round, bending it over backwards you might say till it's JUST like snapshots but better."⁴⁴⁶ Arbus's use of the bright, low winter light throws figures and light garments into sharp relief--some are reminiscent of Goya's *Los Caprichos* aquatints. She purposefully blurs and overexposes images, which lend the subject a kind of hallucinatory evanescence. In the *Untitled* series, Arbus has transformed the body of madness of previous photography into an exemplar of culturally unsullied existence.

In one of the *Untitled* series, Untitled (#16) (figure 3-26), Arbus captures a young woman wearing a white sheet and a skull mask that sits skewed on her face. The white sheet is not illuminated by a flash, but by the bright sun. The off-center positioning of the figure, coupled with the blurriness of the background, lend the image the appearance of the snapshot. The feet of the figure cannot be seen; she seems to float, weightlessly, just above the grass. Her identity obscured by the costume, the woman has become a kind of ethereal ghost, a supernatural being hanging for a moment in the air before disappearing.

The last image before the afterword in the *Untitled* series, Untitled (#49) (figure 3-27), presents a high-contrast image of a group of the mentally retarded proceeding along in a line. Perhaps they have queued up for some kind of parade, or group activity. Arbus liked to photograph these subjects on holidays when they wore costumes. The bright whites of the inscrutable costumes are thrown into sharp relief by the overcast sky in the background. It is a mystery as to what character the retarded people think they are dressed as; this enigma

⁴⁴⁶ Arbus in Revelations, 203.

has both humorous and metaphorical connotations. In the center of the photograph, one person has a drawn-on moustache and goatee, while others wear masks and pajamas over light, summer-weight clothing. Arbus creates a play between the masked and unmasked figures. What is arresting about this photograph, though, is the exaggerated features of the individuals who are in profile--their own faces are more grotesque 'masks' than those who are actually wearing masks. The mask's role has been reversed in this picture, a kind of inverse *unheimlich*; instead of rendering the familiar strange, as is the case with the normal definition of uncanny, Arbus's masked figures render the strange familiar. In this play between mask and face, the strange becomes indistinguishable from the non-strange. This photograph's high contrast tonality is reminiscent of Goya's *Los Caprichos* aquatints. But it also underscores Arbus's commitment to revealing humanity's odd and almost supernatural beings as metaphors designed to throw the social and political tumult of the 1960s into sharp relief. Collectively, these *Untitled* photographs seem to represent a tribe of innocent and un-self-conscious primitives living in the magic green verdure of rural Pennsylvania and New Jersey, grotesque in physiognomy, but gentle and loving at heart--and friendly to explorers.

IX. Avedon, Arbus, and the Aging Body

Avedon and Arbus often photographed older subjects. In terms of the body, this interest was in what might be called the *aging* body. At a time when strong ideological differences between generations are thrown into sharp relief, Arbus and Avedon use old skin, the antithesis of youth, beauty, and glamour, to explore meaning. Arbus is interested in the once-great: the old debutante, the aging socialite, Charles Atlas, the aging, overtanned strongman, an aged Mae

West in her boudoir with her pet monkey, and the old woman in her negligee, among others. These are people who still have a kind of personal myth woven about them, whether celebrity, aristocracy, or physical beauty, but no longer have the aura sustaining that myth in public or in photographs. These photographs engage the body as the site of identity rupture; the mythic, youthful person whom one associates with the name of the individual versus the physically aging referent. Arbus's photographs of the aging expose the eccentricity of the once-great, and let us in on the secret of their daily lives in a culture of the young and the now that inevitably has passed them by.

In "Mae West: Once Upon Our Time," published as "Emotion in Motion" in *Show*, 1963, Arbus presents a photo-story about aging film icon Mae West as a contemporary fairy tale (figure 3-28). The text, written by Arbus, wryly points out that:

Her fortress is almost as impregnable as Sleeping Beauty's. There is a high fence surrounding her villa by the sea in Santa Monica, a broken telephone at the gate and a sign saying Beware of the Dog besides the bell although there is no dog to beware of. Beyond the overgrown garden, across the gilded living room, among the nude likenesses of the mistress of the house, a pair of wild woolly monkeys strain at their chains on a trapeze in the corner.⁴⁴⁷

West, her boudoir, and her coterie are described in humorous language: "She has been called a Queen Bee whose favors leave strong men limp. Some say that she is the greatest female impersonator in the world. It is rumored that she has nine million dollars in the bank and her paternal grandmother is said to have possessed three well-formed breasts."⁴⁴⁸ Arbus's text imposes multiple labels which act as circulating identities, such as "Queen Bee" and "the greatest female impersonator in the world."⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁷ Arbus, "Mae West: Once Upon Our Time," *Show* (January 1965) in Arbus, *Magazine Work*, 58.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

In another segment entitled "The Girl of the Year, 1938" and that appeared in *Esquire*, July 1966, Arbus photographed Brenda Diana Duff Frazier (figure 3-29), "twenty-eight years after she had been on the cover of *Life* magazine as the most famous debutante of the year."⁴⁵⁰ Frazier is photographed luxuriating in bed, smoking a cigarette, wearing a white fur stole which, with her dyed black hair, frames her face. Frazier's *coiffure* and white pancake makeup bespeak another style of an older generation. In an article entitled "Fashion Independents: Mrs. T. Charlton Henry," appearing in *Harper's Bazaar* in 1965, Arbus provided three photographs of Mrs. Henry, a wealthy Philadelphia matriarch (figure 3-30).⁴⁵¹ Slender and elegant, with an unusually high, rounded hairdo that sits atop her head like cotton candy, Mrs. Henry looks imperiously into the camera. In each instance, the aging body works against the youthful skin and seamlessness of glossy fashion ads in favor of a kind of timeless, eccentric elegance.

In Arbus's Woman in her Negligee, N.Y.C. of 1966 (figure 3-31), an older woman in what looks like her sixties or early seventies sits at the end of a bed, her open black purse next to her. The old woman wears a translucent negligee that vaguely suggests her shape underneath. Her pose is not revelatory in a voyeuristic kind of way; she looks demure, shy, even vulnerable. The wrinkled face, loosely-tendoned neck, and delicate spider-veins in the old woman's arms and legs attest to her age. She purses her lips as if about to speak. She wears no jewelry except for a simple wedding band. Her dresser is visible in the reflection of a mirror on the door behind her. The scene is a private one, and slightly uncomfortable, as if we have come upon our grandmother as she changed her clothes. Perhaps Arbus sought to explore the aging body and the suggestion of

⁴⁵⁰ Arbus, Magazine Work, 76-77.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

sexual intimacy, a situation that no doubt would have made her audiences somewhat uncomfortable.

In terms of the aging body, Arbus's work has parallels to the painted portraits done by Alice Neel in the 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁵² Neel's portraits, which also collectively may be read as an American social panorama, conveyed in her often nude sitters a sense of intimacy and vulnerability which was registered in their bodies. Neel's 1970 portrait of Andy Warhol (fig. 3-32), for example, depicts Warhol sitting, shirtless, on a low couch done only in contour line. Warhol's chest scars are quite visible, and he wears what appears to be an unflattering hernia truss. Linear contour lines outlining Warhol's chest assume the shape of a woman's breasts. This is not the glamorous and chic Warhol of Max's Kansas City and the tabloids. In Neel's painting, his mask is off; Warhol appears fragile, vulnerable, and somewhat androgynous. Warhol does not meet our gaze, but appears to be looking at the floor in a moment of self-reflection.

Avedon's photographs of the aging body, taken in the studio and always shot against a white background, dramatically push the face into the foreground, focusing on the countenance of the individual as a landscape, on revealing and enlarging every fine, weatherbeaten line and wrinkle. Meaning for Avedon is located in these high-contrast arroyos and convolutions of aging flesh. In his first book *Observations*, the aging body refers to a kind of honorific literary or artistic pedigree; as, for example, in Isak Dinesen (figure 3-33) and Ezra Pound (figure 3-34). In *Nothing Personal*, the aging body is most predominantly predicated upon social issues, civil rights, and the differences between generations; for example, in Perle Mesta, Washington Hostess, Judge Leander Perez, and William Casby. In these arresting photographs, aged skin signifies intolerance and suffering. In Dwight David Eisenhower, former President of the

⁴⁵² Romy Golan suggested the connection to Neel.

United States (figure 3-35), a photograph Avedon gave Arbus a print of as a gift, Ike seems lost in thought, almost wistful, despite the extreme close-up we are offered of the man.

One notable exception is Bertrand Russell, Philosopher. Taken in profile, Avedon's photograph of Russell is so extreme in closeup that his head fills the entire frame of the picture. Russell's hearing aid snakes out of his ear into his thick, strawlike grey hair. Every crag, blotch, and grey follicle of the old philosopher's leathery head seems to go in a different direction. The complexity and age of the old English philosopher's features, Avedon seems to say, signify the complexity and age of Russell's philosophy. His profile is a surface "full of clues" to be deciphered.⁴⁵³ Russell's head is like an ancient cypress, knotted and mottled and pitted, as if buffeted by hundreds of storms. Avedon would serialize his interest in the aging body in his series of photographs of his slowly dying father, Jacob Israel Avedon, of 1973 (figure 3-36). Avedon's interest in physiognomy as roadmap of an individual's existence is no more literalized and personalized than in these powerful photographs, in which the slow approach of the death of his father, and the old man's increasing fear, is recorded in Avedon's characteristic precision of detail. Perhaps, though, Avedon's photographs of his dying father are influenced by Arbus's photographs of her father, David Nemerov (figure 3-37), on his deathbed in 1963, taken a few weeks before he died of lung cancer.⁴⁵⁴ Prior to this photograph, Arbus had taken a picture of her dead grandmother, Rose Russek, on March 18, 1955.⁴⁵⁵

This chapter has provided a broader context for the understanding of

⁴⁵³ Richard Avedon, artist's statement in Carroll T. Hartwell ed., Avedon (exh. cat. Minneapolis, MN: Minneapolis Institute of Art, 1970), n.p.

⁴⁵⁴ Arbus, revelations, 166.

⁴⁵⁵ See "A Chronology," in *Ibid.*, 138.

Arbus's photographs of people in terms of the human body as a central trope of the 1960s. The claim was made that Arbus's work was more purposively conceptual and performative than the literature on her work suggests. I have considered a broader artistic frame for her work, including contemporaneous performative and literary works, hoping to gain a more interdisciplinary perspective on works generally discussed by scholars in distinct fields.

Chapter IV

Framing Arbus's Social Panorama: Literary Types and Fictional Histories

I. A Complex Relationship to Literature

From the time of Balzac's *Comedie Humaine* through Alfred Döblin's *Berlin, Alexanderplatz* to James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, the literary social panorama and photography have been thematically intertwined. Both areas have attempted to produce a cross-section of individuals representative of a particular social moment. Arbus's specific connection to literature of this sort must be established, as it provides clear links to her work as a social panorama. In terms of other literature, scholars have drawn comparisons between Arbus and Franz Kafka, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and Philip Roth.⁴⁵⁶ Generally, the comparisons hinge on the biographical, emphasizing the mythic stature of the writer.

This chapter addresses the specific nature of Arbus's social panorama by examining both the literature and the literary climate pertinent to its conception. It is important to recognize that Arbus had an unusually close relationship to literature which impacted her approach to the social panorama. Part of this approach must be considered as inextricably linked to the literary and cultural milieu in which she worked. One question this chapter seeks to answer is, how does this literary and cultural milieu bear out in her panorama? This chapter examines certain thematic tropes, such as identity, the simulacrum, the split, or 'schizophrenic,' self, and the undermining of middle-class mores, among others,

⁴⁵⁶ See Marie Czach, "Diane Arbus, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton: Astringent Poetry and Tragic Celebrity," *History of Photography* 19,2 (Summer 1995), 100-106.

that Arbus shared with the literature of her times.

Recently, the display and publication of pages from Arbus's personal notebooks and a good portion of her personal library (337 books) in the *Diane Arbus: Revelations* exhibition and its accompanying catalogue have underscored the fact that literary sources had a significant impact upon her work. These materials may be a 'revelation' to contemporary audiences, but intimations of Arbus's unusual and complex relationship to books existed as early as 1972. In the 1972 *Diane Arbus* monograph, Arbus explicitly refers to the influence of literature on her work:

Another thing I've worked from is reading. It happens very obliquely. I don't mean I read something and rush out and make a picture of it. And I hate that business of illustrating poems. But here's an example of something I've never photographed that's like a photograph to me. There's a Kafka story called "Investigations of a Dog" which I read a long, long time ago and I've read it since a number of times. It's a terrific story written by the dog and its [sic] the real dog life of a dog...one of the first pictures I ever took must have been related to that story because it was of a dog...[he] came at twilight every day. A big dog. Kind of a mutt. He had sort of Weimaraner eyes, grey eyes. I just remember it was very haunting. He would come and just stare at me in what seemed a very mythic way. I mean a dog, not barking, not licking, just looking right through you. I don't think he liked me.⁴⁵⁷

Arbus's "oblique" reference to the Kafka story points to the way in which literature informed her work, and influenced not only its artistic conception, but its function as a social document. The dog is interesting to her precisely because he does not behave in a socially predictable manner. As Arbus indicates, he does not bark, lick her hand, or desire to be petted. The connection between the story and her seeing it as a photograph seems to manifest itself in Arbus's stated desire to capture the "mythic" in the photograph.

