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SECOND NATURE: DIANE ARBUS, PROMISCUITY AND PHOTOGRAPHY



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2002

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I, Thelma Goldie Mitchell, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 71, 930 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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Synopsis

The early photographs of Diane Arbus are well known, but the latest edition of her work less so. Granted posthumous publication by her Estate in 1995, *Untitled* is a collection of 51 images of women Arbus photographed between 1969 and 1971. The monograph of Arbus's work, again published posthumously in 1972, was to become the principal source of her photographs, and includes images from the entire spectrum of her oeuvre: couples, families, children, eccentrics, nudists, dwarves, transvestites and hermaphrodites were all susceptible to Arbus's photographic scrutiny. Arbus searched for what she herself called the 'flaw.' Whether congenital, or self-constructed, Arbus was interested in the visible abnormalities and physical blemishes or imperfections that her subjects displayed.

Unlike the short sequence of seven images previously published as a seemingly anomalous series at the end of the monograph, the extensive collection of previously unseen photographs presented in *Untitled* clearly show women with the physiognomic manifestations of Down's syndrome. While other women appear 'normal' looking, we are informed through the accompanying written editorial that the women are residents of institutions for the 'mentally retarded'; many photographs show women wearing fancy dress clothes, bonnets and masks, as Arbus often visited at picnics, parties or Halloween.

Focusing beyond the mere surface of formal photographic differences between those women with Down's syndrome and those without, this thesis examines the underlying social and political structures that led to these women being diagnosed 'mentally retarded' and incarcerated in residential institutions, and most significant, their subjection to enforced sterilisation which prevented them from procreating. Drawing on theories of labour relations and human evolution, the histories of repressive state apparatuses, such as the institution of the prison, and the social functions and political power of photography when deployed by civic organisations or specific state mechanisms, the task lies not in the simplistic application of meanings to Arbus's images; rather, the onus lies in determining the purpose to which Arbus's photographs have been put. Instead of investigating photography per se, as a set of merely formal and autonomous relations, it is not only the subjects of Arbus's *Untitled* series that require examination, but even more significant, the contexts and formats of her photographs, and their subsequent disclosure and dissemination to unenlightened onlookers.

Introduction: Second Nature

We may now be so accustomed to seeing photographs, and indeed, producing photographs ourselves, that photography, it seems, has become second nature to us. But what does second nature mean exactly? If something of a cultural origin becomes such a deeply ingrained habit that it comes, seemingly, to be natural to us, then we describe it as second nature. We might say something 'comes' as second nature to us, something—an action, an attitude, a belief—that we have either inherited or discovered, but in whatever shape or form, second nature is always appropriated from someone, or something, else. This conviction of ours, whilst always cultural and not at all natural, then reproduces itself so often, and with such certitude, that it becomes part of the 'natural' scheme of things: seemingly one of the natural processes of life itself.¹ But this is only a metaphorical description of events, and we should consider how photography enters into the equation.

Ironically, photography can be described as both literally and metaphorically second nature. How so? Taking photographic realism as our point of entry—for indeed, realism is the only one—we concur that modern photography's reproductive genius replicates nature herself, producing a second version—in fact, a copy—of her original state, albeit on a flat surface, and while often absent of colour, the photograph

¹My thinking behind the term 'second nature' is both literal and ideological. As I go on to say, photography is 'literally' second nature, or better perhaps, the photograph provides the most literal mimesis of nature without implicating the hand of the artist (which requires the term representation rather than mimesis). Photography being 'second nature' might be considered the visual equivalent of the linguistic cliché: a trite or overused expression or idea, which is nevertheless instantly understandable or recognisable to most people; the term itself, that is, second nature, might even be considered as such.

But second nature is also—*is always*—ideological, and photography being a contextual medium, and not a representational one, lends itself very easily to ideological purposes. Keith Moxey describes this more accurately in semiotic terms: "If we accept this critique of the resemblance theory [of mimesis], then what alternative theory of representation can we find to put in its place? Semiotics, or the theory of signs, can free the concept of representation from its dependence on mimesis. Semiotics views the work of art as a system of culturally and historically determined signs. It conceives of the work as part of a system of communication in which the artist makes use of conventional signs—that is, socially meaningful processes of signification—in order to construct a cultural object that articulates and disseminates the attitudes of the society of which he or she is a part. The work thus becomes a nexus of cultural activity through which social transactions circulate and flow." *The Practice of Theory: Poststructuralism, Cultural Politics, and Art History*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), 31.

nevertheless shows all the attributes of perspective and volume, of distance and shape present in nature, and as seen with our own eyes. Hence the photograph—and this is its irony—accounts *naturally* for the objects coveted by its maker. Thus the second nature of photography is literal: photography literally reproduces its objects, producing a second replica of them. And while this copy is literal, paradoxically, it is also metaphorical; it may seem that if a literal second nature exists, there would logically follow a third, fourth, and fifth nature, and so on, ad infinitum, in accordance with the number of copies made; however, photography is only capable of reproducing nature herself, or better perhaps, photography allows nature to reproduce herself, although admittedly in another form. Thereafter, photography simply reproduces photography, and all other copies beyond that of second nature are mere simulacra. In other words, nature is no longer required to reproduce herself, it is instead her reproduction that is reproduced.

Historically though, photography was regarded by many as a surrogate for drawing, and indeed for painting, and although photography does share figurative drawing and painting's physical attributes of perspective and chiaroscuro laid down on a two dimensional plane, their relationship was instead sealed by association of terminology: in the early days, photography as art, art photography, and pictorialism were to hinder photography's progress to be anything other than authored, created, singular, and therefore, autonomous. The result was that photography merely described the world: it did not define it, it did not visually bring the world into being. Thus photography became visual counterfeit for defective draughtsmanship. The more photographs the masses produced, the more an elite tried to separate photography from its civic engagement and attempted to align it with the canon of Art.

The 19th century photographer Henry Peach Robinson, for example, was devoted to photography as art, and in his book, *The Elements of a Pictorial Photograph*, he considers all aspects of the medium, from the imitation of nature to composition, and he includes a variety of subjects, such as choice of models, the nude, and winter photography.² But notably, Robinson includes a discussion based on the individuality of the maker, and her relation to art practice:

Of all the attempts made to prove that photography was not an art, that which would have most force, if proved, would be that it showed no evidence of individuality; but, on the other hand, if the possession of that quality were proved, it would be one of the strongest arguments in favour of the admission of photography to the brotherhood of art, for individuality, in its products, necessarily implied the operation of a directing mind behind the "soulless camera."³

The biographical method of assessing the artist's life in order to identify her work, and vice versa, resulted in the elevation of the artist to the status of individual genius. Each work can be attributed to a single maker, and can therefore be identified as a such-and-such, or a work made by so-and-so; provenance took precedence over all other considerations. Authorship—the artist's name to be more precise—ensured the spirit of the artist lived on after death, although admittedly, only if inaugurated by the Art historians of that time, and perpetuated or rediscovered by the Art historians of today. But in respect

²H. P. Robinson, *The Elements of a Pictorial Photograph*, (New York: Arno Press, 1973). First published 1896.

³*Ibid.*, 157-158. In order to defend his own individuality, Robinson recounts a somewhat humorous anecdote concerning his choice of models, his subsequent composition thereof, and other requirements for making art photographs: "Some years ago I was foolish enough, hoping to encourage the picturesque in our art, to explain how I got my models, dressed them, and used them, just as another would give you the formula for his developer. This was a fatal indiscretion. Frank confidence, except about things that can be weighed and measured, does not do in photography. Instead of giving a useful lesson you play into the hands of those whose interest it may be to discourage a journey in a direction they could not themselves follow . . . when I showed how it was done, how the result was achieved by a combination of intelligence and strict adherence to the *appearance* of nature in the models, and common sense and some knowledge of art, as well as power to invent a subject, in the photographer—all of which aids are necessary—unenthusiastic photographers felt discouraged at being asked so much, and finding that they had few of these necessary qualifications to fall back upon, resorted to the ingenious device of condemning figures in landscape altogether, and my 'young ladies' have never since been forgiven. Only a few months ago a photographer, who has achieved a sort of reputation for eccentricity, but has never produced a picture, took the opportunity of dragging into a paper he read, reference to 'those mongrel-attired ladies who would be more comfortable with sunshades instead of the staring sun-bonnets they affect for the benefit of the camera man.'" *Ibid.*, 94.

of photography, can we truly consider any sense of individuality to be present in the work? Since in photography everything is essentially already given, already exists in the world, what role does the photographer play—other than stage technician—in making photographs as art photographs, as opposed to just photographs? Could it be that photography was commandeered as Art to prevent it proliferating elsewhere?

In turn, the terms invented to describe the various phases of photography seem contradictory: they both define and disguise photography's scientific heritage. The shift from pictorialism to straight photography might seem to be little more than a focusing of the lens, a shortening of exposure time, and a reduction of photographic grain; in other words, it was through the technological progress of both camera apparatuses and developing and printing processes that photographers could make better photographs. But additionally, and importantly, the straight photographers took their task to be an objective recording of the world, instead of manufacturing the mere illustrations of the imaginary theatre scenes set up previously by photographers of pictorial persuasion. When all was said and done though, the straight photographers still believed in photography as art, and still sought to express themselves through a medium they believed to be transcendent and universal. This transcendence in photography was part of the modernist legacy: how could art remove itself from the history of dictatorial politics and the acceleration of capitalism? Formalism was taken to be the answer, and although this internalising functioned well enough in respect of the plastic arts, it had limited application in photography; although some photographers did try to remove all traces of content from their images, this was, and remains, a purely academic

exercise, especially today when photography is used so provocatively and tenaciously in the domains of advertising and journalism.

In his book, *Trace and Transformation*, Joel Eisenger gives an historical account of photography and its various categories. With regard to modernist photography, that is, straight photography, Eisenger notes the central questions concerning the universality of meaning in a work of art, and no less importantly, the commodification of the work:

Is it the function of a work of art to bear an exalted message or to be traded as a precious object? Can a work of art legitimately be both a precious commodity and the vessel of transcendence and universality, or is the message of universality automatically undermined by an affixed price and ownership? If a precious artwork can carry a cargo of transcendent meaning, who is entitled to it? Only the wealthy who can afford it? If transcendent art is made available to everyone, is this only a distraction from social inequalities, a sedative that keeps the oppressed from political action? Is transcendence a wrongheaded and destructive goal for art?⁴

In counterpoint to transcendence and universality, documentary photography is invested with the authority to show how the world really is: documentary photography became linked with sociology, and in turn, became a euphemism for the recording of society's underclass. But with this new classification, documentary photography, comes the support system of language: most often photographs of documentary usage are supplemented by words in the form of a caption, an article, or an essay. Here again, photography is second nature, but in this instance, second to language; for although the word is entirely arbitrary, hence veritably second nature itself, somehow through its own logic, its own system—the configuration of words, the tone of voice, not only of speech, but also of writing—language is somehow taken, in its most practised sense, to be natural. Thus if language is natural, then all other languages—the

⁴Joel Eisenger, *Trace and Transformation: American Criticism of Photography in the Modernist Period*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 54.