Despite her never having gone to college, Arbus's library reveals that she was widely read. A close look at Arbus's letters, some of which are reprinted in *Revelations*, reveal a rich and complex relationship to literature. She often shared

⁴⁵⁷ Arbus, *Diane Arbus*, 8.

ideas with her older brother, Howard Nemerov, an accomplished poet and Professor of Literature. In his prose and poetry, Nemerov wrote about the differences between photography and poetry, between photography and language, and on the processes of photography.⁴⁵⁸ Nemerov mentioned discussions with Arbus as an impetus for some of his own meditations on popular photography and art:

People, tourists, say, who habitually respond to a sight by photographing it, appear to me very defensive about life. As though they wished to kill reality in order to guarantee it, as though only the two-dimensional past were to have a real (a historical) existence. They are ever-present witnesses to the character of civilization as immediate, abstract, in a sense *memorized*; the living memory delegated to that 'objective' one in the black box...Poetry is a struggle against this kind of imagery, and I recall characterizing a certain kind of bad poem as 'a twelve-line image with a two-line caption telling you what to think.' Much later, I made this into a distinction (in conversation with the same sister), saying that I had been twenty years in the poetry business without, so far as I can say, telling people what they ought to think; good art tells you only what you do in fact think.⁴⁵⁹

As the text indicates, Nemerov and Arbus often used each other as sounding boards for the discussion of literary ideas. Arbus also shared a literary connection with her friend, occasional lover, and mentor, the painter and graphic designer Marvin Israel. In a letter to Israel from November 1960, we are offered a glimpse of Arbus's powers of literary observation:

Woogie [a performer at Hubert's Museum] left me alone with the rat and the snake saying darkly that I should keep my hands well out of the way and call her as soon as the one had swallowed the other. Being alone with them was like a sort of reversal of what happened in Eden, with the snake succumbing to its own temptation. The rat was mostly white with a pink eye and its legs were splayed wide apart in complete abandon while the snake was very knowing and the enormity of its mouth was a little like a smile...it looked like a sexual paradox, a parable to be enacted on judgement day, in which the female at last entered the male. Maybe it is the Genet in me which is transforming

⁴⁵⁸ Czach, 102.

⁴⁵⁹ Howard Nemerov, Journal of the Fictive Life (North Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Press, 1965), 81.

everything.⁴⁶⁰

Her letters are filled with similar metaphoric allusions, and often characterize people in terms of myth or parable. She read voraciously. Her library was rich and varied, running the gamut from classic literature (Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Balzac, Proust, James) and contemporary (Céline, Robbe-Grillet), to treatises on photography (Ivins), to philosophy (Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Spinoza), and poetry (Nemerov, Eliot, Graves). Arbus also owned scientific texts illustrated with photographs, books on psychoanalysis, science fiction, humor, and stories of the paranormal, to name a few. She even owned a directory of swingers. Her photographic and written work indicates a novel thematic reverberation with certain ideas and characters from the books she was reading. Like her blackboard of subjects and her photographic collage wall, the books she was reading were 'in her head' while she worked.

However, care must be taken not to over- (or under-) determine the impact of Arbus's own library on her photographs. How may we be sure she carefully read all of her books? What reader does not have books in their collection they have not completely read, or read at all, for that matter--or have been influenced by an important source not in one's own collection? Once again, Arbus's intentions ultimately remain unknowable, and must be discussed in terms of circumstantial evidence. Thus the *effect* of her work is central to this chapter; how it resonates with like-minded works of the period.

A list of books she was or had considered reading, listed in the front of

⁴⁶⁰ Arbus, Revelations, 149. She owned a copy of Genet's The Maids and Deathwatch: Two Plays by Jean Genet, preface by Jean-Paul Sartre (New York: Grove Press, 1961).

one of Arbus's 1970 appointment books and reproduced in the *Revelations* book, exemplifies the breadth of her preoccupations.⁴⁶¹ On the whole, this list suggests a broad interest in 'photographic meaning,' science, and the historical classification of the human body. It supports the argument made in this dissertation about the response of Arbus's *oeuvre* to ideologies (nationalistic, physiognomic, eugenic) on which groups of portraits are contingent.

As just mentioned, Arbus sustained a deep and committed relationship to literature as a point of intellectual identification with her brother Howard, with whom she was very close. Among other writers whose work they admired, Nemerov and Arbus were particularly intrigued by Franz Kafka.⁴⁶² Diane Zuliani investigates the influence of Kafka on Arbus, creating a precedent for the discussion of Arbus and her literary sources. Zuliani argues that:

I do not wish to imply that it was Arbus's intention to 'illustrate' Kafka. Instead, I hope to have shown that a common vocabulary of signs exists between them, in part stemming from the shared frame of reference of the two individuals...it is the shock of recognizing as real that which was thought to exist only in myth and fable that is common to Arbus and Kafka, whose characters cannot be forced into mythological metaphors any more than Arbus

⁴⁶¹ Elisabeth Sussman and Doon Arbus, "A Chronology," *Revelations*, 207. The list includes *Prints and Visual Communication* by William Ivins (1969), *Mental Deficiency of Different Origins: A Pictorial Survey* by Hans Forssman and Hans Olaf Akesson (1964), *Ghost Hunter: true stories of psychic phenomena* by Hans Holzer (1963); *On Death and Dying* by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross (1969; as mentioned in the *Revelations* Chronology, this book was probably connected to an assignment for *Esquire* about dying people she was supposed to work on in Chicago in July, which never actually takes place); *An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species* (1787, 1965).

⁴⁶² Diane Zuliani, "Diane Arbus and Franz Kafka: Canine Investigations" in *History of Photography* 19, 2(Summer 1995), 127-29. Arbus owned Kafka's *The Trial*, *Amerika*, *Parables and Paradoxes*, *The Penal Colony: Stories and Short Pieces*, *The Great Wall of China: Stories and Reflections*, *Selected Short Stories*, and *Wedding Preparations in the Country and Other Posthumous Prose Writings*.

or Kafka can...⁴⁶³

Zuliani notes certain parallels between Arbus and Kafka, and argues how Arbus may have been influenced by him in terms of thematic content related to alienation, myth, and irony. It is instructive that Zuliani suggests a “common vocabulary of signs” linking the work of Kafka and Arbus--she sees a desire to conflate classical metaphor and contemporary ideas in their characters. Yet Arbus and Kafka remain resistant to such a simple binarism. Zuliani, for example, seems to get into problems when she discusses themes in Kafka’s and Arbus’s work that, she argues, are the result of ‘parallel experiences’ of place and ethnicity (Jewish, urban, etc.), arguments which place too much emphasis on biography and race. While these areas are by no means unimportant, I would like to discuss Arbus’s work in terms of sources she not only spoke about, but spoke *in concert with*, placing her more solidly within the thematic *zeitgeist* of the sixties. I do not aim to cover all of Arbus’s literary sources, but would like to focus on three important ones not yet analyzed in any systematic fashion. First, I will discuss Arbus’s work within the context of the history of Bestiaries and Books of Eccentrics, ending with Edith Sitwell, Joseph Mitchell, and Jorge Luis Borges, three authors who draw upon that history. I would then like to contextualize some like-minded authors of the Sixties, such as Carson McCullers, Gore Vidal, and Joan Didion, whose work echoes themes of Arbus’s. Lastly, I will analyze Arbus’s own library, and discuss two main themes relevant to this dissertation: psychoanalytical texts, and books which themselves suggest a social panorama whose portraits comprise a critique of middle-class values.

In *Harper’s Bazaar* (November 1961), with its glamorous cover photograph by Richard Avedon of the model Hiroko, a special masthead section entitled “the Editor’s Guest Book” appeared. It included Borges, writer Morris Philipson, and

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 128.

Arbus. There is a photograph of each of the three mentioned, and the photo of Arbus is taken with her daughter Doon. She and Doon wear white robes and their hair is wet--they are tanned, and look as if they just got out of the pool.

The notes in the guest editor section says:

Writer-photographer Diane Arbus is the wife of the fashion photographer, Alan Arbus, and the sister of the poet Howard Nemerov. Through a strong emphasis on picture content, her art is that of the observer. Always fascinated by unusual people or those who live apart from society--as evidenced in her feature for "The Full Circle" on p. 133--her ability to gain their confidence and friendship is an essential part of her talent.⁴⁶⁴

With the description "writer-photographer," we are reminded that Arbus's literary aspirations are important in any consideration of her work (the placement of a Borges piece entitled "The House of Asterion" next to Arbus's piece was intended to be thematically complementary). Indeed, Arbus owned several manuals for the writer of fiction.⁴⁶⁵ On this basis, Arbus may be linked to 'literary' photographers like Walker Evans, who sought in photography a contemporary vehicle of expression for modernist literary themes, or Robert Frank, who, in *The Americans*, was influenced by the American 'road story' as told by a European (from De Toqueville through Nabokov). No doubt Frank also was influenced by Kerouac's *On the Road*. But where Evans was firmly entrenched in the modernist tradition, and Frank in the irony of existential isolation characteristic of Sartre, Malraux and the Beats, Arbus's interest in literature may be said retrospectively to straddle the modernist and postmodernist traditions.

⁴⁶⁴ Harper's Bazaar 3000 (November 1961), 107.

⁴⁶⁵ These include Cleanth Brooks's Understanding Fiction and I.A. Richards's Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgement, and several writer's diaries, such as Dostoevsky's two-volume The Diary of a Writer and The Notebooks for Crime and Punishment, and Justin O'Brien's The Journals of André Gide.

II. Arbus and the Tradition of the 'Book of Eccentrics'

The year 1960 was important for Arbus in the development of a central issue in her work, the photographing of a 'gallery' of freaks and eccentrics. At this early period in her work, Arbus may have been influenced by the galleries of freak portraits that hung in places like Hubert's Museum on Forty-Second Street in New York. Later, in an essay written in 1966 entitled "Hubert's Obituary," Arbus would lament the loss of the social phenomenon of the Dime Museum, where human oddities could be seen:

Imagine Albert-Alberta, a creature half-man and half woman, seductive as a nightmare, a veritable French psychological novel, but symmetrical, flirtatiously revealing a powdered perfumed sequinned female left breast with a rugged muscular hairy male right hand while our mouths fell open in disbelief. Or Charlotte the Gorilla Girl, terrible, toothy, and hairy all over because it seems her pregnant mother had been frightened in the zoo...and Seal the Seal Boy, he was the most cheerful man I have ever known.⁴⁶⁶

Arbus's interest in freaks was not just the result of a taste for the grotesque, intended to shock contemporary audiences. Her fondness for freaks was in their ability to represent the extension of a long tradition in popular literature of books about human oddities and 'curious characters.' As early as 1960, Arbus's notebooks revealed such an interest: she had stapled in circus flyers for "The Human Blimp, Now the World's Fattest Man," and "Suzy, Nature's Enigma, the World's Strangest Human" (figure 4-1). By stapling these images in her notebooks, surrounded by her own notes, Arbus began to formulate her own conceptual 'gallery,' with its attendant stories.

Such collections of tales, often more myth than reality, date back almost five thousand years. According to Leslie Fiedler, the oldest surviving document dealing with 'monsters' [humans with severe birth defects] is a Babylonian

⁴⁶⁶ Arbus, "Hubert's Obituary, Or, This is Where we Came In," in Magazine Work, 81.

lexicon of 'monsterology,' inscribed on clay tablets that date from c. 2800 B.C.E.⁴⁶⁷ As early as the 2nd century C.E., Pliny noted dryly that "formerly hermaphrodites were regarded as ominous signs, but today they seem merely entertainments."⁴⁶⁸ More recent manifestations include C.J.S. Thompson's *The Mystery and Lore of Monsters, With account of some Giants, Dwarfs, and Prodigies* (1931), Dame Edith Sitwell's *English Eccentrics* (1957), Daniel George's *A Book of Characters* (1959), and a book that historicizes freaks in a scholarly manner, yet still is in essence a bestiary: Leslie Fiedler's own *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (1978).⁴⁶⁹

In April of 1960, Arbus wrote to Marvin Israel about her ideas concerning a project about freaks and eccentrics. As Doon Arbus and Elisabeth Sussman point out in the *Revelations* chronology, the new project began to evolve out of language.⁴⁷⁰ In April 1960, Arbus wrote, "Last week I looked up the word 'anomaly' because I always thought it meant a fish out of water but I knew I was wrong and I was right. It means something not subject to analogy or rule, or something odd or strange or exceptional...and I saw the connection between freaks and eccentrics, the exception to every rule."⁴⁷¹ Then, in the fall of 1960, Arbus began assembling a project on the subject of eccentrics. She wrote to Howard (who was then teaching at Bennington College):

⁴⁶⁷ Leslie Fiedler, *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 20.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid. Other important sources included Ambroise Paré's *Chyurgy* (1579), Gaspar Schott's *Physica Curiosa* (1662), R.S. Kirby's *Kirby's Wonderful Museum of Remarkable Characters* (six volumes, 1803-20), the unnamed author of *Biographical Sketches of Eccentric Characters* (1832), and John Timbs's *English Eccentrics and Eccentricities*, (two volumes, 1866), to name only a few.

⁴⁶⁹ For a thorough discussion of the appearance of freaks in literature, see Fiedler's chapter entitled "Freaks and the Literary Imagination" in *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self*, 256-273.

⁴⁷⁰ Doon Arbus and Sussman, "A Chronology," *Revelations*, 148.

⁴⁷¹ Arbus, Letter to Marvin Israel, April 20, 1960 in Ibid.

I am working on something now, the eccentrics I have so long thought of, or rather people who visibly believe in something everyone doubts, and remembering a commodity of dreams [the title of Howard's collected short stories, 1960] I wondered if there were any such anywhere round your vicinity which would provide me with the excuse an oppty [sic] for a visit...any imposters, or people with incredibly long beards, or ones who believe in the imminent end of the world, or are reincarnations or keep lions in their living room or embalmed bodies or even skeletons or have developed some especial skill like a lady in Florida who is meant to eat and sleep under water, or affect some remarkable costume or other, or collect things to the point of miserliness? Don't trouble about it...unless when you look up from the page the Messiah comes wandering out of the woods.⁴⁷²

These letters are compelling, as they indicate Arbus's predetermination to engage the subject of eccentrics in terms of a broader conceptual frame, something she said "I have so long thought of." Further, Arbus's commentary on the subject of eccentrics to her brother signals an interest in a project that involves bringing together a group of individuals who in one sense are contemporary manifestations of classic eccentric characters, as we shall see, but also *metaphorically*, rather than literally, comprise the counter-cultural nature of her social panorama.

Towards the end of 1960, Arbus was researching and preparing a proposal for a project on eccentrics for *Esquire*. In a letter to Marvin Israel, dated November 13, Arbus stated that "I have been holed up in the public library with Kirby's *Wonderful Museum of Remarkable Characters* and *Wilson's Magazine of Curious and Odd Memoirs and Anecdotes* and I am agog with stories...."⁴⁷³ Kirby's *Wonderful Museum*, published in England in 1803-20, a six-volume set of books about unusual and eccentric characters in England and abroad, contained vignettes about the physically deformed and eccentric, but also about famous seducers, transvestites, eccentric noblemen and artists, and oddities found in

⁴⁷² Arbus, letter to Howard Nemerov, c. Fall 1960 in *Revelations*, 154.

⁴⁷³ Arbus, *Revelations*, 154.

nature, such as giant trees, volcanoes, earthquakes, and "The Haze of 1801."⁴⁷⁴

In some ways, *Kirby's* was a proto-Guinness Book of World Records for early nineteenth-century readers in its attempt to list physical extremes of size in living things. The preface to the first volume states the mission of the *Museum*:

That taste for enquiring into all the arcana, perfections, and even the eccentricities of art and nature, which, from various causes, seems growing with our growth, strengthening with our strength, will most probably find its true and genuine ailment in the panacea, which it shall be our duty and pleasure to present to our readers, as much as possible adapted to this diversity of taste, inclination, and propensity...that which is truly curious, positively, or relatively wonderful, will, at all times, be our study to procure and collect from the inexhaustible regions of animate and inanimate nature...

Kirby's advances the idea that the observation of curious characters represents a kind of intangible cure for the curiosity of those of "taste," an idea that reappears in Sitwell. Arbus's interest in *Kirby's* was perhaps in its dry yet often amusing characterizations of classic types. It also seems consistent with an early development of the concept of a social panorama, as it represents a collection of individuals whose tales are told in the manner of parables with hidden moral messages. In *Kirby's*, classic types such as the dwarf, the giant, the skeleton man, the bearded lady, and the transvestite are depicted in both story and engraving. For example, an engraving entitled Mademoiselle Lefort of 1819 (figure. 1-2), the frontespiece of the sixth volume, is of a bearded lady, "exhibited in Spring Gardens [London], 1818." She is not mocked, but rather described in exemplary terms as a kind of exotic French commodity. In general, moral and ethical issues of the day are woven into the stories about the spurious or exemplary conduct of the characters.

Similarly, in the preface of John Timbs's *English Eccentrics and Eccentricities* of 1866, Timbs notes that "with oddity of character may co-exist much goodness

⁴⁷⁴ R.S. Kirby, *Kirby's Wonderful Museum, or Magazine of Remarkable Characters* vols. I-VI (London: Barnard and Sultz, 1803-1820).

of heart; and your strange fellow, though, according to the lexicographer, he be outlandish, odd, queer, and eccentric, may possess claims to our notice which the man who is ever studying the fitness of things would not so readily present."⁴⁷⁵

This statement is later echoed by Edith Sitwell and Joseph Mitchell in terms of eccentrics being moral exemplars, instead of 'normal' citizens (it is not certain, however, that Arbus read this particular book, although it is in the collection of the main branch of the New York Public Library, where she went to read *Kirby's*). Timbs acknowledges the entertainment value of his book, and that its characters may offer the reader a lesson. Perhaps in keeping with the times, Timbs also includes more tales about the quirky habits of the wealthy and fashionable in their mannerisms and pursuit of material possessions.

Books of eccentrics were popular in Victorian England. Coupled with this phenomenon was a passion for collecting portraits. Circus performers sat for traditional photographic portraits and some, like General Tom Thumb and Commodore Nutt, achieved celebrity. Their likenesses became popular collectibles. Writing about historical fluctuations in the Victorian acceptability of freaks, Fiedler points out important descriptive wording by P.T. Barnum from his *Autobiography*: "Barnum refers to human anomalies not as Freaks but as 'curiosities,' lumping them with other attractions, such as animals and marvels of creative taxidermy, which may seem to us of a quite different kind: the 'woolly Horse,' for instance, a 'genuine mermaid,' 'Jumbo the Elephant,' and Joice Heth, a black woman who claimed to be 161 years old and to have been the slave of George Washington's father."⁴⁷⁶ If we may overlook the obvious racism of Barnum's lumping Joice Heth together with animals, Fiedler makes a valid

⁴⁷⁵ John Timbs, *English Eccentrics and Eccentricities* vol. I (London: Richard Bentley, 1866), iv. Although Arbus never mentioned reading Timbs, it is discussed here to establish thematic parallels interesting to her.

⁴⁷⁶ Fiedler, *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self*, 15.

observation about the social place of the freak in Victorian society:

'Curiosity' is a typically Victorian word, memorialized in the title of Charles Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and reminding us that in that era the interest in Freaks had reached a high point. Indeed, Queen Victoria was quite as curious about Barnum's curious charges as was her favorite novelist. And in America the situation was much the same, with such eminent transatlantic Victorians as Abraham Lincoln and Mark Twain proving equally ready to take time off from a war or book to receive and swap jokes with a Dwarf [Comodore Nutt].⁴⁷⁷

Relating this point to the twentieth century, Fiedler makes the observation that "the reigning figures in politics had begun to break off the dialogue with Freaks which had lasted for millenia, surviving the fall of ancient empires...."⁴⁷⁸ Arbus's photographs of Freaks, then, come at a low point in the history of Freaks in terms of social acceptability, yet a point in which the moniker 'Freak,' mythologized as the marginalized other, explodes into something radically different, a counter-cultural banner adopted by middle-class rebels she had little interest in photographing. Arbus avoided assignments about hippies, Yippies, and peace demonstrations (although she attended them).

Edith Sitwell's *English Eccentrics* (1957) was at heart a book of entertainment, mixing biography with myth and folklore. However, *English Eccentrics* was also a more literary attempt in a long tradition of books belonging to the realm of popular amusement. In the Author's Note at the beginning of the book, Sitwell mentions her indebtedness to "the biographers of her Eccentrics, and to those other collectors of Eccentricity whose works she has had an opportunity of consulting."⁴⁷⁹ Thus she recognizes the history of the peculiar genre of literature and her place within it. Similar to Sitwell, Arbus mentions that she is a collector of sorts, and, as shown earlier, had a clear idea of her place in

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Edith Sitwell, *English Eccentrics* (New York: the Vanguard Press, 1957), n.p. (author's note).

the history of photography. In a letter proposing a project on eccentrics to *Esquire* editors Robert Benton and Harold Hayes, written circa November 1960, Arbus quotes Sitwell on the subject of eccentrics: "Edith Sitwell says in what is the prettiest definition: ANY DUMB BUT PREGNANT COMMENT ON LIFE, ANY CRITICISM OF THE WORLD'S ARRANGEMENT, IF EXPRESSED BY ONLY ONE GESTURE, AND THAT OF SUFFICIENT CONTORTION, BECOMES ECCENTRICITY [Arbus's capitals]." ⁴⁸⁰ In this emphasized portion of her proposal to *Esquire*, Arbus suggests a connection between Sitwell's metaphoric eccentrics and her own interests in a social panorama of individuals whose existence offers a "criticism of the world's arrangement." In August of 1961, *Esquire* balked at the project, and it was picked up by the new art director at *Harper's Bazaar*, Marvin Israel. ⁴⁸¹ The piece was published under the title "The Full Circle" in *Harper's Bazaar*, November 1961.

The opening chapter of Sitwell's book, entitled "Goose-Weather," lauds earlier practitioners in the book of eccentrics genre, such as Kirby and Timbs. Sitwell notes her indebtedness to Kirby, from "whose pages I have culled this story, and who seems to have been one of those happy persons who never look about them, but who, when confronted with an indubitable fact, are astonished very easily." ⁴⁸² In the opening pages, Sitwell discusses various cures for "melancholy," chief among them the tales of eccentrics:

to go further in our stretch for some antidote against melancholy, we may seek in our dust-heap for some rigid, and even splendid, attitude of Death, some exaggeration of the attitudes common to life. This attitude, rigidity, protest, or explanation, has been called eccentricity by those whose bones are too pliant. But these mummies cast shadows that do not lie in their proper geometrical

⁴⁸⁰ Arbus, *Revelations*, 155. Arbus's quote is from Sitwell's *English Eccentrics*, 21-22. See my introduction.

⁴⁸¹ Arbus, *Revelations*, 157.

⁴⁸² Sitwell, 21.

proportions, and from these distortions dusty laughter may arise.⁴⁸³

Sitwell claims that “[t]his eccentricity, this rigidity, takes many forms. It may even, indeed, be the Ordinary carried to a high degree of pictorial perfection....”⁴⁸⁴ Sitwell’s ‘ordinary’ eccentrics are folk who have no physical deformity, who seem perfectly middle class, yet behave in an odd fashion. For example, “Major Peter Labellière...described as a Christian patriot and Citizen of the World [sic] ...expressed his criticism of the conduct of the planet, by leaving in his will the direction to bury him head downwards, in order, he explained, that ‘as the world was so turned topsyturvy, it was fit that he should be so buried that he might be right at last.’”⁴⁸⁵

Let us turn to some examples in Arbus’s magazine work to understand her approach to the joining of eccentric character and literary subject. In her letters, Arbus indicates an early interest in photographing odd subjects who represent contemporary manifestations of literary metaphor. In Joe Allen, “The Backwards Man” (fig. 4-3), a slender contortionist employed by Hubert’s, Arbus sees a type of Janus-headed figure: “Joe Allen is a metaphor for human destiny--walking blind into the future with an eye on the past.”⁴⁸⁶ She also demonstrates, in this early period of her work, a concern for photographing characters who echoed classic literary types. Of William Mack, “The Sage of the Wilderness” (figure i-2), she wrote to Israel:

I found William Mack the sort of furry Rasputin who is courtly and tedious and sinister, remarkably like someone who will appear in the daily news newly dead...a retired German merchant seaman and moslem convert and that sort of union square etymologist who can derive any word from any other...he is given to saying things like that Moses wasn’t a Jew and Shakespeare didn’t write any

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁴⁸⁶ Arbus, appointment book, July 6, 1961 (footnote 121), in Revelations, 154.

plays which make me quite tired to hear and I never know what to say in reply. But he is very splendid looking, like a seer who has forgotten his own secret or an anachronism who wishes it was obsolete. Proud, formidable and airless like an unprincipled martyr...the world is full of fictional characters looking for their stories.⁴⁸⁷

In Allen and Mack, Arbus found characters for a panorama who represented a metaphoric connection to classic types, yet were inextricably tied to the social situation in which they lived.

In *Diane Arbus: Revelations*, in an entry in one of her notebooks, "no. 35," labeled "November 1968," Arbus lists a number of possible subject headings. The subjects appear divided into two columns. The column on the left lists thematic "types" which correspond to chapters in popular bestiaries and books of eccentric characters found in popular literature from the renaissance to the present: "morons, imbeciles, idiots, cretins, macrocephalics, hydroceph[alics], gargoylism, fat, handicapped, freaks, exhibitionist, albinos, S&M, criminals."⁴⁸⁸ On the right are listed subjects which correspond more specifically to her interest in social organizations: "clubs, groups, ritual, plastic surgery, beauty queens, PR Queens, ...Proms...."⁴⁸⁹ There does not appear to be a direct line-by-line correspondence between items in each of the two columns, but what emerges from this list of possible subjects seems to be the wish to conflate the types of the classic bestiary with the rituals of americana.

Joseph Mitchell's *McSorley's Wonderful Saloon* (1938), *The Bottom of the Harbor* (1960), and *Joe Gould's Secret* (1964), collections of his *New Yorker* articles on eccentric individuals, had a strong impact on Arbus's subject matter, and she actively sought to photograph some of the people Mitchell wrote vignettes

⁴⁸⁷ Arbus, letter to Marvin Israel, Jan. 12, 1961 in *Ibid.*, 155.

⁴⁸⁸ *Revelations*, 191.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

about, such as Joe Gould ("Professor Sea Gull") and Mazie Gordon.⁴⁹⁰ Mitchell's socially conscious brand of journalistic biography may be linked to nineteenth-century texts like Henry Mayhew's *London Labor and the London Poor* (1861-62), an illustrated series of vignettes about urban types, such as prostitutes, "street-sellers," "Coster-Lads," and "Dredgers."⁴⁹¹ Like Mayhew, Mitchell empathized with his subjects in an unsentimental way. Also like the nineteenth-century Englishman, Mitchell peppered his accounts with deadpan, often grotesque, humor. But Mitchell's stories lacked the obvious class consciousness of Mayhew's subjects. To Mitchell, characters like Gould and Gordon represented a dying breed of kind-hearted New York eccentrics of singular purpose who lent color to the drab and increasingly homogeneous urban landscape. Arbus was fascinated with Mitchell's descriptive prose, and strove to emulate his deadpan, what he called "graveyard," humor in her photographs and written work. Mitchell's work also contained a social critique that interested Arbus: he attempted to establish a link to a vanishing past, to what he saw as a vital sense of humanism and place that still existed in the homes and actions of marginalized individuals. Mitchell found it ironic that such individuals had been cast aside by bourgeois society, and strove to record their value for posterity in an era of growing corporate and mass-cultural hegemony. Thus the narrative aspect of Arbus's photographs, the emphasis on spaces filled with objects as a way of telling a story about the person she was photographing, must be understood

⁴⁹⁰ See Patricia Bosworth, *Diane Arbus* (New York and London: Norton, 1984), 176-78. Despite its much-maligned overdependence on sensationalistic biographical details, the Bosworth biography provides a number of important starting points for Arbus scholars, such as the Mitchell book.