'languages' of art, for example, are taken as second to language proper, and are therefore second nature.

With photography though, there exists the unique relation of reality—the world of objects—presented in a form that is compatible with the printed word. The arrangement between words and photographs is reciprocal: the photograph supplies a literal description for the word, and the word replenishes the photograph with its concept. Understandably, things are not always that straightforward, but suffice to say, relations between the word and the photograph are always more concerned than controlling—more empathetic than emphatic. Eisenger claims: "Language not only identifies but also explains relationships. If photographs are to be integrated thoroughly and meaningfully into their social context, they must be accompanied by words."⁵

But the use of language must also extend to writing about Art objects, and of course, we must include the historians who produce these metanarratives. The distinction between historical fact and historical construction is an important one: historiography is, after all, quite a different matter. The discrepancy lies forever between the terrain and the map, the map and the terrain, and one should never assume any sense of symmetrical affinity. This is easily and logically applicable to the world and photography, photography and the world: both language and photography may clearly have referents in the world, but we should not conceive of history and its objects as providing a linear continuum, as historians would have us believe. Relations between events and objects and their chronicles are instead in a constant state of flux, and always subject to the conditions of their use.

With regard to photography, John Tagg extends the medium's position beyond the usual 'cultural' contexts of high Art, asserting that

⁵Ibid., 109.

state apparatuses and structures of governance grant photographs their visual currency; this currency is in turn their power, or rather, the specific organisation or institution invests the photograph with power to suit its desired ideological purpose. Tagg explains events thus:

The cult of Art . . . was not displaced [by photography]. What emerged instead—and it was not just a question of specialisation at the level of production—was a decentered field of institutions, practices, agencies and discourses in which photographic technologies were . . . deployed [. . .] it is certainly true that, within the photographic field, the excessive connotators of Art characteristic of aspiring amateur and turn-of-the-century Pictorialist strategies were simply redundant and could be largely, and with time, abandoned . . . what this shows is neither that a historicist imperative was working itself out, nor that some inherent truth of the medium—the in-itself and for-itself of photography—had compelled recognition. What matters is that the institutional structures which constitute artistic status—not only the institutions of the art commodity market but also, and crucially, post-market institutions of patronage, exhibition, publication and critical representation, and the discursive structures of photographic criticism—were already in place.⁶

We can infer then, logically, that while photography was shown in Art institutions, and although continues to be, it could no longer be restricted by the label Art. Importantly, Tagg goes on to deliberate the role the historian plays in either perpetuating or interrogating the already existing institutional structures of the Art establishment. In response to his own question, *Should Art Historians Know Their Place?* Tagg answers:

NO: if it means being deferential, keeping within the bounds of an aesthetic decorum whose organisation and effects certainly need to be studied, but which so much art history serves only to perpetuate, if it means being polite, accepting the definitions of good manners built into the imposing, sacramental institutions which house art history's supposed objects of study, where failure to conform may jeopardise the very access a historian has to the properties of private collections, auction houses, religious institutions, country homes and museums.

YES: if it means recognising how art histories decorate the ways of life of the powerful, creating and validating social occasions for civilised displays of superiority and wealth and, more that, serving

⁶John Tagg, *Grounds of Dispute: Art History, Cultural Politics and the Discursive Field*, (Hampshire: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1992), 98-99.

themselves as models of decorum, reproducing manners, generating standards of taste, and laying down protocols for correct behaviour in the presence of Art—which is in the end, all that aestheticism has been able to specify.⁷

We may now be so accustomed to seeing photographs made by Diane Arbus that their subjects no longer surprise us in the way they used to. The monograph of Arbus's photographs is well known, although the later editions of her work less so. Indeed, it is the latest volume of images that is the main focus of this thesis: while *Untitled* was only recently published, in 1995, the photographs included in the book were made by Arbus some 25 years earlier.

The first section of chapter one of the thesis gives a cursory account of her life and exhibitions, preceding a more extended discussion of the three books published posthumously by the Estate of Diane Arbus. The three books differ greatly: the monograph that accompanied the posthumous retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York was considered—at that time at least, and perhaps in many respects still is—the consummate initiation to the work of Arbus. While some quoted material is presented at the beginning of the book, it is very informal, and in contrast to the classical monograph format, is not at all a chronology of Arbus's life and practice. The Estate admitted the book was conceived as an homage to Arbus, and it was to remain the principal source of her work until the second publication issued some 12 years later. *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work* is an altogether different account of Arbus. Here, her photographs are presented in a style similar to the configuration found in the magazine layouts of their original contexts; most of Arbus's assignments were presented in lifestyle brochures or

⁷Ibid., 48-49. Tagg's question, *Should Art Historians Know Their Place?* is the title of the second chapter where he gives an eight page series of yes and no responses. See 48-56.

topical publications. Sometimes Arbus wrote the accompanying captions and sometimes the article, and these are also reprinted in the book, revealing Arbus's command of language as well as her aptitude for photography.

Some 11 years later, *Untitled* was published, and this is the first volume of Arbus's work devoted to a single subject. Arbus said of her practice and methods:

A photograph had 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 generalised human being, everybody'll recognise it. It'll be like what they used to call the common man or something. It was my teacher, Lisette Model, who finally made it clear to me that the more specific you are, the more general it'll be. You really have to face that thing. And there are certain evasions, certain nicenesses that you have to get out of.⁸

Arbus certainly focused on subjects that other photographers might avoid, although her work could be said to be influenced by a number of others besides Lisette Model.

The second section of chapter one addresses the significance of the Estate of Diane Arbus in terms of the photographs they have, over the years, released for distribution. Notably, all three books are published by the Aperture Foundation, which is known specially for producing polished editions of photographic work, notably under the rubric of Art. And, all three books have been produced within the editorial control of Arbus's daughter Doon, and Arbus's friend, the painter Marvin Israel. *Untitled* was again edited by Doon Arbus, but with Yolanda Cuomo, although they also, again, had help from Marvin Israel. The Estate also controls the use of Arbus's photographs by scholars and historians. The requirement that the Estate examine and edit articles and essays prior to publication is one of their conditions attached to photographic

⁸Arbus quoted in *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*, eds., Doon Arbus & Marvin Israel, (New York: Aperture Foundation Inc., 1997), 2. First published (New York: Aperture Foundation Inc., 1972).

reproduction rights. This form of censorship is a matter to which many writers have refused to concede however; as a result, many compositions instead go without Arbus's photographs in the interests of independent opinion.

Since Arbus's Estate have been less than forthcoming with permissions in the past, I presumed, (from previous objections to statements from other scholars as discussed in chapter I, section 1:2), that my own address of Arbus's work—especially of the *Untitled* book of photographs—would undoubtedly be subject to censorship as well. Interrogation of this sort is something to which I, likewise, would never concede. Consequently, I too have opted to present this dissertation without accompaniment of Arbus's images. In order to get beyond this understandably bothersome impasse, however, a copy of Diane Arbus's *Untitled* book is available for inspection in conjunction with the dissertation. And in order to expedite matters further, numbers have been pencilled opposite each image in *Untitled*, and these are referenced in brackets to identify the images as and when they are discussed within the main text.

Chapter two presents a discussion based on a variety of articles written about Arbus's life and work. The 'unofficial' biography of Arbus was, and still is, viewed by most individuals as an ill researched book of hearsay rather than history; the author Patricia Bosworth concentrates on Arbus's privileged upbringing and subsequent relationships rather more than her photographic accomplishments. The Estate of Diane Arbus declined to make any contribution towards Bosworth's book. While they maintained their silence against her version of events, they instead set about producing a new version of their own: *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work* was published in the same year as Bosworth's barren biography, and propagated a new interest in Arbus's work. Significantly though,

Magazine Work presents Arbus as a professional photographer working on paid assignments, in contrast to the personal perspective promoted in the earlier monograph.

The second section of chapter two focuses on one single essay, written by Carol Armstrong. Armstrong gives a mainly formal analysis of a selection of Arbus's photographs from the monograph collection, although she also takes recourse to the written information made available 12 years later through *Magazine Work*. Armstrong makes some insightful observations about the nature of photography and its ability to reproduce, aligning this cultural reproduction with natural procreation. But she also relies heavily on a formal methodology, and this in turn raises questions about the providence of her endeavours. Consequently, chapter three deals with methodologies, beginning with formalism and the dispute contrived between painting and photography.

This age old debate is aired out in order to assess the qualities peculiar to painting, and those peculiar to photography. We must consider whether a formalist approach to photography is worthwhile, that is to say, would a formalist approach to photographs produce any meaningful outcome? If not, and if formal analysis of photographs is thus redundant, we must contemplate how we might make sense of photographs beyond their being mere aesthetic apparitions—since defined as Art object, removed from all outside discourses and sustained by Art's exclusive domains. Thus it is necessary to consider Erwin Panofsky's iconographical methodology, which he produced in response to the limitations that formalism exerted upon the plastic arts. Michael Ann Holly writes:

When Panofsky began writing essays on art in the second decade of [the 20th] century, the discipline of art history was dominated by a preoccupation almost exclusively with form. In essence, formalism had always devoted itself single-mindedly to the aesthetic properties of the work and had deliberately, even forcefully, wrenched the object from its historical situation and broader human surroundings. Formalists are interested in the genius of the

artist only insofar as it becomes expressed in the individual work. For the most part, all information extrinsic to the experience of the individual work on its own terms is relegated to auxiliary status—whether the information is biographical, historical, or sociological. The "pure visibility" trend in art criticism and . . . stylistic approach to the history of art, both of which tended to treat the subject matter of a work as a "mere pretext" for the exercise and display of significant visual constructs, epitomize this tendency in art theory in general in the opening years of this century. A concern either with subject matter per se or with cultivating the viewer's sense that the work is the product of an identifiable milieu was deemed an impediment to the proper appreciation of its aesthetic complexities.⁹

Bearing in mind that photography did not supplant painting as was initially feared, we must reconsider: What qualities are peculiar to photography? What qualities separate photography from painting? The third section of chapter three is therefore an analysis of Roger Scruton's essay on representation and photography, the question central to his debate being: Is photography a representational art?

Scruton argues against his numerous counter-claims, and presents an almost comprehensive rationalisation for this; his assertion being, of course, that photography is not a representational art, because photography has a causal relation to the world. While the photographer is always free to choose her objects/subjects, she is simultaneously limited by what is already given, by what is already in existence. If objects and subjects cause their own shadows to be recorded in alliance with the scientific transfer of photography, then this signifies that these objects exist, or existed, in the world. Again, this relates to the topics of documentary photography and the assumption of photographic truth.