⁴⁹¹ Henry Mayhew, *London Labor and the London Poor*, vols. I-IV (London: Griffin, Bohn, and Co., 1861-1862). Mayhew's volumes reflected a widely-held entertainment in mid-nineteenth-century America and England--the observation of the poor. Wealthy urbanites often would stroll in slums, observing the curious 'fauna' as they might in a zoological garden. Yet Mayhew's humanist tone is never mocking.

within the context of Mitchell's features.

Arbus first contacted Mitchell in November 1960. Recalling this initial conversation, Mitchell said that:

She told me she wanted to take pictures of some of the people I'd written about, like Lady Olga, the bearded lady, and Mazie, who ran a movie house in the Bowery. She said she imagined they were a link to a strange, dark world--to an underworld. I said I supposed they were but hadn't Brassai done photographs like that of the Parisian underworld in the 1920s and wasn't Weegee doing it right now for the *Daily News*? Diane allowed as I was right but she was going to go about it in a different way--pursuing what couldn't be defined, pursuing what was missing in an image. I said Okay.⁴⁹²

Mitchell also mentioned that "I urged Diane not to romanticize freaks. I told her that freaks can be as boring and ordinary as so-called 'normal' people. I told her what I found interesting about Olga, the bearded lady, was that she yearned to be a stenographer and kept geraniums on her windowsill...."⁴⁹³ Bosworth, who interviewed Mitchell in 1979, has the following to say regarding Mitchell's chats with Arbus:

Mitchell says Diane phoned him frequently in subsequent weeks. They would always talk for at least an hour, and Mitchell jotted down some of the topics they covered: Kafka, James Joyce, Walker Evans, Grimm's Fairy Tales. She had been reading Edith Sitwell's *English Eccentrics* and told him of Sitwell's theory that contemplating eccentrics was a cure for melancholy--a way of distinguishing man from beast.⁴⁹⁴

Arbus sent one of the first copies of *Bazaar's* November issue to Mitchell at the *New Yorker*, with a note from her written on the cover: "Dear Mr. Mitchell, thanks for your kindness on the phone last fall when I was looking for people. Here are some I found (pp. 133-137) Diane Arbus."⁴⁹⁵ Arbus and Mitchell maintained a phone dialogue for seven years, from 1960-67.

⁴⁹² Mitchell in Bosworth, 177, from Bosworth's interview with Joseph Mitchell, Oct. 30, 1979.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 178.

⁴⁹⁵ Arbus in Ibid., 184.

Mitchell's profiles of eccentrics in *The New Yorker* provided Arbus with a wealth of information. In particular, Mitchell explained the hierarchy among freaks, their class distinctions (as between those born, and those 'made' by tattoo). Mitchell may have urged Arbus not to romanticize freaks, but she discovered that her interest in them was in line with the currents in American intellectual life that were then hoisting the counter-culture into a new and aggressive prominence.⁴⁹⁶ Arbus's was a journey of social exploration like that which George Orwell had made three decades earlier. In *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), Orwell showed himself to be equally interested in the social hierarchies of the rootless poor, and was determined to resist any attempt to romanticise tramps and *plongeurs* (sewer plungers).⁴⁹⁷

Mitchell's story entitled "Lady Olga," a piece about a famous bearded lady named Jane Barnell, is just the sort of story that would have interested Arbus. A minor celebrity, Lady Olga appeared in Todd Browning's 1932 film, *Freaks*. Arbus sought out Lady Olga, but discovered that she did not want to have her picture taken. In his story, Mitchell says that Lady Olga was with a Ringling Bros. sideshow entitled "The Congress of Strange People," which was "as highly esteemed by freaks as the Palace used to be by vaudeville actors."⁴⁹⁸ Barnell quit Ringling Bros. and joined the basement sideshow of Hubert's museum on West Forty-Second Street. Mitchell mentions that, between shows, Ms. Barnell likes to visit with other performers, usually with Albert-Alberta, the half-man-half-woman (both Lisette Model and Arbus photographed Albert-Alberta).⁴⁹⁹

Mitchell's bearded lady details a hierarchy of freaks:

⁴⁹⁶Eric Homberger, "J.P. Morgan's Nose: Photographer and Subject in American Portrait Photography" in Graham Clarke ed., *The Portrait in Photography*, 129.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Mitchell, 90.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 92.

Her self-esteem suffers least of all when she is working in circuses, where sideshow class distinctions are rigidly observed. She herself divides freaks into three classes: born freaks, made freaks, and two-timers. Born freaks are the aristocrats of the sideshow world. She, of course, is a member of this class. So are Siamese twins, pinheads, fat girls, dwarfs, midgets, giants, living skeletons, and men with skulls on which rocks can be broken. Made freaks include tattooed people, sword-swallowers, snake charmers, and glass-eaters.⁵⁰⁰

Echoing Mitchell, Arbus mentions a similar interest in this hierarchy: "they've already passed their test in life. They're aristocrats."⁵⁰¹ Mitchell says that:

Normal people who obtain sideshow engagements because of past glory or notoriety are two-timers to her. Examples are reformed criminals, old movie stars, and retired athletes like Jack Johnson, the old prizefighter, and Grover Cleveland Alexander, both of whom starred for a while on the dime museum circuit. Because Johnson wears a beret and because she has heard that he sips beer through a straw, she particularly dislikes him. 'To the general public, old Jack Johnson may be a freak,' she says, 'but to a freak he ain't a freak.'⁵⁰²

Mitchell makes the bearded lady seem like a normal human being with regular foibles, and also concerned with quotidian domestic chores, as, he acknowledges, a woman of the time period might be. Mitchell ends the piece with a thought that seems to collapse the boundaries of freakishness and celebrity: "...she has a certain professional pride. Sometimes, sitting around with other performers in a dressing room, she will say, with a slight air of defiance, that a freak is just as good as any actor, from the Barrymores on down. 'If the truth be known, we're all freaks together,' she says."⁵⁰³

In another story, called "The Gypsy Women," Mitchell describes the need for a "real gypsy scholar" in the United States: "when I read about American professors studying strange tribes of people in the far corners of the earth, it

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 96.

⁵⁰¹ Arbus in Diane Arbus, 3.

⁵⁰² Mitchell, 97.

⁵⁰³ Mitchell, 105.

burns me up: you'd think at least one of them would study a strange tribe that's right under their noses."⁵⁰⁴ Perhaps we could say that Arbus took up Mitchell's call for urban anthropology?

Let us look at Arbus's Russian Midget Friends in a Living Room on 100th Street, N.Y.C. of 1963 (figure 4-4) as an example demonstrating her interest in Mitchell's type of social panorama. In this photograph, Arbus captures three elderly short folk, one of whom, on the left, recognizable from other photographs, is named Andrew Ratoucheff, or "Andy Potato Chips," a long-time circus sideshow performer. The three figures, sitting close together in the center of the photograph, are reminiscent of three wizened yet kind mythic beings. They all touch each other, emphasizing both their physical and psychic togetherness--and their childlike vulnerability. The three figures display a theme Arbus would return to later, the simultaneous appearance of youth and old age that she considered to be a metaphor for the unstable state of identity characteristic of the sixties. Instead of just focusing upon the heads of the three friends, as Avedon might have done, Arbus also includes the banal, kitschy details of their apartment. These could be found in any middle-class home, including a ceramic cat lamp, photographs stuck into a mirror, and an African violet potted in a plastic Breakstone's Whipped Butter tub.

Jorge Luis Borges

From 1961 to 1965, several of Arbus's magazine stories convey the influence of Borges: in particular, Arbus's "The Full Circle" in the November 1961 issue of *Harper's Bazaar*, "Mae West: Once Upon Our Time" (published as "Emotion in Motion") in the January 1965 issue of *Show*, and "The Bishop's

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 173.

Charisma," an unpublished piece from 1964. Directly adjacent to Arbus's "The Full Circle" in *Harper's* is a story by Borges entitled "The House of Asterion," originally written in 1947. With the close collaboration of Marvin Israel as art director, it seems plausible that Arbus wanted it read in tandem with her work, as a companion piece. As I have already outlined, the story concerns the Greek myth of the Minotaur, but is told from the perspective of the Minotaur. Far from the static monster who devours humans in the myth, Borges's Minotaur, Asterion, feels human emotions: anger, sadness, and melancholy. The story opens with the thoughts of a man named Asterion; the reader does not know he is a Minotaur yet. Asterion mentions that he is a prisoner, and that "I know that I am accused of arrogance and perhaps of misanthropy, and perhaps even of madness...the fact is, I am unique."⁵⁰⁵ Asterion invents games for himself in his labyrinthine prison, even an imaginary double whom he politely shows around. Like Arbus's eccentrics, the Minotaur is a social outcast, and, like Arbus's vignettes, Borges's "House of Asterion" lets the reader inside the Minotaur's head where he has dreams and desires, and is vulnerable and afraid.

Generally, Borges's *grand guignol* of characters is based upon individuals both real and mythic, but his accounts of their actions are fictional. This approach echoes the style of writers in the book of eccentrics genre, who mixed biographical fact and fiction with impunity. Borges engages a pseudo-biographical style that almost seems repertorial, as if he were reporting the biographical exploits of a notable eccentric individual firsthand. Placing these individuals in a specific historical context, Borges effaces the boundary between fiction and history. The identity of Borges's characters is slippery. He organizes his characters into 'galleries,' such as "A Universal History of Iniquity" (1935),

⁵⁰⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, "The House of Asterion" in Jorge Luis Borges: Collected Fictions (New York and London: Penguin, 1998), 220.

"The Garden of Forking Paths" (1941) and "The Aleph" (1944).⁵⁰⁶ Arbus owned English translations of Borges's *Ficciones*, and his *Other Inquisitions: 1932-1952*.⁵⁰⁷ In this section, I will draw thematic parallels between Arbus's and Borges's work concerning myth, simulacra, and identity.

In 1933, Borges began a series of sketches called *Historia Universal de la Infamia*, or "A Universal History of Infamy." Published between the years 1933 and 1934 in the Argentine literary journal *Crítica*, these stories took characters and ideas from other published works and 're-invented' them. Blending fact and fiction, often mythic in resonance, many of the stories had a vague feeling of surrealistic authenticity. In 1935, he wrote what is considered to be the prototype of the typical "Borgesian" story, "The Approach to al-Mu'tasim," a review of a fictional novel. In these early works, a theme emerged which Borges would continue to employ throughout his career: the obfuscation of authorship and identity.

Meaning in Borges's work is mediated by the surreal uncanniness at its heart. Borges's sustained practice of the uncanny gives rise in his texts to endless tensions between illusion and meaning, and to the competing desires for fragmentation, dispersal, and stability.⁵⁰⁸ This results in a play between meaning and absurdity. From this vantage point, he engages strategies of deception and simulacra. He demonstrates an affinity towards unsettling binarisms, and fosters a distrust of the permanent.⁵⁰⁹ Yet within this sense of impermanence, Borges seeks human continuity. José Saramago, Portuguese writer and winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize in Literature, and a great admirer of Borges, has made an

⁵⁰⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 1-287.

⁵⁰⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones* (New York: Grove Press, 1962), and Borges, *Other Inquisitions: 1932-1952*, Ruth Simms trans. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968).

⁵⁰⁸ Note from the publisher, http://www.themodernword.com/borges/borges_crit_gen2.html

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

important point about Borges: Saramago mentioned the Argentinian writer's "literature of ritual, announcing a world itself composed of rituals."⁵¹⁰ Arbus herself professed a desire to photograph rituals, as explicitly stated in her 1963 Guggenheim grant application entitled "American Rites and Customs." Borges situates his characters in a social atmosphere in which fact and fiction have become all but indistinguishable. In one of Borges's *Fictions* entitled "The Disinterested Killer Bill Harrigan," a yarn about the short life of the legendary Billy the Kid, Borges deals specifically with the theme of the shift of identity: "[h]e never fully lived up to the legend of himself, but he came closer and closer as time went on. Something of the New York Hoodlum lived on in the cowboy..."⁵¹¹ Bill Harrigan becomes a man of multiple identities, part myth, part fable. Borges engages in a pastiche of the Billy the Kid myth, inventing fictive biographical details that nonetheless draw our attention to the almost arbitrary nature of historical information, and the blurred, discontinuous line between fact and fable. Surfaces often play important roles in Borges' *Fictions*, demonstrating how a character's identity shifts according to shifting appearances. Often the binarism of 'self' and 'Other' is clouded.

Borges's use of the simulacrum is interesting in terms of the evanescence of identity. In "The Circular Ruins," which Arbus would have read in her English copy of *Ficciones*, the protagonist's main stated goal is "to dream a man."⁵¹² A sorcerer, the protagonist goes to an abandoned yet magical circular ruin deep in the jungle. There, he desires to dream about a man so carefully that the man would become a real living, breathing son for him. The sorcerer brings him

⁵¹⁰ Saramago made this point in an address at the European Parliament in Brussels on March 23, 1999. See also Chris Rollason, "Borges's 'Library of Babel' and the Internet" on http://www.TheModernWord.com/borges/borges_papers_rollason2.html

⁵¹¹ Borges, Jorge Luis Borges. Collected Fictions (New York: Penguin, 1999), 33.

⁵¹² Borges, 97.

about a bit at a time in each dream, "organ by organ, feature by feature, through a thousand and one secret nights."⁵¹³ But eventually "he feared that his son would meditate upon his unnatural privilege and somehow discover that he was a mere simulacrum. To be not a man, but the projection of another man's dream--what incomparable humiliation, what vertigo!"⁵¹⁴ At the end of the story, the sorcerer, in despair, decides to give himself to the flames of the burning ruin. However he is not burned, and "with relief, with humiliation, with terror, he realized that he, too, was but appearance, that another man was dreaming him."⁵¹⁵ Borges scholar Sylvia Molloy argues that for the writer the simulacrum had multivalent properties: it "may be a metaphor, a character, a plot, literature, an author. It also may be Borges, it also may be the self."⁵¹⁶ Molloy argues that Borges deconstructs the traditional notion of the character, fusing fact with myth. She indicates that Borges's text "works assiduously against fixed images, monstrous images that have been classified, images that are monstrous *because* they are classified...Borges's text tries to ignore that fixity--which, because of its imperfection, merely emphasizes the illusion of all classification--and at the same time it hints at the possibility of movement behind simulacra."⁵¹⁷

Arbus's A Family on Their Lawn One Sunday in Westchester, N.Y. of 1968 (figure i-6) demonstrates an affinity with Borges's interest in layers of meaning and the simulacrum. In a letter to Peter Crookston, circa September 1968, Arbus's description of the photograph is reminiscent of part of Borges's "The

⁵¹³ Ibid., 100.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Sylvia Molloy, Signs of Borges. Oscar Montero trans.(Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 3.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 6.

Circular Ruins”:

If your material on The Family is not utterly signed and sealed, I have one of the upper middle class suburban family on their lawn, just two parents and a child...its so odd, nearly like [playwright Harold] Pinter but not quite, it might just serve to introduce the whole thing along with that quotation you sent me of (“the family with its narrow somethingorother and its etc. etc. might be the source of all our woes...” I’ve forgotten it, but in the picture the parents seem to be dreaming the child and the child seems to be inventing them, maybe its more like Charles Addams).⁵¹⁸

She specifically mentions that the parents and the child seem to be dreaming each other, echoing Borges’s sorcerer and his simulacral dreamed man. This description by Arbus is fascinating for its ability to implode the notion of family togetherness. If the child by the pool is dreaming the parents in the lawn chairs, and they him, the figures are simulacra to each other, mere shadowy appearances. The thick, lush, dark pines in the background seem to act as a visual register of the tumultuous inner dialogue each member of the family hides from one another. The lawn on which they sit becomes a Pinteresque suburban stage, the child’s toys, props. The family’s distance from one another, both spatial, and, in terms of body language, psychological, separates them from the ubiquitous, mythic mass-media image of the smiling, happy, white American family.

Thematically, Borges’s *Universal History of Infamy* suggests a kind of carnivalesque masking of identity. When asked about *A Universal History of Infamy*, Borges answers, “all the stories in that volume were mockeries in some way, artifices.”⁵¹⁹ He says, “what else indeed is that ‘appearance,’ that ‘surface of images,’ if not a mockery of other texts and a textual carnival?”⁵²⁰ Borges’s *History of Infamy* finishes in the carnivalesque baroque of “The Masked Dyer, Hakim of Merv,” a story in which everything, including the individual’s original

⁵¹⁸ Arbus in Revelations, 195.

⁵¹⁹ Borges in Molloy, 18.

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

face, is a mask.⁵²¹ Molloy argues that, “instead of functioning as points of convergence, the characters in *A Universal History of Infamy* are effective points of divergence. They are and are not their masks; rather, they fleetingly occupy those masks, without revealing themselves.”⁵²² Molloy also discusses Borges’s characters as a kind of hybrid form of pastiche:

Based on borrowed stories, alienated within his own story, the character sketched by Borges in *A Universal History of Infamy* is an elusive conglomerate. Fragmented, robbed of centrality by the importance given to his circumstance, at once vacant and shielded by masks, Borges’s character is, like Orson Welles’s *Citizen Kane*, a simulacrum, a chaos of appearances, a surface of images whose stability is permanently threatened by multiplicity and hiatus. Borges masks and unmasks character [and] his use of character...⁵²³

In Arbus’s *A Family on Their Lawn*, the mother wears the mask of the platinum blond beauty, yet there is a coldness about her that is palpable in her expression. She has the high cheekbones and chiseled features of a model or an actress, yet there is a slight downturn of her lips which suggests haughtiness or scorn, even a mannequin-like lack of expression, similar to Arbus’s photograph of Viva. In her bikini, she is simultaneously mother and blonde bathing beauty.

Arbus’s “The Bishop’s Charisma,” an unpublished photo-story she had prepared in 1964, is a photo-essay with Borghesian connotations. Arbus photographs and writes the tale of an eccentric older woman, *The Bishop* (figure 4-5):

On a cliff overlooking the pacific, in a cemetery in the sun, a small lady in damask robes with hair of a phosphorescent pink holds aloft a styrofoam cross encrusted with smaller crosses and raises her eyes till they pale at the vision of Jesus Christ. She is called Bishop Ethel Predonzan of the Cathedral of the Creator, Omnipresence, Inc. Christ, she declares, has summoned her there to Santa Barbara, California, all the way from Astoria, Queens, to await His

⁵²¹ Molloy, 23.

⁵²² Ibid., 24.

⁵²³ Molloy, 25.

Second Coming on December 4th of this year.⁵²⁴

The Bishop is a character of multiple, shifting identities, some real, others fictive, the stuff of myth. Arbus relates her peculiar, Borghesian 'history':

The Bishop's history is almost too long to remember. She vaguely recalls that she was a princess in ancient China, the wife of Moses, Bathsheba, and the daughter of Absalom, as well as the wife of King Solomon, who was not so wise as people think, she admits, because she often told him what to do. Later she was the twin sister of Jesus Christ, but died and became Mary Magdalene. She was Joan of Arc and Bernadette, too, but now she is Bishop Predonzan.⁵²⁵

The Bishop is a kind of eccentric chronicler whose existence seems outside of time: "Bishop Predonzan has written 1600 pages of a bible which comes to her by Divine Dictation. 'I'm never going to die,' says the Bishop, 'I'm going to live forever.'"⁵²⁶

Arbus was also fascinated by a man named Moondog (fig. 4-6, 1961), a well-known blind pauper who haunted midtown corners near the Museum of Modern Art, and claimed to be the son of a Protestant minister.⁵²⁷ Moondog, photographed for but not included in "The Full Circle," was another character of Borghesian complexity. Arbus recorded some of his monologues in her notebooks, which, according to Sandra Phillips, "revealed a canny sense of the politics of madness and the palpability of belief."⁵²⁸ In a letter to Marvin Israel, Arbus wrote:

Moondog's name is Louis, and he is not especially eccentric but I had never before seen a blind person at length, and it is remarkably like being in someone else's dream in which the most definitive act you can perform would be to disappear. He lives in an atmosphere as dense and separate as an island with its own sea, so he is more autonomous and vulnerable than anyone, and the

⁵²⁴ Arbus, Magazine Work, 48.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ Sandra Phillips, "The Question of Belief," in Revelations, 58.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

world is rendered into shadows and smells and sound as though it was being remembered even as it acts...Moondog's faith is other than ours. We believe in the invisible and he believes in the visible.⁵²⁹

Arbus's letter reveals a literary mind of complex metaphoric substance. Her description of an encounter with a blind man, like Borges's Minotaur, attempts to see the world, to see reality, through the veiled consciousness of someone else. In her photograph of Moondog, Arbus captures Moondog standing at attention in front of the nondescript location where he lurks: the sidewalk in front of a brick wall. Moondog, dressed in an odd assortment of fabrics like an eccentric knight, holds a spear at attention. But Arbus's text is needed to reveal and complete the meditation on identity she seeks in her choice to photograph him. When Arbus said to Israel that "Moondog's faith is other than ours. we believe in the invisible and he believes in the visible," she meant to capture a man for her social panorama who saw things with a radically different perspective than the average middle-class reader of magazines. As such, Moondog represented another piece of a social panorama whose individuals collectively comprised voices and experiences gathered with a socially critical eye. The intended result did not have a sense of nationalism or scientific objectivity as its guiding principle, but exhibited instead a greater sense of social diversity that paralleled similar concerns by the sixties counter-culture.

Arbus's closeness to thematic tropes in Borges, such as the arbitrariness of classification, the blurring of authorship and identity, and the use of the simulacrum, links her work to a moment at which writers, critics, and historians have positioned the birth of postmodern thought.⁵³⁰ She is notably the first photographer to consciously engage these Borghesian themes in her work. One

⁵²⁹ Arbus, Letter to Marvin Israel, December, 1960 in Revelations, 58.

⁵³⁰ Brian Wallis positions Borges as a kind of 'father of postmodernism' in "What's Wrong With This Picture? An Introduction" in Wallis ed., Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), xiv-xvi.

of the seminal voices of postmodern thought, Foucault acknowledged his debt to Borges in the Preface of *The Order of Things*:

This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought--our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography--breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other. This passage quotes a 'certain Chinese encyclopaedia' (*sic*) in which it is written that 'animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies'. In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*.⁵³¹

Foucault's laughter at Borges's (to our eyes) Pythonesque "Chinese encyclopedia," at its apparently completely random principle of organization, is tempered by the knowledge that, to another person unfamiliar with our present system of classification, our system may seem equally illogical. Foucault identified Borges's story of the Chinese encyclopedia as an allegory that pointedly suggests the limits of positivist representation. The irony of Borges's allegory centers on his demonstration that such classifications, which comprise what Foucault calls the "inner laws" and "encoded eye" of a culture, are themselves fictional and contradictory constructions.⁵³² Wallis rightly points out that Foucault's laughter "underscores his recognition that the cultural codes we live by, the orders of discourse we follow, all manners of representation--are not natural and secure, but are arbitrary and historically determined; they are, therefore, subject to critique and revision."⁵³³ Borges thereby reinforced Arbus's,

⁵³¹ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xv.

⁵³² *Ibid.*; also Wallis, *Art After Modernism*, xiv.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*

conclusion that the social panorama, as a manner of representation, involves the collusion of fact and fiction in line with the value systems of a given culture. Borges's panorama of infamous characters questioned the central roles of biography, appearance, and authorship. Arbus's own panorama, in effacing the distance between freak and non-freak, subverted social taxonomies by using positivist, physiognomic signifiers against popular readings of the type.

III. Like-Minded Sixties Literature

Studs Terkel's *Division Street: America* was published in 1967 as a historical document of the everyday lives of Americans and their thoughts on contemporary events. It is not surprising that Arbus owned a copy. In the book, Terkel recorded a journalistic cross-section of largely urban "portraits" of workaday Chicagoans and midwesterners, from teenagers to senior citizens.⁵³⁴ Terkel's book is divided into sections bearing the name of his subjects, like "Lucy Jefferson," "John Rath," and "Stan Leonard." Each story is prepared from interviews with the subject, and narrated in the first person. Terkel wanted to get people's reactions to the social upheavals of the sixties, such as civil rights, the Vietnam War, and the threat of nuclear war. *Division Street: America* is similar to Arbus's work in that both highlight social *difference*--the fact that America is not just composed of the white middle class whose images dominated popular culture.

Terkel's social panorama is further evidence of a broader interest in this theme in the sixties. Peppered with mundane details and stark realism, Terkel's

⁵³⁴ Studs Terkel, *Division Street: America* (New York: Pantheon, 1967).

Division Street attempts no critique of typologies found in earlier books of a similar inclination. But Terkel's book throws Arbus's work into sharper relief. She was not just interested in a kind of 'objective' social document in the sense of August Sander's *Antlitz der Zeit*. Her work is closer to literature than to a historical document. Arbus's work is different than Terkel's in her attention to literary metaphor, gender, and classical types which formed the root of a fractured, even schizophrenic, sense of identity. It is vital to plumb these literary themes to understand the complexity of Arbus's approach to her subjects, whose social position was only the beginning of her interest in them.

I would like to focus on three texts, Carson McCullers's *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1943), Gore Vidal's *Myra Breckinridge* (1968), and Joan Didion's collection of essays, originally published in magazines, entitled *Slouching Toward Bethlehem* (1968), in which some thematic issues also present in Arbus's work are addressed. In doing so, I hope to draw a more complete understanding of the significance of such themes to the sixties.⁵³⁵ To date, Vidal, McCullers, and Didion are not mentioned in the literature on Arbus. Although it is uncertain whether or not Arbus read these authors (however, given her literary inclinations, most likely she knew of them), each author, like Arbus, takes a different angle on the experience of the outsider in society--and how that outsider deals with his or her status as a social outcast. Also, like some of Arbus's work, these texts deal with the fragmentation of identity, and use black humor. In this thematic terrain, each work offers a different manifestation of the critique of middle-class values so prevalent in the sixties.

To foreground our discussion, a few words need to be said about the ultimate outsider, the "freak," in literature of the sixties. Preceding, and in conjunction with, the 1961 re-release of Todd Browning's film *Freaks* (originally

⁵³⁵ McCullers's story was written in 1943, but she died in 1967, an event that prompted a new surge of interest in her work.

released in 1932), which Arbus went to see on a number of occasions, there was a substantial body of work about freaks. As Browning's film resurfaces in the early 1960s, its title becomes a mantra for the counter-culture. What does that mean to Arbus, and others using the term? Does it embody an authentic critique of representation, of middle-class values, becoming, in a sense, the moment at which the Other, by speaking, by acting against stereotypes, by returning the gaze, becomes avant-garde? Or is this the point when the freak is co-opted by the broadening (and congealing) needs of mainstream entertainment and news media for an immediate and accessible symbolic verbiage?

The term "freak" was adopted as an ironic label by young people who felt that the bourgeois morality of the older generation was inherently hypocritical towards sex, drugs, music, civil rights, etc., and must be abandoned at any cost. Fiedler points out that the term is used both pejoratively ("speed freaks," "uptown freaks") *and* honorifically.⁵³⁶ She argues that "...its use...betrays an undercurrent of self-hatred, natural enough in a group of rebels drawn from the least violent, most educated, and most self-deprecating segment of our society, the suburban bourgeoisie."⁵³⁷ The term freak was appropriated by a disaffected middle-class youth to rebel against their own class mores (Arbus abhorred photographing this new freak, the "hippie," preferring subjects who adhered more closely to the classical type: dwarf, giant, etc.).