Chapters four and five are devoted exclusively to Arbus's *Untitled* collection of photographs. Panofsky's third stratum of iconographical analysis—that the historian should include 'synthetic intuition' in her sphere of consideration—combined with Scruton's claims of

⁹Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1984), 24.

photography's causal relation to the world, are the basis on which the remaining two chapters are founded. Panofsky's advice, that the role of the historian should be comparable to that of diagnostician, pre-empted the later historical methodologies, or rather contexts, of Marxism and feminism, although these were also in themselves a reaction against formalism. Marxism is the more important one here, in that feminism is essentially a gender specific subset of it. It is not the social and economic conditions in which Arbus herself lived and worked that matter here, but rather the social and economic conditions that enabled the existence of her photographic subjects.

The first section in chapter four deals with the visible, and therefore evidential, nature of photography. As previously noted, photography shows us what there is in the world, and in Arbus's world there are women who display the physiognomic signs of Down's syndrome; hence the necessity to investigate the syndrome itself, and the attitudes and beliefs surrounding it at the time that Arbus made her photographs. Other matters, such as human evolution and family likenesses are also discussed before moving on to the concept of 'mental retardation.'

Thus the second section of the chapter deals with what is not visible and what cannot be seen through photographs. Arbus's *Untitled* images do not only show women born with Down's syndrome, but importantly, the images show 'normal' looking women as well. There are a small number of photographs of children too, indeed, the images show women from the entire spectrum of life. We are presented with the concept of 'mental retardation' through the accompanying editorial announcement, a concept which is 'invisible' to photography. We are also informed through the written editorial that the photographs were made at the residences to which these women were relegated for allegedly having low intelligence quotient and maladaptive social behaviour.

The final section of chapter four outlines the analogies, and disanalogies, between the institution where the women are interned, and the prison system. While the latter denies the inmate her liberty, so too does the institution for the mentally retarded. Michel Foucault describes the rise of the prison to be the "penalty of civilised societies."¹⁰ But it is not just the deprivation of individual freedom that the prison sanctions, but also the rehabilitation of the offender. Thus the convicted criminal is given the opportunity to reflect upon her crime, to show remorse, and to engage in penal labour—all with the intention of ameliorating the mind and disciplining the body. While initially the institutions for the mentally retarded were set up to care and nurture for those with seemingly abnormal mental functioning, it soon became apparent that the financial cost of doing so far outweighed the benefits. The women incarcerated in these institutions were put away and all but forgotten.

Significantly though, the morality of these women was severely questioned, and where the prison service disciplined the corrupt mind and careless body of the inmate, the medical profession defined and diagnosed 'mental retardation,' declaring that these women should not be allowed to proliferate in society for fear of producing more of the same. Thus mandatory sterilisation was introduced: not only were these women deprived of their liberty, they were deprived of their sexual function to reproduce, and to perpetuate the human race.

The first section of the final chapter considers the role of women within the family, and takes into account the historical and material conditions that led to patriarchy and the subordination of women, drawing from Frederick Engels' essay *The Origin of The Family, Private Property and The State*. This reduction of the status of women—women

¹⁰Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (London: Allen Lane, 1977) , 232. First published *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*, (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1975).

now viewed as mere childbearing apparatuses—led to the rise of the women's movement, the suffrage movement, and from the 1970's on, this cause became known as feminism. Resultingly, the image of women and their bodies, and their photographic representations became the focus of attention, and this is discussed briefly in the second section of this chapter, before moving on in the final section to re-assess Arbus's *Untitled* book in relation to the family photograph album.

Arbus wrote of her intention to make a book from the photographs of the women she recorded at the institutions, which she never realised in her lifetime; she intended to title the book *Family Album*. The posthumous publication of *Untitled* might be regarded as its substitute. The final analysis of these photographs reveals their social function, as a means of integration and unification, and as a means of reifying the concept of the family in the post-modern era, for a post-modern generation. The alienation of individuals from each other, from society as a whole, comes from both the logical genetic deviations thrown up in the biological evolutionary process, but also, significantly, by the classifications and divisions fabricated by the post-industrial capitalist state. Diane Arbus remarked:

It . . . [seems] as if way back in the Garden of Eden after the Fall, Adam and Eve had begged the Lord to forgive them and He, in his boundless exasperation had said, 'All right, then. Stay. Stay in the Garden. Get civilised. Procreate. Muck it up.' And they did.¹¹

¹¹Diane Arbus quoted in Arbus & Israel, 5.

I Diane Arbus

1.1 Diane Arbus . . .

Diane Arbus committed suicide in her apartment, N.Y.C., July 1971. She was 48 years old.

Born on 14 March 1923, Arbus was the second child and first daughter of David and Gertrude Nemerov. David Nemerov was to become Executive Vice-President of the exclusive and very prosperous department store Russeks, situated on Fifth Avenue. Russeks was established in 1897 by Gertrude Nemerov's family and was originally a speciality store selling only furs. But David Nemerov, son of a Jewish immigrant, worked long hours, and his tireless efforts combined with his creative vision made Russeks enormously successful and in turn, the Nemerovs very wealthy. As a result, Diane Arbus's upbringing was a privileged one: she and her elder brother Howard Nemerov were tended to by their respective nannies in various large and decadent apartments in Upper Manhattan. The Nemerovs also employed a number of maids, a housekeeper and a chauffeur.

Arbus was later educated at the Ethical Culture and Fieldston schools, and although very accomplished in many subjects, she chose not to continue her studies beyond high school graduation. Arbus was particularly creative in writing and art, and when she was fourteen years old her father arranged for her to have drawing lessons in the Russeks store with their illustrator Dorothy Thompson. It was there she met Allan Arbus who was employed as a copy boy in the advertising department. Almost immediately Diane announced her intention to marry Allan Arbus, and this was met with strong disapproval from the Nemerovs. But instead of the relationship declining as they hoped, the relationship intensified, and on 10 April 1941, shortly after Diane's eighteenth birthday, she and Allan Arbus

were married. They lived in a rented apartment in downtown Manhattan. Allan Arbus continued to work at Russeks, but he also had a second job; and although Diane Arbus did not work, the Nemerovs no longer financially supported her.

In 1943, after his basic training with the Signal Corps, Allan Arbus was sent to a photography school in New Jersey and he and Diane Arbus rented a room there. They set up a darkroom and in the evenings Allan taught Diane what he had learned that day in class. He was later posted to Burma with a photography unit. Diane Arbus reluctantly returned to the Nemerov apartment on Park Avenue and on 3 April 1945 she gave birth to her first daughter, Doon. After the war, the Arbuses were reunited and decided to turn to fashion photography as a means of earning a living.

David Nemerov reportedly contributed towards the cost of some photographic equipment and gave the Arbuses their first regular account in Russeks advertising department. The Arbuses always worked very closely as a team on these assignments and their photographs were published in magazines such as *Glamour* and *Vogue*.¹ Diane Arbus was making photographs outside the world of fashion as early as 1943 however, and she quit the commercial and advertising business altogether in 1956. In the late 1940's she studied briefly with Berenice Abbott and Alexey Brodovitch, then art director

¹In its April 1947 issue, *Glamour* published a short article on married couples with joint careers, "Mr. & Mrs. Inc.": 'Diane and Allan Arbus found their forte in photography . . . working very slowly and carefully, they compose in the camera instead of relying largely on cropping and other mechanical tricks. Result, a distinctive Arbus quality which includes elements of portraiture and fantasy.' Although her husband was the one who actually took the photographs, [Diane Arbus] contributed a great deal to the general look of them, including the choice of models, the styling, and the concept, which was often inspired by the work she saw in *Harper's Bazaar* or other magazines. She regularly took their portfolio to editors and art directors, discussed new assignments with them, and, in the process, became familiar with many aspects of the business." Essay written by Thomas W. Southall, "The Magazine Years, 1960-1971," *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, eds., Doon Arbus & Marvin Israel, (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), 152-171, 152-153. First published (New York: Aperture Foundation, Inc., 1984).

of *Harper's Bazaar*, before beginning a highly influential two year period of study with photographer Lisette Model in 1957.²

Although the Arbuses had lived separately for some years—Diane Arbus moved into another apartment with their two daughters sometime between 1959 and 1960—they did not divorce until 1969. By the end of her marriage, Arbus was moving on, not only in terms of her personal life, but also in her professional life, and she once again began to submit her work to magazines, gaining publications in *Esquire* and *Harper's Bazaar* in 1960 and 1961 respectively.³ These assignments were more often not advertising or fashion related however; rather they were based around human curiosities and eccentrics, and were always accompanied by captions and a written article. Sometimes Arbus herself would suggest topics, and sometimes she would write the text.

Arbus also taught photography in the late 1960's at Parsons School of Design and Cooper Union in New York, and at Rhode Island School of Design. Besides her commercial ventures, she was the recipient of two Guggenheim fellowships in 1963 and 1966 which

²Lisette Model emigrated to New York from Paris in 1938 shortly after her marriage. Born in Vienna in 1901 to a Jewish father and Catholic mother, her early life was similar to Arbus's in that she enjoyed an educated, privileged childhood, before her family were forced to live in reduced circumstances. Originally Model intended to become a concert pianist, and although accomplished, she abandoned this idea in her early twenties. Model began teaching in 1957. Alongside Arbus, who remained a close friend of Model for the rest of her life, Robert Mapplethorpe and Bruce Weber were also students. Model said: "Diane Arbus was the greatest student I ever had. Not only because she came out with great photographs. Diane Arbus was influenced by nobody." Model quoted in Ann Thomas, ed., *Lisette Model*, (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1990), 150. See especially chapter nine, "Ideas of their own: Model & Arbus 1957-1971," 146-155. Even though Model denies influence, there are some similarities in their work. See Model's *Coney Island Bather* series (1939-41), *Albert-Alberta*, *Hubert's Forty-second Street Flea Circus New York*, c.1945, which shows a hermaphrodite, as well as other images of female impersonators, circus performers, and refugees. In contrast to her teacher, Arbus did not photograph the destitute or the blind as Model consistently did. She said of her own practice: "I just picked up the camera without any kind of ambition to be good or bad. And especially without any ambition to make a living . . . My whole freedom working in photography comes because I say to myself, let's see what is going on in the world. Let's find out. How do these people look? What is it supposed to mean? In which way, you see, then comes out the whole social structure. And I never try to impose myself. I work the opposite way around." Model quoted in Thomas, 43. Lisette Model was still teaching and lecturing on photography until a few weeks before her death in New York, 1983.