Thus, the conservative values of an older generation came under fire. To American poet Carl Sandburg, voice of an older generation, freaks represented an absolute other, "mistakes God made," forced to exhibit themselves until death delivers them--whereas Carson McCullers finds them to be touchstones to deep emotions and the unconscious. Yet both render the experience as a visual

⁵³⁶ Fiedler, Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self, 303.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, 304.

one, ie. in terms of appearance.⁵³⁸

McCullers's *Ballad of the Sad Café* takes place in the rural south, in a small abject town, the description of which recalls Walker Evans's photographs of rural clapboard structures. The protagonist, Miss Amelia, a wealthy widow with masculine mannerisms and known for her dour personality, takes in an obsequious hunchback named Lyman Willis, who claims to be a long-lost relation. Such an odd coupling, and Miss Amelia's apparent fondness for this curious individual, begets quickly spreading, spurious rumors and gossip among the townsfolk and the regulars who hang out at Amelia's store.

Initially mistrusted, the hunchback quickly proves amicable, and befriends the townspeople. Willis, whom Amelia fondly calls "Peanut," is humanized by McCullers: "There is a type of person who has a quality about him that sets him apart from other and more ordinary human beings. Such a person has an instinct which is usually found only in small children, an instinct to establish immediate and vital contact between himself and all things in the world. Certainly the hunchback was of this type."⁵³⁹ The genial hunchback Willis initially seems to be the social opposite of the mythical hunchback typified by Victor Hugo's Quasimodo, in *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1837), who was socially scorned, and forced to live in the cathedral's belfry. In Willis, McCullers subverts the physiognomic typology of reading exteriors for one based upon the interior instinct to be a good person. Yet McCullers's tale takes a grotesque turn. Ultimately the hunchback betrays Amelia, leaving with her hated criminal husband, Marvin Macy, with whom the hunchback seems to have been secretly in league prior to his arrival in town. The story ends with Miss Amelia in a downward spiral of defeat and resignation, the intended result of her estranged

⁵³⁸ Carl Sandburg in Fiedler, 16.

⁵³⁹ Carson McCullers, "The Ballad of the Sad Café," in Collected Stories of Carson McCullers (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1987), 211.

husband's reappearance. Apparently Willis was as human as every man, capable of inducing feelings of love, and later, betrayal. In Hugo, Quasimodo turns out to be a good man despite his grotesque physiognomy; with McCullers, Willis turns out to be a bad man despite his social charisma. However he and Miss Amelia did love each other, if only for a fleeting moment.

McCullers's masculine Amelia and loving but treacherous hunchback are characters who problematize traditional associations of gender, typology, and identity. Such characterizations are echoed in some of Arbus's portraits, such as A Naked Man Being a Woman, N.Y.C. of 1968 (figure 3-18), Seated Man in Bra and Stockings, N.Y.C. of 1967 (fig. 4-7), A Young Man in Curlers on West 20th Street, N.Y.C. of 1966 (fig. 3-19), and Sharon Goldberg, N.Y.C. of 1965 (fig. 4-8). Each of these individuals is photographed by Arbus to reveal both masculine and feminine qualities. Arbus captures the difference between physical and simulacral identities. This dualism represents part of the problematization of the type characteristic of Arbus's social panorama. Even the transvestite as a type is deconstructed, as Arbus reveals the process involved in the passage from male to female. We may see this process deliberately mapped out in a sequence of contact sheets from Arbus's shoot with Catherine Bruce/Bruce Catherine, the Naked Man Being a Woman. In four of these images (fig. 4-9), Arbus photographs the process of transformation from Bruce Catherine, man sitting on a park bench, to Catherine Bruce, woman sitting on a park bench. Each photograph, involving many in his/her apartment from which the now-iconic image has been taken, record Arbus's interest in a kind of gender metamorphosis. But this interest in transformation also records frame by frame the *construction* of physiognomy, not the evidence of its formation by natural external forces, as with Sander's photographs. If we were to decide on Bruce Catherine/Catherine Bruce's gender from the photograph Naked Man Being a

Woman, we would conclude that he, lacking an evident penis, is a woman. But Arbus, sending up the reading of appearances as truth, has the man pose like a classical Venus--his penis clenched between his legs. Sharon Goldberg, a hirsute young woman of sixteen Arbus photographed in 1965 for a project she called "Ethnic Beauties," has a similar collusion of male and female attributes. Goldberg, an attractive young woman and "beauty queen," has copious amounts of hair covering her arms, shoulders, and back in a masculine way. She lays demurely on an unmade mattress with curtains in the background--clearly this is Goldberg's bedroom, or a private room in her place of residence. She has the facial beauty of the beauty queen type, but her hairy body resists the hairless body of the softcore pinup. Her expression is one of vulnerability, as if Arbus is allowed access to her secret.

Some of Arbus's characters challenged traditional notions of sexuality in keeping with the subversive spirit of "sexual revolution" characteristic of the sixties. They problematized notions of deviancy associated with transvestitism and homosexuality. In 1968, historian Ronald Berman argued that homosexual content in literature had a newly subversive prominence:

Avant-garde homosexuality is the most current form of underground literature. It is unlike the familiar styles of deviate artistry, those limited to ingenious photographs, biographies of seduction, and apologies which plod from Alcibiades to Frederick the Great...the homosexual literature of the Sixties is ideological...it is based on a bipolar attitude that the proper response to the human predicament is the act of deviancy, and that the culmination of enlightenment is the explosion of outmoded sanctions.⁵⁴⁰

Along with Genet, whom Arbus read (she owned a copy of *The Maids and Deathwatch: Two Plays by Jean Genet*, with a preface by Jean-Paul Sartre, 1961), there seems to be a literary depiction of the homosexual as criminal/hero which rejects the republican, middle-class, WASP values dominating popular culture.

⁵⁴⁰Ronald Berman, *America in the Sixties. An Intellectual History* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 235.

Gore Vidal was one of a number of prominent gay writers of the sixties, Truman Capote being another, to openly acknowledge his homosexuality.

Vidal's socially satirical *Myra Breckinridge* (1968) presents a transvestite anti-hero whose self-proclaimed mission is "the destruction of the last vestigial traces of traditional manhood in the race in order to realign the sexes, thus reducing population while increasing human happiness and preparing humanity for its next stage."⁵⁴¹ Myra is a dual personality--physically a man named Myron (whom she tells the reader is her husband), but "she" is also every bit the glamorous Hollywood diva. A charismatic acting teacher (she teaches Empathy and Posture at the Academy of Drama and Modeling), Myra believes wholeheartedly in the mythic status of movies and celebrities, and constantly reminds us of her belief that commercials are the future of artistic endeavor. "I must confess that I part with Myron on the subject of TV. Even before Marshal McLuhan, I was drawn to the gray shadows of the cathode tube. In fact, I was sufficiently *avant-garde* in 1959 to recognize the fact that it was no longer the movies but the television commercial that engaged the passionate attention of the world's best artists and technicians."⁵⁴² In *Myra Breckinridge* there is an interesting play of authorial voice; sometimes it is difficult to ascertain who is talking--Vidal or Myra, as she makes humorously lucid social observations. At one point Myra refuses the title of casting agent, saying "I would prefer to go my own solitary way as critic and mythmaker."⁵⁴³ She acts out, and pulls off, her deepest sexual fantasies, which Vidal imbues with social significance. It is Myra's sworn duty to strip the "classic American stud" of his libido, to erase his sexual power, through the premeditated act of the anal penetration of Rusty, the

⁵⁴¹ Gore Vidal, *Myra Breckinridge* (New York: Penguin, 1968), 36.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, 109.

handsome, blond, virile aspiring actor. No doubt this act shocked contemporary readers, as it completely undermined the myth of the handsome, virile, heterosexual male hero.

The most direct comparison to *Myra Breckinridge*, and the most obvious, are Arbus's photographs of transvestites mentioned in the preceding pages. But both *Myra Breckinridge* and Arbus's photographs also depict Hollywood sets which emphasize the starkness, isolation, and artifice of their creation. In Arbus's Rocks on Wheels, Disneyland, Cal. of 1962 (fig. 4-10) and A House on a Hill, Hollywood, Cal. of 1963 (fig. 4-11), she purposefully exposes the artifice of the film prop. In A House on a Hill, which bizarrely resembles the façade of a New York tenement building, complete with fire escapes, Arbus allows us to see the metal framework supporting the façade. The photograph has a cinematic, Hitchcockian ambience, resembling in effect the sinister house on a hill inhabited by Norman Bates and his mother in *Psycho*. The building sits perched on top of a weedy hill dominated by thick brush. This Arbus photograph focuses upon the simulacrum as a faded myth. Around the time these photographs were taken, Arbus wrote in a 1962 notebook, "wonderful pseudo-places at dawn in Disneyland, ruins of Cambodian temples which never existed, False deserts littered with bones of animals who never died, like a shrine for unbelievers[,] and black swans swim in the moat of a castle which looks like the advertisement for a dream."⁵⁴⁴ In *Myra Breckinridge*, Vidal uses irony in Myra's preference for the simulacrum over the real thing:

I am seated in front of a French café in a Montmartre street on the back lot at Metro. Last year's fire destroyed many of the studio's permanent outdoor sets--those streets and castles I knew so much better than ever I knew the Chelsea area of Manhattan where Myron and I used to exist...but, thank heaven, this café still stands. Over a metal framework, cheap wood has been so arranged and painted as to suggest with astonishing accuracy a Paris bistro, complete

⁵⁴⁴ Arbus, Draft of a telegram to Harold Hayes at Esquire on pseudo-places from Arbus's 1962 Notebook #10, Revelations, 162.

with signs for 'Byrrh,' while a striped awning shades metal tables and chairs set out on the 'sidewalk.'⁵⁴⁵

Myra offers us an ironic reversal of the simulacrum--to her, the Metro set is more real than Chelsea in New York City, "where Myron and I used to exist." With black humor and ironic reversal, Vidal's *Myra Breckinridge* sends up the myths and fantasies that underscore "the American dream" in the sixties.

As in Arbus's work, Joan Didion's collection of essays entitled *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968) deconstructed middle-class values by revealing seamy realities behind social façades. A collection of Didion's magazine essays from such publications as *Vogue*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and *The New York Times Magazine*, this book sought to uncover the *noir* heart that lay beneath the sunny exterior of Californians and their romantic, manifest destiny-inspired 'American dream.' As a collection of essays, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* was itself a kind of social panorama, featuring individuals ranging from a murderous housewife, Lucille Marie Maxwell Miller, and Michael Laski, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party U.S.A., to mythologized celebrities like John Wayne, Howard Hughes, and Joan Baez. In each of her essays, Didion used a repertorial, often humorous deadpan voice similar in style to that of Joseph Mitchell. Also like Mitchell, Didion wove a social message into her work. In "Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream" (first published in 1966), Didion offers an account of the motive of the homicidal housewife:

they [the police] set out to find it [her motive for homicide] in accountant's ledgers and double-indemnity clauses and motel registers, set out to determine what might move a woman who believed in all the promises of the middle-class--a woman who had been a chairman of the Heart Fund and who always knew a reasonable little dressmaker and who had come out to the bleak wild of prairie fundamentalism to find what she imagined to be the good life--what should drive such a woman to sit on a street called Bella Vista and look out her new picture window into the empty California sun and calculate how to burn

⁵⁴⁵ Vidal, 28.

her husband alive in a Volkswagen.⁵⁴⁶

Despite her proper, middle-class exterior, Miller, who, it turns out, had an affair, was convicted of killing her husband. To Didion, Miller represented an example of the falsehood of appearances; that beneath the appearance of gender conformity and social propriety, one can never tell what dark thoughts lurk. Similarly, in Arbus's portrait of Mrs. Marguerite Oswald of 1964 (figure 4-12), her subject, seated formally, appears to be the ideal of the prim and proper matron, every bit the image of the 'church lady.' Yet Arbus knew her viewers would attempt to find something lurking behind that façade, some physical evidence or explanation, perhaps, for Lee Harvey Oswald's assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Yet Mrs. Oswald does not look murderous, or even like her son. There seems to be no physiognomic connection to be made. However, her countenance subtly belies some deeper sense of pride--of her own new celebrity, or perhaps of the celebrity of her son. As a mother, this is a pride that she alone experiences. According to the Arbus photograph, if Mrs. Oswald may be found to be guilty of anything, it seems to be not in the eugenic perpetuation of deviancy, but in an excess of pride. It is in capturing this terrain, the duality of proper matron and secret pride, that Arbus reveals the riven identity characteristic of her social panorama.