³"The Vertical Journey: Six Movements of a Moment within the Heart of the City," *Esquire* (July 1960), 102-107, and "The Full Circle," *Harper's Bazaar* (November 1961), 133-137, 169-173, 179. These two publications consisted of six portraits of New Yorkers and five portraits of eccentrics respectively, both accompanied by texts written by Diane Arbus. Both series of photographs with captions and texts have been reproduced in Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 8-13, 14-22 respectively.

were awarded for her project, "American Rites, Manners, and Customs." While in 1962 she had shown work to John Szarkowski, then director of the department of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, he did not exhibit her work until the *Recent Acquisitions* show of 1965. Only two years later though in 1967, Szarkowski selected thirty-two of Arbus's portraits for the *New Documents* exhibition, for which she received great acclaim.⁴ Her final exhibition whilst alive was also in 1967, at the Fogg Museum in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and in 1970 she produced a portfolio of prints that she intended to be the beginning of a series of limited edition works.⁵

The attention [Arbus's] work has received since her death is of another order—a kind of apotheosis.⁶

Arbus's untimely death by her own hand precipitated a posthumous retrospective exhibition of her work in November 1972, again at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Although this was preceded by

⁴The New Documents exhibition also showed the work of Gary Winogrand and Lee Friedlander. John Szarkowski was director of the department of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, New York from 1962 until 1991. Under Szarkowski's curatorship, the museum presented a number of group shows, but notably individual photographers were invited to exhibit. Even more significant, the number of acquisitions and publications increased greatly: between 1964 and 1973 there were more books published than in the preceding 35 years of the department's history. See Peter Galassi, "Two Stories," *American Photography 1890-1965 from The Museum of Modern Art New York*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 10-41. Part one of Galassi's essay gives an historical account of the transition from pictorialist to modernist photography. Part two of the essay deals with the changing curatorial policies and practices of MoMA since the department of photography was formally established in December 1940. For example, Galassi references Szarkowski's seminal exhibition *The Photographer's Eye* of 1964, from which a catalogue was produced in 1966: "The exhibition proposed to see photography whole, as a distinct pictorial language, and to provide a basic set of tools for analyzing it . . . *The Photographer's Eye* included a very wide range of pictures, among them anonymous documents of the journeyman professional, magazine journalism, amateur snapshots, and the masterpieces of self-conscious artists. In one sense, there was nothing new in this. Beginning with [Beaumont] Newhall's history exhibition of 1937, however, it had been common to divide photography into expedient categories, based in turn on function, style, period, or formal resemblance: press photography, scientific photography, documentary photography, abstract photography, and so forth. As long as photography was divided in this way, it was not necessary to consider how the various parts were related to one another. In Szarkowski's exhibition all of the photographs, from the most ordinary vernacular to the most refined expression of cultivated sensibility, were presented on a single plane. This curatorial strategy has been mistaken for an answer, when in fact it was a question, which has grown more rather than less interesting over the past thirty years. The nature of the relationship between photography's vernacular and fine-art traditions is a splendid puzzle that remains to be solved." Galassi, 38.

⁵The portfolio was designed by Marvin Israel and contained ten signed prints. "The portfolio sold for a \$1000 and only five of them were purchased during Arbus's lifetime. In 1983, one of the five sold at auction for approximately \$40,000." Southall, note 61, Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 171.

⁶Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (London: Penguin, 1979), 39.

Arbus's inclusion in the Venice Biennale in July the same year, the retrospective at MoMA was, importantly, accompanied by the publication *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*.⁷

The monograph contains eighty black and white photographs made between 1962 and 1971.⁸ The images are consistently one to an opening, positioned on the right hand page; they are not arranged chronologically or thematically. Although all have similar inventory style titles on the left hand page, there are no page numbers beyond the fifteen pages of text that precede the photographs. This informal introduction is edited from a number of tape recordings from classes given by Diane Arbus in 1971, from interviews, and from some of Arbus's own writings.⁹ The selections of both photographs and texts were made by the editors: Arbus's eldest daughter Doon Arbus, and Arbus's friend and colleague, the painter Marvin Israel. The monograph includes images from the entire spectrum of Arbus's oeuvre: couples, families, children, eccentrics, nudists, transvestites and dwarves.

Most of the subjects have been photographed frontally and close-up. For example, *A young man in curlers at home on West 20th Street, N.Y.C. 1966* depicts precisely what the title states; moreover, the image reveals not just the thick strands of hair on the man's forehead and the shadow from the stubble on his chin, but notably the fact that he has

⁷Doon Arbus & Marvin Israel, eds., *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*, (New York: Aperture Foundation, Inc., 1997). First published (New York: Aperture Foundation, Inc., 1972). Notably, the 1997 edition is the 25th anniversary edition.

⁸I acknowledge, of course, that all the publications show *reproductions* of Arbus's photographs, and they are not photographs per se. However, I shall use the terms photograph and image interchangeably, as is common in most discussions of reproductions of photographs.

⁹The classes referred to here are most likely to be Arbus's periods of teaching in the late 1960's at Parsons School of Design and Cooper Union, New York and at Rhode Island School of Design. The two interviews used were: Studs Terkel, Interview with Diane Arbus on WFMT, Chicago, 1969, and Ann Ray Martin, "Telling it as it is," *Newsweek* 69:13 (20 March 1967), 110. Although not stated, one can locate certain sections of the text to be extracted from writings made by Arbus for magazine projects, for example, extracts from "Notes on the Nudist Camp," which remained unpublished in 1965, but was later published in Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 68-69. This reference is missing from the contents page of the book.

plucked out every last eyebrow hair only to reinstate them with symmetrical black make-up pencil arches. *Girl with a cigar in Washington Square Park, N.Y.C. 1965* is photographed close enough for us to see her dry frizzy hair, bad skin, and that she has a squint in her right eye. Likewise, *Puerto Rican woman with a beauty mark, N.Y.C. 1965*: although the subject does indeed have a beauty mark to the left side of her mouth, one notices she has exaggerated the outline of her lips with an over zealous application of thick, shiny lipstick, and eventually one spots her other distinguishing feature—a somewhat unsightly growth at the side of her left eye.

But this is exactly the sort of thing that interested Diane Arbus. She commented: "You see someone on the street and essentially what you notice about them is the flaw. It's just extraordinary that we should have been given these peculiarities."¹⁰ Other examples include *Transvestite at her birthday party, N.Y.C. 1969*, where a broad smile reveals a missing tooth; *Girl in her circus costume, Md. 1970* is wearing shorts that exaggerate her protruding stomach and her ample, dimpled thighs; the *Mother holding her child, N.J. 1967* displays her shiny face and chipped nails as she holds up her drooling, fractious child like a trophy for the camera, while the subject in *Seated man in a bra and stockings, N.Y.C. 1967* drapes himself strategically over his chair, legs crossed, audaciously displaying his laddered nylons. Where other images perhaps do not show any obvious physical 'flaw,' either congenital or self-constructed, some of Arbus's subjects are situated in cluttered rooms with tacky furnishings, such as *A widow in her bedroom, N.Y.C. 1963*, while others are photographed in the park, smoking, or eating junk food, dressed in cheap clothes and fake jewellery. The women wear too much make up—the men wear too

¹⁰Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*, 1.

much make up. Even the more average looking subjects, such as *Elderly couple on a park bench, N.Y.C. 1969* or *Woman with a veil on Fifth Avenue, N.Y.C. 1968*, begin to look somewhat unappealing—in some cases even quite repulsive—when photographically filed amongst society's 'misfits.' And of course, this is what so intrigued Diane Arbus. She confessed:

I made rough prints of a number of [images]. There was something wrong in all of them . . . But there was one that was just totally peculiar . . . It looks to me a little as if the lady's husband took it. It's terribly head-on and sort of ugly and there's something terrific about it. I've gotten to like it better and better¹¹

Although this admission could refer to a number of Arbus's images, *A woman with pearl necklace and earrings, N.Y.C. 1967* especially fits this description. In keeping with Arbus's photographic familiarity, it is possible to count almost every pore in this middle-aged woman's face, while her pearls take comfort in a fold of flesh at the base of her thickened neck.

With a number of exceptions, Arbus's subjects look frankly if not defiantly straight into the camera, and this, combined with the closeness of the subject, greatly reduces the pictorial depth. As a result, the subject often seems two-dimensional: a cardboard cut-out amongst a confusion of props, or backed up against flat and uneventful scenery. The inventory style titling also contributes to this impression: the information is visually factual, but at the same time, temporally fictional. One can check the subject and her attributes and belongings, but not the time or the place. The date and location of these inventory titles are a marker, not for the presence of the subject

¹¹Ibid., 10-11.

within the photograph, but rather the presence of their maker: Arbus herself.¹²

Still within the monograph publication, there exists eleven anomalous images. Four of these photographs are without human subjects: *A castle in Disneyland, Cal. 1962*, *Xmas tree in a living room in Levittown, L.I. 1963*, *A lobby in a building, N.Y.C. 1966* and *A house on a hill, Hollywood, Cal. 1963* are curiously unpopulated. Each one gives a feeling of being merely a façade. In fact, *A house on a hill* is just that, while the photograph *A lobby in a building* is simply a re-presentation of a re-presentation: a photograph of a two-dimensional photo-mural of a landscape. The castle in Disneyland appears to float above its surrounding moat like a mirage. One notices a swan in the foreground. But is it real, or fake? It is impossible to tell. Finally, the room with the Xmas tree—under which lay an extensive pile of uniformly rectangular-shaped-perfectly-wrapped-presents-with-bows—seems to exist only to look upon, and not live in. Even the lamp by the side of the sofa still has the cellophane wrapping on its shade.

The other seven anomalous images are the only thematically arranged grouping, and these appear at the end of the monograph. While each of these photographs contains a human subject, they do not have titling consistent with the other images in the book. The seven images portray only female subjects and are simply titled *Untitled*, with numbers (1) to (7) followed by the non-specific date, 1970-71. The subjects are similarly posed—in the immediate foreground and facing frontally—with the exception of the final

¹²See Diane Emery Hulick, "Diane Arbus's Expressive Methods," *History of Photography*, Vol. 19., No. 2., (Summer 1995), 107-116. This article comments on the formal aspects of Arbus's work, such as presentation, titling and texts, compositional motifs and use of light; Arbus was very diligent about numbering and dating contact sheets produced from her negatives. "In 1956 she began numbering her negatives in sequence and, during the next fifteen years, contacted more than 7500 rolls of film and made finished prints of more than a thousand different pictures." Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 5.

photograph: *Untitled (7) 1970-71* shows nine women moving in a muddled line across the picture plane from left to right. They are intent on their destination, and take no notice of Arbus and her camera.

The retrospective exhibition combined with the monograph of Arbus's work generated enormous public interest: more than a quarter of a million people visited the exhibition in New York alone, before it began a three year tour of Canada and the rest of the United States. Some twelve years later, in 1984, the monograph editors pronounced:

The book was conceived as an homage . . . As a collection of some of her best work and a clue to her intentions it served a purpose. But as a depiction of her career, for which it has been held accountable, it is misleading.¹³

And so to redress this, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work* was published. It was Doon Arbus and Marvin Israel who again edited the selection of photographs and the series of texts Arbus wrote for various magazine projects. The book also contains an essay printed at the end titled, "The Magazine Years, 1960-1971" written by Thomas W. Southall.¹⁴ In contrast to the monograph, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work* has a list of contents and the pages are numbered. The configurations of photographs, titles, captions and texts are in keeping with the style of a magazine layout, and significantly, these are printed more or less in chronological order. Doon Arbus and Marvin Israel also wrote the foreword in which they state:

Like most photographers of her time, Diane Arbus looked to magazines as the sole means of earning a living taking pictures . . . This book . . . is a record of what she did for magazines. It is about work as a process rather than a series of isolated achievements and about the evolution of a distinctive

¹³Editors' foreword, Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 5. See section 1.2 for commentary on the editorial policy of the Estate of Diane Arbus.

¹⁴Southall in Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 152-171.

photographic style that grew out of ingenuity, eclecticism, and the simple necessity of getting the job done.¹⁵

Again, contrary to the monograph, most of the subjects are now personally identified, for example, *Andrew Ratoucheff*.¹⁶ On turning to the designated page, one sees that the bed end on which this man's hand is resting is parallel with his shoulder, and so one quickly realises—Mr. Ratoucheff is in fact a dwarf. The accompanying caption does not mention this however, stating only: "Andrew Ratoucheff, actor, 54, in his Manhattan rooming house following a late-show performance of his speciality: imitations of Marilyn Monroe and of Maurice Chevalier singing 'Valentina'."¹⁷ This photograph is one of a series of six titled *The Vertical Journey: Six Movements Of A Moment Within The Heart Of The City*. Thomas W. Southall claims, "This portfolio of direct, unsentimental portraits . . . was intended to illustrate the dramatic extremes of life-styles and personalities found in New York City."¹⁸ While five of the subjects are named and all have explanatory captions written by Arbus herself, there is no further written text.¹⁹

Another inclusion in *Magazine Work* is listed as simply *Dr. Donald E. Gatch*.²⁰ On turning to this page, however, it is the larger image on the right hand side that immediately attracts one's attention. This photograph shows the scene inside a kitchen—a scene that grows

¹⁵Editors' foreword, Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 5.

¹⁶One of five photographs from the series, "The Vertical Journey: Six Movements of a Moment Within the Heart of the City," first published in *Esquire*, (July 1960), 102-107. Reproduced in Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 8-13.

¹⁷Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 10.

¹⁸Southall in *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁹The captions of the six photographs in order of presentation are: "Hezekiah Trambles, 'The Jungle Creep,' performs five times a day at Hubert's Museum, 42nd & Broadway, Times Square." "Mrs Dagmar Patino, photographed at the Grand Opera Ball benefiting Boystown of Italy, Sheraton-East Hotel." "Andrew Ratoucheff, actor, 54, in his Manhattan rooming house following a late-show performance of his speciality: imitations of Marilyn Monroe and of Maurice Chevalier singing 'Valentina'." "Flora Knapp Dickinson, Honorary Regent of the Washington Heights Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution." "Walter L. Gregory, also known as The Mad Man from Massachusetts, photographed in the city room of The Bowery News." "Person Unknown, City Morgue, Bellvue Hospital." Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 8-13.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 100-105.

more squalid the longer one looks. A dishevelled mother is sitting to the right hand edge of the frame looking at a child who gazes back at her. The child is confined to lying on her back on a patchwork blanket that covers a low trolley with wheels—in effect, a makeshift pram. Although soiled looking, the child wears a white nappy and clothing that is tonally connected to the stove just behind. Beyond this unsanitary cooker streaked with grime and the cluttered table beside it, a man emerges from the dingy recesses of the room where he has been lurking unnoticed throughout. His face and his one visible hand that rests on the table, as well as his clothing, are so black with dirt that he merges with the gloom, remaining almost unseen.

On looking across to the left hand page, one can view a reduced size reprint of the original double magazine page from *Esquire*, June 1968. The article is titled *Let Us Now Praise Dr. Gatch*. The photograph next to the opening passages of Bynum Shaw's text is one of Dr. Gatch himself, standing beside a windowless wooden shack. As he looks directly into the camera, he is unaware that the shack's occupant stands in the doorway mimicking him. Dr. Gatch adopts a valiant pose: while his right hand leans against the door frame, his left hand is positioned on his hip holding open the jacket of his three piece suit. His left foot is raised, resting on an axe propped against the shack. Dr. Gatch wears spectacles and smokes a pipe. His whole manner suggests that of a pioneer. The caption reads: "Dr. Donald E. Gatch, crusading country doctor who fought hunger and parasite disease in a poor community of South Carolina's affluent Beaufort County." There are four further full page photographs displaying the sordid conditions in which the people of these communities had to live: both black and white families, their filthy clothes, their overcrowded homes. While the section included from Shaw's article is legible here,

it is not fully reprinted. Indeed, only the articles written by Arbus herself, both published and unpublished, are reproduced in conjunction with her photographs in *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*.²¹

Again, contrary to the monograph's wholly anonymous subjects, many of whom Arbus simply came across standing in the street or walking in the park, *Magazine Work* includes many portraits, not merely of named subjects, but of famous subjects. Arbus photographed artists, such as sculptor Frank Stella, painter Agnes Martin and pop artist Roy Lichtenstein. Other known subjects were writers, such as novelist William Golding, playwright Norman Mailer, feminist writer Kate Millet and poets W. H. Auden, Marianne Moore and Jorge Louis Borges. She also photographed the actors Marcello Mastroianni, Mae West and Jayne Mansfield, musician and singer James Brown, ballet dancers Erik Bruhn and Rudolf Nureyev, as well as a politician—the infamous Eugene McCarthy.²²

As previously stated, most subjects, although not famous, are named. But again there exist a number of exceptions. For example, group photographs in the contents list are given generic names, such as *Student Santas*, although the two selected images are titled *This Ho-Ho-Ho Business* and presented with the following elucidatory caption: "Student Santas attending the twenty-eighth annual Santa Claus

²¹Again, see section 1.2 for commentary on the Estate's editorial policy.

²²The portraits of Stella, Martin and Lichtenstein, amongst others, were originally published as "Not to be missed: The American Art Scene," *Harper's Bazaar*, (July, 1966), reproduced in Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 82-85; Golding was originally published in *Harper's Bazaar*, (August 1963), reproduced *Ibid.*, 30; Mailer, "The Kennedy's Didn't Reply," *New York Times Book Review*, (November 17, 1963), reproduced *Ibid.*, 31; Millet with Fumio Yoshimura, amongst others, "Make War Not Love!" *Sunday Times Magazine*, (London), (September 14, 1969), reproduced *Ibid.*, 122-125; Auden and Moore, Bruhn and Nureyev, amongst others, "Affinities," *Harper's Bazaar*, (April 1964), reproduced *Ibid.*, 40-43; Borges, "Three Poems," *Harper's Bazaar*, (March 1969), reproduced *Ibid.*, 118-119; Mastroianni, "Europe's Uncommon Market," *Show*, (March 1963), reproduced *Ibid.*, 26-27; West, "Emotion in Motion," *Show*, (January 1965), reproduced, "Mae West: Once Upon Our Time," *Ibid.*, 58-61; Mansfield with her daughter, amongst others, "Familial Colloquies," *Esquire*, (July 1965), reproduced *Ibid.*, 66-67; Brown, "James Brown is Out of Sight," *New York: The Sunday Herald Tribune Magazine*, (March 20, 1966), reproduced *Ibid.*, 74-75; McCarthy, unpublished 1968, reproduced *Ibid.*, 110. With the exception of the article about Mae West, none of the texts were written by Diane Arbus, and therefore, none of the texts by other authors are reprinted in *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*. Notably though, the text for the James Brown feature was written by Doon Arbus.

School in Albion, New York."²³ One photograph shows four santas standing on the lawn outside 'Santa's Sleigh Stables Workshop.' This sign is legible above the porch doorway sheltered by the porch roof, which is in turn covered with a generous topping of fake icicles. The other photograph portrays an off-duty Santa, albeit still in full regalia, sitting comfortably in an armchair in his parlour at home as his wife 'stands by' him.

Two similar examples are listed as *Sun City Retirees* and *South Bay Singles Club*; they are collectively titled *The Affluent Ghetto*, and were originally published in *The Sunday Times Magazine*.²⁴ As the accompanying text was not written by Arbus, it is not included, although a short caption reads: "Two custom-built leisure communities in America." The first group represented by three photographs have an additional caption, *Sun City, retirement community*. Of the two smaller images, one shows nine women standing in a row in a civic-looking hall. They all wear similar long, flowery dresses, and judging by their gaping mouths, they are involved in a communal sing-song. The other image shows a man and a woman holding hands; they look set to begin dancing. Both wear name badges: Ralph and Helen Reed are presumably married, presumably to each other. Helen wears a gingham dress and winks girlishly at the camera. Ralph wears a checked shirt and bootlace tie and takes things a little more seriously: he tidily conceals the lower half of his left arm behind his back whilst looking solemnly into the camera. The third image is full page size and shows four men and six women who fill the entire picture plane from top to bottom. All wear bathing costumes and the women also wear bathing caps. Not all

²³Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 56-57. Originally published, *Saturday Evening Post*, (December 12, 1964), 20-21.

²⁴Originally published, "The Affluent Ghetto," *The Sunday Times Magazine*, (London), (January, 3 1971), 8-15. Reproduced *Ibid.*, 142-145.

look directly into the camera, but with the exception of one man in the back row whose expression appears to be one of curiosity, everyone is laughing, or at the very least, smiling enthusiastically. Obviously a Sun City retiree is quite a pleasant thing to be, particularly when one is surrounded by such an amicable host of fellow retirees.

The other set of images from *The Affluent Ghetto* portrays members of the *South Bay Singles Club*, which functions as a sub-title. The three images appear to be different stages in the 'mating game.' The first of the two smaller photographs shows a busty, tanned, peroxide blonde. Only one half of the telephone is visible at the left hand side of the king size bed where she awaits her suitor. Provocatively propped against some pillows, she wears only a bikini. She does not look into the camera, but rather looks over to her right as though something, or someone, is attracting her attention . . .

The second photograph shows a man and a woman also wearing bathing costumes; he is dark and handsome, she is blonde and petite. A kitsch painting of a sunset with palm trees in a gold frame hangs on the wall behind them; on the table in front lies a copy of *Playboy*. They both look directly into the camera. Their arms touch as they sit next to each other on the couch. They look nervous—maybe it's their first date . . .

The final full-page size image again shows a man and a woman. He is handsome, sporting a moustache, bathing shorts and fashionable sunglasses. While he languishes on top of a sunlounger placed on the grass in front of the club's apartment buildings, his partner languishes on top of him . . . She wears a white bikini and white high heeled sandals. Not only is her hair peroxide white—obviously gentlemen prefer blondes—she is also rather well endowed. Both subjects look relaxed. Understandable—they have

succeeded in reaching the final stage; as a result, however, they must now relinquish their club status.

The subjects in all of these images—the Santas, the retirees and the singles—are not individually named as they function solely as part of their respective groups. Effectively, the subject loses her individuality and becomes genericised, and can therefore only be understood, at least within Arbus's photographs, in relation to another subject within the same grouping.²⁵ There are also a number of unnamed individuals but there is reason enough for this.