In "John Wayne: A Love Song" (1965), Didion explores the territory of Wayne the myth vs. Wayne the man who had contracted cancer:

I licked the big C, John Wayne announced, as John Wayne would, reducing those outlaw cells to the level of any other outlaws, but even so we all sense that this would be the one unpredictable confrontation, the one shoot-out Wayne could lose. I have as much trouble as the next person with illusion and reality, and I did not much want to see John Wayne when he must be (or so I thought) having some trouble with it himself, but I did, and it was down in Mexico when he was making the picture his illness had so long delayed, down in the very country of

⁵⁴⁶ Joan Didion, "Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream" (1966) in Slouching Towards Bethlehem (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968), 15.

the dream.⁵⁴⁷

Like Arbus, Didion sought to expose the seamy truths of people, to reveal the banal realities of their lives which the iconic image of the celebrity often masked (and which so many Americans took for the truth). In Arbus's "Make War Not Love!" (fig. 4-13) which was featured in the London *Sunday Times Magazine* (1969), Arbus published photographs of feminists, including Ti-Grace Atkinson, writer Kate Millet, and radical groups such as The Red Stockings.⁵⁴⁸ Arbus's photographs do not idealize or glamorize these women--she chooses to highlight banal details, capturing them in seedy, cramped apartments with somewhat dazed expressions, or looking slightly comical in their self-defense preparation. Didion's "Where the Kissing Never Stops" (1966), a piece on Joan Baez's Institute for the Study of Nonviolence, uses the kind of socially poignant journalistic deadpan, both critical and laudatory of the kind of subject that Arbus favored. Didion describes the Baez myth:

She is the Madonna of the disaffected. She is the pawn of the protest movement. She is the unhappy analysand. She is the singer who would not train her voice, the rebel who drives the Jaguar too fast, the Rima with the birds and the deer. Above all, she is the girl who 'feels' things, who has hung on to the freshness and pain of adolescence, the girl ever wounded, ever young.⁵⁴⁹

In Didion's text, Baez is made to seem overly idealistic. She is quoted as describing her life as like "living in a crystal teardrop."⁵⁵⁰ Didion exposes the naïve unreality of Baez's rose-colored perspective: "Although Miss Baez does not actually talk this way when she is kept from the typewriter, she does try, perhaps unconsciously, to hang on to the innocence and turbulence and capacity

⁵⁴⁷ Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, 32.

⁵⁴⁸ Arbus, "Make War Not Love!" text by Irma Kurtz. *Sunday Times Magazine (London)* (Sept. 14, 1969) in Arbus, *Magazine Work*, 122-125.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵⁵⁰ Baez in *Ibid.*, 57.

for wonder, however ersatz or shallow, of her own or of anyone's adolescence."⁵⁵¹ Didion reports the mundane, everyday details of life at the Institute, a small house in Carmel Valley, California with a humorous deadpan: "Miss Baez and her fifteen students meet at the school for lunch: potato salad, Kool-Aid, and hot dogs broiled on a portable barbecue. After lunch, they do ballet exercises to Beatles records...."⁵⁵² For Didion, Baez's naïve idealism is a larger theme characteristic of the 1960s--one well recognized by now, but brought into focus by writers like Didion, who sought to expose the flaws and realities which lay beneath such romanticized thinking.

In "7000 Romaine, Los Angeles 38," Didion talks about the mythology surrounding billionaire Howard Hughes. She writes, "I am interested in the folklore of Howard Hughes, in the way people react to him, in the terms they use when they talk about him."⁵⁵³ Didion notes that "Angelenos" like to tell stories about Hughes's exploits; "the stories are endless, infinitely familiar, traded by the faithful like baseball cards, fondled until they fray around the edges and blur into the apocryphal."⁵⁵⁴ In Hughes, Didion sees a western anti-hero, someone whose folkloric status reveals something deeper about Americans:

Why do we like these stories so? Why do we tell them over and over? Why have we made a folk hero of a man who is the antithesis of all our official heroes, a haunted millionaire out of the West, trailing a legend of desperation and power and white sneakers? But then we have always done that. Our favorite people and our favorite stories become so not by any inherent virtue, but because they illustrate something deep in the grain, something unadmitted. Shoeless Joe Jackson, Warren G. Harding, the *Titanic*: how the mighty have fallen. Charles Lindbergh, Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, Marilyn Monroe: the beautiful and the damned. That we have made a hero out of Howard Hughes tells us something interesting about ourselves, something only dimly

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵⁵² Didion, 48.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., 58.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 69.

remembered, tells us that the secret point of money and power in America is neither the things that money can buy nor power for power's sake...but absolute personal freedom, mobility, privacy.⁵⁵⁵

Didion's deadpan repertorial style has a way of cutting through any pretense of romanticism and rendering idealistic Americans as humorous and kind of pathetic.

In her essay entitled "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" (first published in 1967), Didion, like Arbus, covers the subject of idealistic teenagers with a mix of irony, sadness, and humor. However, unlike Arbus, whose teens self-consciously held each other in Washington Square Park or wore buttons on their lapels at pro-war rallies in New York, Didion's aim is to capture the feel and diverse characters which made up the Haight-Ashbury experience in San Francisco. Debbie and Jeff, two homeless teenage runaways scrounging a living in the street, seem to have left home due to conservative parental constraints. But their naïvete is alarming. Debbie's primary complaint seems to be about the state of her manicure, and Jeff's plans for the future are nebulous: "[w]e're just gonna let it happen...[e]verything's in the future, you can't pre-plan it. First we get jobs, then a place to live. Then, I dunno."⁵⁵⁶ In Didion's text, both older and younger generations are disillusioned.

These essays by Didion are echoed in late photographs by Arbus. Ozzie and Harriet Nelson, for example (1971, figure 4-14), appeared in the June 1971 issue of *Esquire*, her last published article.⁵⁵⁷ Outwardly, this photograph of Ozzie and Harriet relaxing on their bed seems to present the popular T.V. couple as they might want to appear--at ease in front of the camera. But the flash reveals what makeup can conceal on television. Despite Ozzie and Harriet's studied,

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., 71.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 92.

⁵⁵⁷ See Arbus, Magazine Work, 148-49.

calm expressions, a sense of emotional disquiet lurks in the clenched lines of Harriets's jaw and in her pursed lips, and in the thin-lipped, subtly smug countenance of Ozzie. These subtle details suggest deeper problems beneath the sunny, packaged images of American family values that, when read in the context of the Nelson children and their families (which appeared in separate photographs), attested to the family's publicly-known problems. The long-practiced masks of Ozzie and Harriet, their intention, and the effect, a kind of strained propriety, suggests the social rift between the manicured suburban appearance of affluent order and the psychological disorder which lay beneath the surface.⁵⁵⁸

IV. Arbus's Library: Reading the Conceptual Panorama

The appearance of certain books in Arbus's own library lends greater credence to the idea that Arbus intended to produce a social panorama whose metaphorical characters reverberated with the sixties counter-culture. This section will discuss certain texts in her library that lend further merit to the idea that Arbus thought of her work as a *collection* of individuals who problematized the notion of a photographic typology. One such work was Albert Camus's *The Stranger*. The major theme in the book is that of the social outsider, Arbus's preferred subject. Sartre says of Camus's *The Stranger*, "the outsider he wants to portray is precisely one of those terrible innocents who shock society by not accepting the rules of its game."⁵⁵⁹ Sartre notes Camus's interest in urban types:

⁵⁵⁸ Suburban angst was written about in works of social criticism like David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), C. Wright Mills's *White Collar* (1951), John Keats's *The Crack in the Picture Window* (1957), and John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* (1958), to name a few.

⁵⁵⁹ Sartre, "Camus' the Outsider," in *Jean Paul Sartre. Literary and Philosophical Essays*, Annette Michelson trans. (New York: Collier, 1970 (1955), 30.

“it might be regarded as a moralist’s short novel, one with a discreet touch of satire and a series of ironic portraits (those of the pimp, the judge, the prosecuting attorney, etc.).⁵⁶⁰ Yet each of these individuals draws the existential loneliness of *The Stranger* out from the shadows. The interest in the social outcast and the sense of a series of ironic portraits mentioned by Sartre as characteristic of Camus’s work may have supported Arbus’s inclination to pursue such themes in her work.

Arbus also owned a book by a mystery writer with the pseudonym Petronius, entitled *New York Unexpurgated: An Amoral Guide for the Jaded, Tired, Evil, Non-Conforming, Corrupt, Condemned and Curious--Humans and Otherwise--to Under Underground Manhattan* (1966). The *Amoral Guide*, a key to New York’s underground life of hookers, transvestites, gay and lesbian nightspots and cruising areas, S&M bars, drug dens, etc., is replete with contemporary urban types, and where to find them hanging out. This guide is a wild and eclectic panorama of all things and debaucheries; it tells us where we might best observe gypsies, or hire a cleaning service whose employees are comprised of “waning acid, meth and other speed heads who crave sustained cleaning chores to diminish all that rote energy.”⁵⁶¹ The *Amoral Guide* would have been the perfect tool for Arbus’s stated desire to be an ‘urban anthropologist,’ and it suggests Arbus’s interest in a broader sense of social phenomena.

Arbus also owned a copy of Ken Ohara’s book, *One* (1970), a book of 500 faces of New Yorkers randomly selected by Ohara as they passed by on the street. The seriality of the faces was conceptually related to repetitions found in Pop and Minimalism. Arbus’s long-time assistant, the photographer Hiro, asked

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁶¹ Petronius, *New York Unexpurgated: An Amoral Guide for the Jaded, Tired, Evil, Non-Conforming, Corrupt, Condemned and Curious--Humans and Otherwise--to Under Underground Manhattan* (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 230.

Ohara "why [the book of faces]," and he said, "I want people to get bored looking at it. When people get bored[,] that's where the essential comes in."⁵⁶² The images are all grainy closeups of faces of New Yorkers of all different ages and ethnic backgrounds. The photographs crop out chins, ears, and hair, focusing upon the eyes, nose, and lips of the subject. This renders all of the faces the same, formally. Yet there are differences in shape, symmetry, facial hair, and age lines. Extraordinary detail of the face is represented. The photographs are uncaptioned, and the book has no text. The book represents a conceptual portrait gallery, but its portraits are anonymous. Ohara suggests that the five hundred faces are all one face, one human being. As I flip through the book, though, the dichotomy of sameness and difference becomes most apparent. Arbus's comment about "the flaw we all possess" reveals itself in the high degree of detail rendered in Ohara's close-ups.

Returning to another well-known Arbus photograph, Arbus's Boy With a Toy Hand Grenade of 1963 (figure 4-15) seems a good way to close my argument. The contact sheet of Arbus's photographic encounter with the young boy (figure 4-16) shows that in most of the images the young man was having fun, coyly posing and laughing. Yet Arbus chose to develop the one image in the series in which the boy looks uncomfortable. The photograph is taken with a plunging perspective that accentuates the expressive immediacy of the scene. Perhaps, in a sense, the boy represents a contemporary version of The Scream by Munch. He is no protesting hippie or body-painted flower child. The young boy is a parable. He faces Arbus, and the viewer, eyes bulging, teeth clenched, and with slender, spidery fingers clutching in exasperation. Exasperated at being photographed. Exasperated by war, yet warlike, as evident in the toy hand

⁵⁶² Ken Ohara, One (Tokyo, Japan: Tsukiji Shokan, 1970). The quotation is from the back cover of the book, which otherwise contains no text.

grenade. Exasperation becomes the *effect*, as how we, looking back, read the image today as a testimony to the angst of the youth of the sixties. Such exasperation, in the last analysis, may be tied to a disgust with the persistence of civil inequalities which were in drastic need of reform. The new prominence of the mass media photograph in the 1960s was a vehicle for this inequality in terms of categorizing and stigmatizing individuals according to a specious system of identification tied to outmoded, pseudo-scientific social sciences. Arbus and some of her contemporaries were fully aware of the photograph's potential to classify, and sought to disrupt the honorific/repressive binarism, in concert with the social upheavals of the Sixties.

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⁵⁶² Ken Ohara, One (Tokyo, Japan: Tsukiji Shokan, 1970). The quotation is from the back cover of the book, which otherwise contains no text.

Bloom called the “anxiety of influence.” This would associate her work with a kind of willful misrepresentation (furthering my argument about the new conception of pastiche which would become an increasingly important tool for what is considered the ‘postmodern’ era). Bloom argued that “[w]hat matters most...is that the anxiety of influence *comes out of* a complex act of strong misreading, a creative interpretation that I call ‘poetic misprision.’ What writers may experience as anxiety, and what their works are compelled to manifest, are the *consequence* of poetic misprision, rather than the *cause* of it.”⁵⁶³ Bloom was writing about literature and poetry, but his statement is significant nonetheless as it comes just at the time period in question, and seems to cover the complex set of relations between the work itself, its seminal influence, and the social climate in which the work was originally produced and disseminated. In the following discussion, I intend to examine the work of subsequent photographers who are influenced by Arbus’s career, to establish how the effect of her work was made manifest. By doing so, I do not propose an exhaustive treatment of Arbus’s impact, only a framework for future scholars who may be interested in pursuing this line of inquiry further.

Les Krims’s work perhaps best represents the Bloomian concept of misprision. Krims interprets Arbus’s work as a kind of exploitative enterprise in which the subject is manipulated to appear shocking to the viewer as a testament to the trauma and alienation felt by the public during the sixties and the Vietnam War. Krims takes what *seems* like exploitation by Arbus and literalizes it, really *does* exploit his subjects. The end result of this purposive exploitation is an ironic, dark humor. Through the use of what A.D. Coleman called the ‘directorial mode,’ Krims’s work couples a fictionalized, crass *mise-en-scène* with a banal,

⁵⁶³ Harold Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry, 2nd ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1973, 1997), xxiii.

suburban backdrop, turning the image into a form of grotesque masquerade. In a series entitled *The Little People of America*, a limited edition folio produced in 1970, Krims produced a series of sepia-toned photographs of dwarves in a horizontal format. Most of the subjects seem happy with Krims's presence, but are captured in a low frame which accentuates their diminutive size. Krims literalized Arbus's influence in a photograph of 1974 entitled Diane Arbus Lives in Us, in which a mentally retarded girl wears the title of the work on a sign around her neck. This blunt humor suggests both Arbus's tangible closeness to her subjects and the reading of her work as a psychological self-portrait of alienation.

As with Arbus's and Avedon's work, Peter Hujar's must be considered within the sixties context of art photographers borrowing from the tropes of fashion photography. Max Kozloff rightly points out that Arbus's career "signals the moment when fashion work, editorial illustration[,] and personal vision overlap."⁵⁶⁴ Like Arbus and Avedon, Hujar was an independent, artistic photographer who, by the nineteen-seventies, had largely abandoned commercial fashion photography.⁵⁶⁵ Hujar worked in the same square format as Arbus, and produced frank, frontal portraits of some of the subjects she had covered, such as transvestites getting dressed, and notable *avant-garde* artists and writers of the period, such as Andy Warhol, William Burroughs, and Susan Sontag. Hujar's portrait of a reclining Divine of 1971 (figure C-1) suggests the androgynous qualities Arbus sought in her transvestites in their apartments. As with Arbus's work, Hujar's exhibits both a palpable closeness to the subject and a disregard for producing an honorific portrait. His intimate portraits of lovers and

⁵⁶⁴See Max Kozloff, "In and Out of Fashion" in Urs Stahel and Hrispsimé Visser eds., Peter Hujar. a Retrospective (Zurich, Berlin, and New York: Scalo, 1994), 185-194.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

transvestites were forerunners for the work of Nan Goldin, and Hujar's more immediate successor, Robert Mapplethorpe. In 1981, Hujar took a number of portraits of patients from a mental hospital, a theme Arbus and Avedon had pursued earlier.

Hujar's work lacks the link to the conceptual social panorama that Arbus's has. But his work does contain a social viewpoint. Hujar took the implications of her interpretation of the nude, in which the traditional representation of the female nude as a voyeuristic object of visual pleasure was subverted in favor of the misshapen bodies of nudists, teenagers, transvestites, and the elderly, and applied them to the representation of members of the gay subculture of New York to which he belonged. Along with Larry Clark's work, this take on personal vision paved the way for the diaristic approach of Nan Goldin.

Seventeen years Arbus's junior, Mary Ellen Mark, who describes herself as "both a documentary photographer and a portrait photographer," and whose work has strong affinities with street photography, is clearly influenced by Arbus.⁵⁶⁶ In fact, Mark even photographed Arbus on the street in a work entitled Diane Arbus, New York City, of 1969 (figure C-2). In 2003 Mark produced a book entitled Twins (2003) which clearly is preceded by Arbus's famous Identical Twins, but oddly, nowhere in the book does Mark mention an affinity with Arbus's work.

Curator Mary Panzer says of Mark's work that "Mark often describes her subjects as people who have been confined--by institutions, by economics, and most poignantly by gender," echoing a similar statement made by Avedon about his work of the early sixties, in which he mentions his preoccupation with

⁵⁶⁶ Mary Ellen Mark, "Foreword," in Mark, Twins (New York: Aperture, 2003), n.p.

photographing subjects confined by power.⁵⁶⁷ Like Arbus's work, Mark's photographs evince a discernible identification with her subjects. Formally, they employ Arbus methods: the square format, the plunging perspective, and the rough edges of the negative. Mark also employs an Arbus-like sense of ironic humor. Mark's photograph Clayton Moore, the Former Lone Ranger, Los Angeles taken in 1992 (figure C-3) pays the same close attention to interior symmetries and humorous, kitschy details of Americana found in Arbus photographs. The elderly Moore, seated on his couch in full Lone Ranger regalia, including signature black mask, recalls Arbus's photographs of aging stars like Mae West and Charles Atlas. Moore even has a small china statue of the Lone Ranger (astride a rearing Silver) in front of him. The two pictures and hanging wall decoration behind Moore are echoed by the three cushions of the couch on which he sits. Generally, though, Mark's portraits seem more honorific than Arbus's, despite their formal similarities, and in this respect mark them as closer to the bravado of Avedon's portraits, or those by Annie Liebovitz.

Mark's color documentary work also revisits themes prevalent in Arbus's work. She pursues these themes in places such as Africa, India, and the U.S.A. Mark photographs the intimate interiors of transvestites and prostitutes, a summer camp for children with cancer (which recalls both Arbus's Untitled work, her nudist camp pictures, and those taken at a summer camp for overweight girls), and the elderly in Florida. Like Arbus, Mark's emphasis is upon revealing that which would be otherwise hidden.

In the 1970s, Larry Fink, a student of Lisette Model, pursued images of parties, gallery openings, museum openings, and nocturnal social gatherings reminiscent of Arbus's work. His use of square-format photography and sharp

⁵⁶⁷ Mary Panzer, "Foreword" in Mary Ellen Mark, Mary Ellen Mark: Portraits (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Press, 1997), v.

contrasts of dark and light, rendered through the use of a flash, recall Arbus's photographs of masked balls and transvestite dances. In Fink's intimate portraits of his neighbors in Martin's Creek, Pennsylvania, his closeness to these subjects is apparent as he photographs the oddly disjunctive personal moments occurring at birthdays and graduations that shape their lives. A sense of dignity is captured in his sitters despite their often abject surroundings, yet it is a dignity which is not posed.

Judy Dater and Jack Welpott, in a book entitled *Women and Other Visions* (1975), conceive of the portrait as "an experience between two human beings, an experience shared with the viewer through the resulting photograph. If the moment was charged with feeling the image can be personal and revealing."⁵⁶⁸ In frank, largely frontal, black and white portraits and nudes of contemporary women, Welpott and Dater explore themes of sexuality, identity, and androgyny. Dater and Welpott's photographs also strongly exude the intimate encounter, yet the sitters in most instances are not caught in a moment of vulnerability, the moment when the subject let his or her guard down that Arbus sought to capture.

Judith Joy Ross's portraits again employ the square format and centered frontality characteristic of Arbus's work. Curator Susan Kismaric notes the direct antecedents of Ross's work as Sander and Arbus.⁵⁶⁹ Like Arbus, Ross is interested in the slippage between public and private identities.⁵⁷⁰ In most of her work, as with Arbus's, there exists a sensible closeness of the photographer to the subject. Both Fink and Ross emulate Arbus's desire to want to photograph a

⁵⁶⁸ Judy Dater and Jack Welpott, *Women and Other Visions* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Morgan and Morgan, 1975), n.p.

⁵⁶⁹ Susan Kismaric, "You See Yourself Clearly Only When You See Yourself as a Stranger," in Judith Joy Ross, *Judith Joy Ross* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1995), 6-7.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

kind of authentic American vernacular, which they find in upstate New York City and rural Pennsylvania, just out of the shadow of New York. Unlike Walker Evans and the New York School photographers, Fink's and Ross's work is not that of the passive witness.

Ross is often preoccupied with the body of her subject as a site of awkward physical transformation from child to adult. Like Arbus's work, Ross's subjectivity stems from the discernible comfort the subject feels with her. In Ross's Untitled, from the series *Easton Portraits* of 1988 (figure C-4), Ross photographs three adolescent women in bathing suits in a frontal yet off-center composition which recalls Arbus's work. Two of the young women occupying the center of the frame are identical twins, and they assume identical postures--feet together, hands clasped in front of the genital region. Their slightly pudgy bodies seem caught in the awkward, long-limbed moment between childhood and adolescence. In contrast, the young woman to the right poses in a contrapposto, and does not cover her genital region, a fact which clearly differs from the twins' posture. Her relaxed pose suggests that she is more comfortable with her changing body--or does the pose capture a childlike naïvete? This visual play of covered and uncovered, naïve and sexually aware, poignantly demonstrates the newly physical role of identity and sexuality, of looking and being looked at, that these young woman from Easton are experiencing. The sense of being looked at is made even more apparent by the young man in the background, who looks at the young women being photographed. Ross's work is closer to a kind of social panorama than any of Arbus's other followers. Coupled with her photographs of teenagers in rural Pennsylvania, her Sander-like frontal portraits of members of congress and visitors to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, taken in the 1980s, attest to her interest in capturing a cross-section of contemporary society.

Cindy Sherman's work is connected to Arbus's in a more conceptual manner. A one-time student of Krims, Sherman's work parodies the concept of the social typology through an extended meditation on self-portraiture. Sherman's early black and white work indulges in a pastiche of stills from black-and-white films (such as those by Hitchcock and Fellini) and advertisements from Arbus's era. The 'look' of the film still suggested a piece of a larger narrative which Sherman renders fictitious by inserting herself, the artistic author, in the place of the woman's role in the 'film'--and thus evoking the role of the gaze in constructing gender in visual images. For Sherman, Arbus may have been a precedent in this regard. As Arbus's 'freaks' looked back at us looking at them, they questioned their role as an object of voyeuristic pleasure. This characteristic may have been more broadly interpreted as a problematization of the gaze that artists of the 1970s sought to thematize in their work. Sherman's work consciously disrupts the notion of the gaze by constructing a deliberate *mise-en-scène* with herself as a fictitious character in a fictitious film; a copy without an original, as Krauss suggests.⁵⁷¹ Arbus's work has a kind of *auteur*-like presence in which her influence is palpably felt. But Sherman's early work also explored the role of social alienation in the construction of the female subject. Hal Foster, speaking of Sherman's Film Stills, said that "here Sherman shows her female subjects as self-surveyed, not in phenomenological immanence (*I see myself seeing myself*) but in psychological estrangement (*I am not what I imagined myself to be*)."⁵⁷² In this sense, Sherman interprets the issue of appearance as a social construction based upon the type, and dramatizes the psychological estrangement that constitutes such self-

⁵⁷¹ Rosalind Krauss, "Cindy Sherman's Gravity: A Critical Fable," Artforum 32, 1(Sept. 1993), 163-164; 206.

⁵⁷² Hal Foster, The Return of the Real (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1996), 148.

awareness.

Sherman's exploration of social identity and gender construction may be said to stem from Arbus's exploration of similar themes in her subjects. In Sherman's work, identity is a construction deliberately rendered by the presence, not of the flaw, of the irreducible individual, as in Arbus's case, but in the insertion of Sherman herself. Sherman's magazine work of the early 1980s has some affinities with Arbus's work. Sherman's notes for an *Artforum* spread, dated July 8, 1981, lists what she calls "characters: drunk, 'innocent' cripple, beaten woman, peasant, weathered, out-doorsy."⁵⁷³ These stock characters are types from which Sherman drew, just as Arbus sought giants, dwarves, eccentrics, and transvestites. In 1983 and 1984, Sherman did fashion spreads for magazines such as *Vogue*, but undermined the desirability of the model by making herself look deliberately unattractive, or even scary. In one of her notebook pages dated March 6, 1985, under the heading "Fairy Tales," she lists such subjects as a "maid with silver hands," an "old woman who hated children," and a "hag lying in a pond."⁵⁷⁴ While Sherman's focus in these pictures seems to shift toward the body and its relation to the material abjection of its surrounding environment, she nonetheless engages the subject's relation to mythic characters.

As a whole, Sherman's work also involves the formation of smaller portrait galleries composed of social types, albeit fictitious ones. These small galleries were often first seen in magazines, and in this sense, they are related to Arbus's groups of portraits in magazines such as *Artforum*. It seems increasingly clear that Arbus's interest in pastiche, grounded as it was in the knowledge of other images from the history of photography, may in fact have had an impact

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 100.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 129.

on artists like Sherman. Sherman said of Arbus's influence that

I felt like I wasn't following in any tradition. Maybe Diane Arbus, as a woman photographer who made some disturbing imagery, but she was really a straight photographer, a traditional photographer. I certainly respected artists like Eleanor Antin, who used their own selves in their work, but I felt somehow removed from them at the same time. So no, though Benglis and people like that were role models.⁵⁷⁵

Arbus rejected feminist readings of her work, but her stature as a woman producing images critical of traditional representations of gender and the Other must have had some impact upon emerging women artists in later decades. Arbus was a commercial photographer who became an artist; Sherman is an artist who gravitated to commercial magazine work. Both engaged magazines as a mode of reception and this suggests the need for a broader inquiry into the traffic between art and commerce in the sixties and seventies.

During the period of Arbus's production, both photographers and critics fundamentally questioned photography's role as a transparent medium. Arbus revealed the identity of the subject, *and* the magazine photograph of that subject, to be a cultural construction that implicates both photographer and viewer. Like modernist portraiture, Arbus's work, at bottom, contains the humanistic perspective of an urban ethnographer. But unlike modernist photography, which believed in the objectivity of the lens, Arbus foregrounds the postmodern photographer's preoccupation with deadpan irony and humor. Arbus eschewed the modernist preoccupation with the perfect print for the look of the banal, everyday snapshot, a characteristic shared by conceptual artists and still being investigated by contemporary photographers. The way her subjects created fictive personas and fictive personal histories was taken a step further by photographers like Sherman, who continues to explore the social construction of

⁵⁷⁵ "Cindy Sherman Talks to David Frankel," *Artforum* 41, 2(March 2003), 54-55.

identity in her portraiture--which needs to be viewed as a group, not individually--and is as much conceptual art as it is traditional photography.

To return to the moment of Arbus's own production, I want to make a connection to Bob Dylan's "Ballad of a Thin Man" from the album *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965). The song echoes the heightened visibility of the circus freak typology in the 1960s as a challenge to the status quo: "You hand in your ticket and you go watch the geek, who immediately walks up to you when he hears you speak, and says how does it feel to be such a freak, and you say 'impossible,' as he hands you a bone. Something is happening here and you don't know what it is, do you, Mr. Jones?"⁵⁷⁶ Dylan's song also details the enigmatic, incredulous conversation between Mr. Jones and, in succession, a sword swallower and a midget. Like Arbus's social panorama, Dylan's "Ballad of a Thin Man" serves as a metaphor for crucial social ferment in which those considered 'freakish' turn on the people who label them thus. Incomprehension is the result for Mr. Jones, who may represent the press, the establishment, or a conservative guy who just does not understand difference. Dylan's geek finds this position freakish, an ironic reversal echoing the contemporary trope of the sane madman. There is a parallel between Mr. Jones and the initial viewers of Arbus's photographs, who did not understand why the 'freaks' were confronting them, did not fully grasp their reading as a panorama indicative of a larger cultural ferment at work in the 1960s.

⁵⁷⁶ Robert Sobieszek suggested this connection to me.

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