Listed as *Person Unknown, City Morgue*, this is the final photograph in Arbus's sequence of six titled *The Vertical Journey: Six Movements of a Moment within The Heart Of The City*.²⁶ It shows a corpse lying under a greying sheet on a hospital gurney. Photographed from the bottom end, this results in extreme foreshortening: the feet appear huge, as does the label attached by a piece of string to the right foot's big toe. The overhead lights reflect against the ceramic tiles and the steel frame of the trolley making everything seem too bright, too harsh, too clinical. Reading the caption below the image, the only additional information given is the location: *Bellevue Hospital*. That is the extent of the identity of this person—we know where she is, but not who she was: there is no longer any need to inquire. As previously stated, this photograph is the anomaly in this series as the other five subjects are named.²⁷

A woman sits with her right leg demurely tucked under her left leg, her high heeled black suede shoe resting on the edge of the couch. She wears a conservative black dress, make-up and pearls. She smiles

²⁵While in their original context these photographs were accompanied by a text, this has not been reprinted in *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*. Therefore, the commentaries on photographs from the book are confined to their reproduction within *Magazine Work*, and not their original contexts.

²⁶Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 13.

²⁷See note 20.

confidently into the camera. This photograph is full-page size positioned on the right hand side while the title and caption are tactically printed on the opposite page. On finding the latter, one sees the small and subtle arrow in the shape of a pointing elbow gesturing silently to the right: *The Transsexual Operation* was published in *Esquire*, April 1967. Although Arbus did not write the supplementary text, she did write the caption: *In 1958, at the age of fifty-two, this man became a woman, legally and physically.*²⁸ This is of course a complex concept to cognate: this woman's identity is inextricably linked with the fact that she used to be a man, even though she has had 'the operation.' And so she remains in limbo, between genders, and is therefore unnamed. Rather she is labelled, forever at the mercy of her conversion.

The first of the two remaining unnamed subjects is *Churchill Look-alike*.²⁹ Basically this image shows a man who answered an advertisement in London newspapers for look-alikes, and who bears more than a passing resemblance to the former Prime Minister. He is unnamed because he assumes the identity of another, namely Winston Churchill. With the final image, the identity of the *Joan Crawford Fan* is equally subsumed, but in his case by the myriad of photographs of Ms. Crawford displayed along the length of the couch, on the back of which her devotee precariously perches.³⁰ He even owns a plaster cast mask of Joan Crawford's face and holds this aloft, gazing in rapturous adoration. Besides this, the door of his sitting room has a small

²⁸Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 88-89. Although Arbus had previously photographed related subjects such as drag queens, transvestites and even a hermaphrodite, this is the only subject who had actually had a sex change operation.

²⁹Ibid., 131. Another photograph, captioned "Norma Falk/Queen Elizabeth," is reprinted alongside "Winston Churchill Look-alike," Ibid., 130. These two images are from a series of eight portraits of look-alikes that were originally published, "People Who Think They Look Like Other People," *Nova*, (October 1969), 66-71.

³⁰Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 138-139. Originally, Unpublished [sic] *The Sunday Times Magazine*, (1969).

window in the shape of a gothic church doorway which adds to the impression this scene is a shrine in honour of the late 1950's film star.

Some eleven years later in 1995, a third volume of Arbus's work was published: the book *Untitled* was again edited and designed by Arbus's daughter Doon in collaboration with Yolanda Cuomo, and they were again aided by Marvin Israel.³¹ In contrast to the preceding books, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph* and *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work, Untitled*, as intimated on the inside cover of the book, focuses on a single project: "The photographs were taken at residences for the mentally retarded between 1969 and 1971, places [Arbus] kept going back to every few months or so, to picnics, dances, on Halloween, in the last years of her life."³² *Untitled* contains fifty-one images and the book is entirely unpaginated. In accordance with the monograph, each image is placed one to an opening on the right hand page, with the exception of the first image which is placed on the left hand side opposite the title page. The image on the front cover also appears again later within the book. There is no introductory text, but instead an *Afterword* of four pages written by Doon Arbus; placed opposite the last page of text is the final image showing two women in fancy dress. In contrast to the seven images previously included in the monograph that each held an individual, albeit the same, title, the images are not individually titled or dated, therefore the title of the book, *Untitled*, stands as a collective title for all the works.

All the subjects appear to be women, from the entire spectrum of life: childhood, adolescence, middle and old age. The subjects have been photographed, in the main, centrally located and frontally facing. The number of figures within each image varies: some

³¹Doon Arbus & Yolanda Cuomo, eds., *Untitled: Diane Arbus*, (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 1995). First published (New York: Aperture Foundation, Inc., no date).

³²*Ibid.*, Afterword, no page number.

photographs portray a single subject, some show two women; sometimes there is a configuration of three subjects and sometimes larger groups of women are shown, including as many as fourteen subjects crammed into Arbus's consistent square format picture plane. All the images have been made outside in the grounds of the institution, with the exception of five photographs.

The first of these inclusions comes after five images of various groupings of residents. It shows four children in a sparse, low ceilinged room; domestic moulded tiles cover the floor [*Untitled*, 6]. The only additional items are a bench table, two chairs and a toy cart. One child to the left at the back of the room, holding some sort of teddy bear, is slumped over in her chair in much the same manner as the toy itself. Another figure is just visible on the far right, but we see only her back as she slouches over the table, facing the grimy, blank wall, while in the middle ground, another child appears to be rocking as she lies on the floor, holding an upturned chair over her legs.³³ The final figure in the foreground is standing, but her eyes roll back in their sockets—she is oblivious to the toy cart behind her.

A second image shows a close up view of a young child looking directly into the camera—drooling [*Untitled*, 9].³⁴ Another photograph shows an adolescent sitting on a plastic chair against a backdrop of tiled wall: she is holding a piece of fabric with both hands, stretching it between her fingers [*Untitled*, 12]. It looks as

³³"We blame the wounded for the failings and abuses of society and the service system . . . When institutional neglect and deprivation results in 'maladaptive behaviour'—for example, rocking and head-banging—it is attributed to the condition of the inmates." Robert Bogdon & Steven J. Taylor, *The Social Meaning of Mental Retardation: Two Life Stories*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994), 16. Originally published under the title, *Inside Out: The Social Meaning of Mental Retardation*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

³⁴This image is analogous to Arbus's earlier image *Mother holding her child*, N.J. 1967 reproduced in Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*, no page number. This photograph was originally published, "Pauline Peters on People: How to Train a Derby Winner," *The Sunday Times Magazine* (London), (March 21, 1968). The text was written by Pauline Peters, and this particular image is of a child who had been entered in a saliva competition at a pre-toddler 'Diaper Derby' in suburban New Jersey. This image, alongside another, is reproduced in Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 94-95, but the text by Peters has been omitted.

though this gesture has been, and will continue to be, repeated many times. The subject, although frontally facing, looks out to the right of the photograph with slightly glazed eyes, as though seeking some stimulation beyond the mundaneness of her needless task. Past more images of older women dressed up—some wearing masks, some wearing bonnets—is a photograph of a child sitting beyond a bowl filled with a glutinous looking substance [*Untitled*, 21]. Food is spattered on the table top. The child is holding her spoon in the air whilst prodding her left eye with the thumb of her left hand; her lip hangs open and she is also drooling slightly. It seems more than likely from her gestures that she does not want to eat any more: she has pushed the bowl away from her towards the picture plane. As a result the bowl appears larger, and therefore more nauseating. The final image in this anomalous series is of a black child viewed from above as she stands against an expanse of utilitarian floor tiles [*Untitled*, 32]. Due to the obscure angle in which the camera has been positioned, the figure is dramatically foreshortened and accordingly, the child looks severely deformed. She has a pleading look in her eyes: it is as though she wants something . . . perhaps she simply wants to go out to play.

As previously mentioned, most of the women are photographed outside in the grounds of the institution; many are shown wearing fancy dress or are often seen wearing bathing costumes. While some are wearing day clothes, others are wearing night clothes. Most often the subjects are aware of Arbus and her camera although sometimes the women seem to be en route to another place and so they focus on their journey instead. This is only a brief formal analysis here of some of the photographs from the *Untitled* publication as this series of images will be discussed fully, although undoubtedly not exhaustively, in the following chapters of this thesis. As Diane Arbus

herself said: "A photograph has to be of something and what it's of is always more remarkable than the photograph. And more complicated."³⁵

1.2 *Myth: The Making of a Legend*

All three books of Diane Arbus's work were published posthumously, all by Aperture, and although a number of minor influences were also involved, notably all three books were edited by Arbus's eldest daughter Doon Arbus, and Diane Arbus's friend, Marvin Israel.³⁶ These publications have ultimately been responsible for the world-wide dissemination of Arbus's images:

Universally acknowledged a classic, DIANE ARBUS: AN APERTURE MONOGRAPH is a timeless masterpiece with editions in five languages and remains the foundation of her international reputation. This twenty-fifth anniversary edition celebrates one of the most important books in history on the work of a single artist . . . A quarter of a century has done nothing to diminish the riveting impact of these pictures or the controversy they inspire. Arbus's photographs penetrate the psyche with all the force of a personal encounter and, in doing so, transform the way we see the world and the people in it.³⁷

Diane Arbus was a singular and explosive force in photography, reshaping both the way pictures are made and our response to them. The Aperture monograph, *Diane Arbus* demonstrated how receptive viewers are to her utterly original art, becoming one of the most popular photography books ever published. Less well known are Arbus's commercial photographs and articles, which co-existed with the personal projects for which she is known today . . . *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work* is a collective portrait of sixties style and culture. It reveals an artist who posed no artificial boundary between "art" and the "paying job," and who chose, regardless of the outlet, to put her own uncompromising, indelible stamp on our visual imagination.³⁸

UNTITLED is the third volume of Diane Arbus's work and the only one devoted exclusively to a single project . . . the vast

³⁵Diane Arbus quoted in Afterword, Arbus & Cuomo, no page number.

³⁶I acknowledge the books did have some other (minor) editorial influences, although notably Yolanda Cuomo edited *Untitled* jointly with Doon Arbus. However, Doon Arbus and Marvin Israel remain the two most influential editors of Arbus's work.

³⁷Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*, 1997 edition, inside front dust cover.

³⁸Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, inside front cover.

majority of these pictures have remained unpublished until now
 . . .³⁹

All photographs and previously unpublished texts made and written by Diane Arbus remain the copyright of the Estate of Diane Arbus, and as a result, the Estate remains all but in complete control of the contexts of the publication of her work. The contributions of Arbus's work released by the Estate are highly considered and carefully edited, and this continues to be the case in respect of other authors and historians: the Estate's incapacitating editorial policy insists on having the final say over articles and essays if the author of such statements wishes to reproduce any of Arbus's photographs. For instance, in 1980 seventeen of Arbus's images were published in *Picture Magazine*, without titles or accompanying text. The editors made the following statement: "Since PICTURE is primarily concerned with the photographic image and the fidelity of its reproduction, we have acceded to the preference of the Estate of Diane Arbus that this monograph be published without accompanying text."⁴⁰

The introductory text in *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph* was revised by the editors, and although *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work* contains an essay written by Thomas W. Southall, it was of course subject to editorial constraints. Likewise, "UNTITLED includes an Afterword by Doon Arbus, the photographer's daughter."⁴¹ Since the Estate chooses what they care to reveal, and resultingly, what to withhold, it is logical that the reader of only these three books on Arbus would gain a very restricted, constructed version of her life and work. For example, the editors later claimed of the monograph:

³⁹Arbus & Cuomo, inside front dust cover.

⁴⁰Quoted in Catherine Lord, "What Becomes A Legend Most: The Short, Sad Career of Diane Arbus," *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 114.

⁴¹Inside front dust cover, Arbus & Cuomo.

In the twelve years since its publication . . . it had remained the foundation for all critical and popular assessments of her life and work. This has not altogether been a good thing . . . as a depiction of her career, for which it has since been held accountable, it is misleading.⁴²

This statement was revealed in the foreword to *Magazine Work*, whose publication timeously coincided with Patricia Bosworth's unauthorised, and largely unbecoming, biography of Arbus.⁴³ Here I would assert that the Estate wants to redress, not simply, as they claim, the 'depiction of [Arbus's] career.' Significantly, the Estate once again intervenes, only this time with a form of subversive censorship: one is party to a collision of information as the Estate endeavour to counteract the dubious biography of Arbus by publishing *Magazine Work*, essentially the fortuitous delivery of hitherto unpublished material—photographs, articles and letters that were not made available to Patricia Bosworth. By refusing to enter into negotiations with Bosworth direct, the Estate continues to author the life and work of Arbus from their privileged position of consanguinity—a status that Bosworth et al will never be privy to.

Thus, we are forced into something of a predicament: on the one hand, the Estate members are the blood relatives of Arbus, while Bosworth is merely a sensationalist biographer whose methodology leaves a lot to be desired. Although she presents a skimpy version of Arbus's career, Bosworth attempts to make up for this deficit with reflections about Arbus's personal life from alternative sources, such as the sales ladies who knew the young Diane Arbus through her visits to Russeks department store where these informants once-upon-a-time worked.⁴⁴ It is hardly surprising that Bosworth was required to

⁴²Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 5.

⁴³Patricia Bosworth, *Diane Arbus: A Biography*, (New York: Norton, 1984), paperback edition, 1985.

⁴⁴*ibid.*

take recourse to these distant sources however, as Gertrude and Howard Nemerov and Renee Sparkia (Arbus's mother, brother and younger sister respectively) were the only family members who cooperated with Bosworth's inquiries: Allan, Doon and Amy Arbus refused. While Lisette Model is said to have made a minor contribution, Richard Avedon and Marvin Israel also declined to comment.

As their simultaneous publication suggests the obvious, Catherine Lord's essay, *What Becomes A Legend Most: The Short, Sad Career of Diane Arbus* obligingly offers a critique of Bosworth's biography and *Magazine Work*, examining the differences and discrepancies in their respective portrayals of Arbus's life and work.⁴⁵ Lord begins with the biography, and in contrast to Bosworth's disregard for truth and her favouring of fictionalised 'facts,' Lord's commentary is direct to say the least. Indeed, she can sometimes seem positively corrosive in her observations, declaring that, "Highly suggestive material, introduced by innuendo . . . is the staple of Bosworth's technique."⁴⁶ While quoting a number of inclusions from Bosworth's book only to dismiss them as absolutely banal, Lord locates three "problematic issues which arise from Bosworth's amateur psychologizing . . . the notions of women, art and history," although she concedes that Bosworth is not the only writer who works in accordance with these sentiments.⁴⁷ Lord talks of the character that Bosworth 'constructs' in order to explain the young, privileged Arbus who turned into the adult, photographer Arbus: befriender of transvestites and frequenter of nudist camps. She comes to the conclusion that, "[Bosworth] is a grossly irresponsible writer . . . [and] the ideas she carries to excess

⁴⁵See note 41 for full reference of Lord's essay.

⁴⁶Bolton, 117.

⁴⁷Ibid.

infect most versions of photographic history, and, certainly, most interpretations of Arbus's work."⁴⁸

In contradistinction then, Lord applauds *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, claiming that, "It contains more reliable information than anything yet published on Arbus."⁴⁹ She admires Thomas W. Southall's "careful, factual essay."⁵⁰ She appreciates that he "brings in a significant amount of primary source material, quoting extensively from Arbus material . . . as well as from her correspondence . . . Moreover, [Southall] uses footnotes, doesn't gush, and utters not a syllable about cursed souls."⁵¹ While Lord clearly values Southall's academic etiquette, she recognises that the Estate together with Aperture—the latter being content to overlook the issue of historiography in compliance to the former—ultimately only supply extra light on the erstwhile brilliance of Arbus. Lord notes that,

Magazine's Work's [sic] Diane Arbus is very different from the Diane Arbus of the first monograph, to say nothing of Bosworth's Arbus—which is in no way surprising, since a correction of the myth was the explicit intention of the *Magazine Work* editors. The revised Diane Arbus is a working woman. Dramas . . . do not figure in the freelance bustle . . . The pampered childhood is ignored; the word 'suicide' is not used. Rebellions, innate perversity, the seduction of extremes, a woman's quest for sexual and personal liberation, or any other psychologistic theorizing are likewise omitted.⁵²

Lord therefore, perhaps even reluctantly, concludes:

Excellent though Southall's text is in its genre, the result is a new monograph that lacks any substantially new reading of Arbus's career. Ironically, this makes *Magazine Work* much duller than its subject . . . because the book is scholarly without confronting the act of writing history, *Magazine Work* fuels the legend without considering the circumstances that enabled the legend.⁵³

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid., 121.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid., 120-121.

⁵³Ibid., 122.

While the issues of truth, the construction of Arbus, the perpetuation of myth and Arbus's consequent legend combine to form the essence of Lord's exposition, and even though she does not offer any hermeneutic analysis of Arbus's work, it is worth noting that Lord's article was published without reproducing any of Arbus's photographs. Indeed, in contrast to the aforementioned *Picture Magazine*, who acceded to the Estate's editorial policy by cutting their text completely in favour of Arbus's photographs, in the same year *Artforum* favoured publishing their text, "Essential Differences: A Comparison of the Portraits of Lisette Model and Diane Arbus," written by Shelley Rice, to the exclusion of Arbus's images.⁵⁴ The editor, Ingrid Sischy, stated:

There are no illustrations of work by Diane Arbus or Lisette Model . . . because permission would be granted only on the condition that the article be read before a permission decision could be reached. *Artforum* is not willing to accommodate compromising stipulations.⁵⁵

Catherine Lord said that at that time "Sischy's stand was rare [as] most art publications will go to any length to avoid printing straight text."⁵⁶ This is clearly not the case with regard to the publications that follow, however. In 1993, for example, the editors of *October* similarly omitted planned illustrations from an article on Arbus's work written by Carol Armstrong.⁵⁷ Ironically though, the editorial spaces set aside for the inclusion of the photographs were retained, which Armstrong then filled with her own statement, making clear the difficulties the Estate posed in terms of censorship over the content of her essay:

While the estate claimed that the extensive changes that it wished the author to make all had to do with matters of fact, in

⁵⁴Shelley Rice, "Essential Differences: A Comparison of the Portraits of Lisette Model and Diane Arbus," *Artforum*, 18:9 (May 1980), 66-71.

⁵⁵Sischy, *Ibid.*, 66.

⁵⁶Bolton, 124, note 28.

⁵⁷Carol Armstrong, "Biology, Destiny, Photography: Difference According to Diane Arbus," *October*, no. 66, (Fall 1993), 28-54.

actuality most of the changes detailed in a five-page, single spaced letter to the author involved the imposition of the estate's editorial judgement.⁵⁸

In her two page addendum, Armstrong conveys open dismay concerning the interference of the Estate in such editorial matters, although she did make the necessary amendments to factual errors and incorrect citations. She continues her criticism by declaring that the fees for reproducing Arbus's images were "exorbitant," and even in the event of making all the necessary written changes, the Estate was only willing to grant permission for half the requested photographs. The Estate also asked for payment for quoting passages from both the monograph and *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*. Armstrong goes on to say,

Though the estate, somewhat inconsistently, eventually agreed to grant permissions for the citations without editorial interference, the author and the editors of *October* felt it to be more consistent to do without those passages as well [as the photographs] and thus be as un beholden to this particular estate, and as clear of its control and of the taint of its censorship, as possible.⁵⁹

She concludes thus:

We wish to register disappointment in the behaviour of this estate, which has only succeeded in hampering (though not stopping) free critical discourse on the very work through which it seeks to gain. Above all, we protest the principle of censorship—there are no conditions under which it is acceptable.⁶⁰

Another example of the Estate's editorial interference is confirmed by Diana Emery Hulick in her guest editorial for the Summer 1995 *History of Photography*—a special edition devoted to Diane Arbus.⁶¹ This auspicious volume contains no less than a total of eight articles and a comprehensive bibliography on Arbus, but none of her

⁵⁸Ibid., 28.

⁵⁹Ibid., 30.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹*History of Photography*, Vol. 19, No. 2, (Summer 1995).

photographs—not a single image, not even on the front cover which is the normal procedure for this publication; instead, the authors and the titles of their articles take prominent position. Again ironically, Hulick begins by declaring: "This issue of *History of Photography* focuses on the work of Diane Arbus."⁶² In respect of her own contribution, *Diane Arbus's Expressive Methods*, Hulick ventures: "I hope that my article, which discusses [Arbus's] technique in relation to her aesthetic, will serve as a useful counterpoint to the articles by my colleagues."⁶³ This is, of course, due to the absence of the photographs themselves; correspondingly, Hulick urges the reader to view the images through the respective Aperture publications.

In her editorial, Hulick goes on to cite an article written by Barbara Goffman, then General Council to the College Art Association, who in turn comments on the previously mentioned Armstrong article, claiming: "It seems that scholars and publishers are unnecessarily self-censoring."⁶⁴ While Goffman is essentially advocating the 'fair use' of historical material—in this case, publication of Arbus's photographs—she does criticise writers and historians for "not pushing the fair use envelope to its limit."⁶⁵ Hulick then retaliates by suggesting that the College Art Association might offer help with the high expenses of litigation usually connected to such cases and indeed, she maintains this is why so few scholars pursue such matters in the first place. Not wishing to risk restriction of continued access to primary research materials, many historians, in order to avoid accedence to the censorial whims of the Estate of Diane Arbus with regard to their own written material, simply do without

⁶²Ibid., Guest Editorial.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Barbara Goffman was then General Council to the College Art Association in the USA. Hulick quotes Goffman from the College Art Association Newsletter (May-June 1994), 5.

⁶⁵Goffman quoted in Hulick, Guest Editorial.

Arbus's photographs. Such is the case of both Carol Armstrong, and Diana Emery Hulick, who also relented: "In the interests of editorial freedom, [in *History of Photography*] we have chosen on this occasion not to reproduce [Arbus's] photographs."⁶⁶

One might consider that publication of Arbus's images alongside these articles would constitute a betrayal of Arbus's status as photographer, and this seems to be the opinion of Doon Arbus, Diane Arbus's eldest daughter. In 1975 she wrote a letter to Helen Martaens stating:

It is very important to me that my mother's photographs be seen as photographs in the context of her own work and those of other photographers, and not as illustrations. Therefore, I have consistently refused to allow them to be reproduced in connection with any books or articles dealing with any subject other than photography itself.⁶⁷

Doon Arbus declared: "The work speaks for itself."⁶⁸ Contradictorily then, although refusing to comment on the work, in the absence of Arbus herself, the Estate now comments on her behalf. Perhaps they are trying to avoid the topic of 'freaks' that is the predominant theme of Arbus's photographs in the monograph, and this by Arbus's own admission: "Freaks was a thing I photographed a lot . . . I just used to adore them."⁶⁹ Although the Estate had editorial control here, they later become extremely cautious about possible connections that writers may make between Arbus and her subjects, both personally and professionally.⁷⁰

For instance, Carol Armstrong points out that some of the changes to her article suggested by the Estate "trod a thin line between matters

⁶⁶Hulick, Guest Editorial.

⁶⁷Bolton, 124, note 28.

⁶⁸Doon Arbus quoted in Bosworth, xi.

⁶⁹Diane Arbus quoted in Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*, 3.

⁷⁰Diane Arbus herself referred to some of her subjects as 'freaks.' She said, "Freaks was thing I photographed a lot. It was one of the first things I photographed and it had a terrific kind of excitement for me. I just used to adore them. I don't quite mean they're my best friends but they made me feel a mixture of shame and awe. There's a quality of legend about freaks." *Ibid.*, 3.

of fact and judgement."⁷¹ She considered this to be the case in "the estate's repeated request not to refer to the untitled series of photographs from the end of Arbus's career as representing people born with Down's Syndrome."⁷² While at this time such labelling was considered unacceptable by the Estate, they themselves later used the term 'mentally retarded' to collectively describe the subjects of the photographs in the *Untitled* publication. Why then is the term 'mentally retarded' acceptable in 1995, while in 1993 the term Down's syndrome was not? Merely another example of the editorial whims of the Estate? Perhaps not so innocuous . . . Here we stumble upon shadowy land—a grey area somewhere between reality, invention and 'political correctness.'

Returning to Arbus's own term, one might infer that the Estate is keen to avoid the view of Arbus herself being considered a 'freak.' Or worse—the whole family might be conceived of as such, as the Estate's refusal to parley with Patricia Bosworth, the writer adjudged by many to be thoroughly disreputable, would indeed suggest. Bosworth herself reprehensibly contemplates: "By 1978 . . . nothing had been written about [Arbus's] life, although it was obvious that behind her pictures lay a strange and powerful person."⁷³

⁷¹Armstrong, 30.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Bosworth, xi.

II Hermeneutics

2.1 History and Hearsay

The intentions of Arbus have always been a subject of fascination and scholarship for many, and the result is a seemingly comprehensive, but actually very narrow, selection of predominantly hermeneutic analysis. In publishing *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, the Estate strategically sought to broaden the debates surrounding Arbus's work, debates that had, by the Estate's own admission, so far been based on the more 'personal' photographs published in the monograph. Ian Jeffrey claims this is "One of the problems—and attractions—of Arbus's career."¹ While Doon Arbus refrained to comment for Patricia Bosworth's biography, declaring that 'the work speaks for itself,' Jeffrey concludes, "The biography does nothing to dislodge that judgement, and by implication endorses the [monograph] selection of 1972."² But Bosworth does not often venture into the more uneasy domain of Arbus's photography. Rather, she confines her biography to the somewhat limited sources of hearsay available to her, and it is precisely her methodology, or indeed, lack of one, that is the main source of criticism for Catherine Lord. In her article *What Becomes A Legend Most: The Short, Sad Career of Diane Arbus*, Lord describes Bosworth's biography as "a dreadful book—badly written, sloppily edited, interminable [with] nothing but a nodding acquaintance with the history of photography."³ As this is reminiscent of so many commentaries on Bosworth's book, rather discuss the biography further, it may well be more interesting, and more fruitful, to examine other writers' opinions.⁴

¹Ian Jeffrey, "Diane Arbus and the Past: When She Was Good," *History of Photography*, Vol. 19, No. 2, (Summer 1995), 95-99, 95.

²*Ibid.*

³Bolton, 114.

⁴See, for instance, Marie Czach, "Diane Arbus, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton: Astringent Poetry and Tragic Celebrity," *History of Photography*, Vol. 19, No. 2, (Summer 1995), 100-106, and Anne W. Tucker, "Arbus Through the Looking Glass," *Afterimage*, 12:8, (March 1985), 9-11.

As stated in chapter 1, section 1.2, Lord's article is essentially a critique of Bosworth's biography and *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*—a comparative study being an obvious choice as their simultaneous publication would suggest. Let us first consider then Lord's objections in respect of the biography. Although she concedes that Bosworth's sections on Arbus's childhood are 'more reliable,' (due to the co-operation of Howard Nemerov and Renee Sparkia, brother and sister of Arbus, as well as some sources from Fieldston School) "more reliable is not *reliable*."⁵ Are we then to believe that Lord herself is entirely reliable? Is she not as susceptible to contrivance as Bosworth when it comes to portraying her version of events? Before launching her major offensive on Bosworth, Lord earlier admitted, after her three page introductory chronology of Arbus's life and exhibitions, "Clearly it's difficult to preserve an entirely objective tone."⁶ She later repeats these sentiments: "It is difficult to remain neutral, but then my objective is history, not neutrality, and they are not to be confused."⁷

While in many respects one might concur with Lord's criticism—that Bosworth's biography is spread thin with fact and iced liberally with fancy—Lord herself can add to the decorative effect: sometimes in her use of ambiguity and metaphor, and sometimes in failing to accurately correct Bosworth's own discrepancies. An example of this is Lord's response to Bosworth's rather embarrassing historical reference to the maker of the world's first photograph: Bosworth ludicrously describes the image made by Joseph-Nicéphore Niépce as "a view from [his] window of his blurred French garden."⁸ Enclosed in brackets as part of Bosworth's text, Lord sardonically questions: "[Were

⁵Bolton, 115.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., 119, quoted from Bosworth, 123.

nineteenth-century gardens blurry, or was that the impressionists?]"⁹ If Lord's main interest is setting history straight, she should have stated the actual, scientific reason for the lack of detail in Niépce's photograph: the exposure time was so necessarily extended that the sun had moved from the East to the West, rising and setting, and therefore the shadows became crossed, this in turn adding greatly to the overall confusion seen in the photograph.¹⁰ Whether Lord knew this or not, she fails to mention it in her main text and does not offer any further footnoted information. Lord does however reference Anne W. Tucker's article, *Arbus Through the Looking Glass* as a 'reliable' source that is "quite clear about Bosworth's factual errors" at least.¹¹

An example of Lord's both reprehensible and ambiguous uses of terminology can conveniently be found together in one statement; she claims: "I dissect the Bosworth book to reveal hagiography gone berserk."¹² We can only ponder over the ambiguity of this statement: is Lord suggesting that Bosworth idealises Arbus to a ridiculous extent, to the level of a saint? Because if she is, this would work against the grain of her own argument, that Bosworth's "five years of interviews have spawned [a] breathless accretion of facts, laced with so many dubious facts, or pointless facts, that even the verifiable facts, to say nothing of the important facts, become tarnished."¹³ Lord later talks of Bosworth "adopting the strategy of classical hagiography," but her use of this term remains, for me at least, dubious: while her writing suggests that she employs the term negatively, she never clarifies why she does so.¹⁴

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰The low light sensitivity of bitumen of Judea resulted in an eight hour long exposure being required to record the scene, thus the sun appears on both sides of the courtyard. See, for instance, Helmut & Alison Gernsheim, *L. J. M. Daguerre: The History of the Diorama and The Daguerrotype*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1956).

¹¹Bolton, 124, footnote 23. See note 4 for full reference of Tucker's essay.

¹²Ibid., 115.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., 119.

While Bosworth does include a generous supply of tattle on topics such as Allan and Diane Arbus's sex life, Diane Arbus's relationship to her brother, (apparently they were unusually close) her fantasy to commit incest with her father and Arbus's suspected bisexuality, to name but a few—for which Lord vehemently condemns Bosworth—Lord nevertheless uses linguistic terms and phrasing that can only be described as parallel to Bosworth's "highly suggestive material" that, according to Lord, is "introduced by innuendo [and] is the staple of Bosworth's technique."¹⁵ Lord suspects "Bosworth's internal model of narrative prose . . . is something like the gothic novel—an amalgam of description, dates, and dialogue that moves the hypnotised consumer *down the path of vicarious pleasure to a formulaic climax* (emphasis mine)."¹⁶

Exhausted by her own tirade, Lord lambastes: "One could go on and on about Bosworth's ignorance . . . and her predilection for morbid smut."¹⁷ But as Lord continues, it would appear that she agrees with Ian Jeffrey. She concludes:

The point, however, is that the [biography] is a closed circle. Bosworth's lack of training in either photography or conventional art history simply makes blatant the usual tautologies of the monograph *genre*: the life generates significance for the art, which in turn is referred back to the life.¹⁸

But how can Lord lay the blame entirely on Bosworth when it is the Estate of Diane Arbus who presented, not only Bosworth, but also Lord and the rest of the world, with such a narrow perspective on Arbus and her work in the first place? Lord does concede this afterwards, however, proclaiming:

Compared to [the biography] *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work* is a relief . . . it is introduced by what can best be described as an apology for the sensation caused by the 1972 Aperture monograph . . . Thus another monograph, a scholarly one this time, [is] intended to

¹⁵Ibid., 117.

¹⁶Ibid., 115.

¹⁷Ibid., 119.

¹⁸Ibid.

combat the exaltation of the Arbus oeuvre as mysterious [and] inexplicable.¹⁹

This 'mysterious and inexplicable' side of Arbus's life and work is of no interest to Carol Armstrong, however. She says of the monograph publication: "I am [interested] in *reading* the photographs, reading the book of which they are a part, and reading in them Arbus's self-construction *as a photographer*. So I leave aside the mythological area of Arbus's biography."²⁰ Armstrong nevertheless references Lord's article, stating:

I address the Aperture monograph . . . [but] I do so against the advice of one writer, [Catherine Lord], who would, quite rightly, see this as a way of taking Arbus's photographs as a 'closed system,' as if they were uninflected by the conditions of their production.²¹

Although Armstrong, in using the similar term 'closed system,' does not quote Lord directly, I do believe that Lord, as quoted in the preceding paragraph, was commenting instead on Bosworth's biography, describing it as being "a closed circle."²² Thus Armstrong misrepresents Lord's opinion by misinterpreting 'the book' referred to by Lord as being the monograph, and not the biography. In context, Lord's opinion in its entirety reads:

One could go on and on about Bosworth's ignorance . . . and her predilection for morbid smut. The point, however, is that the book is a closed circle. Bosworth's lack of training in either photography or conventional art history simply makes blatant the usual tautologies of the monograph *genre*: the life generates significance for the art, which is in turn referred back to the life. Unconstrained by academic etiquette, Bosworth takes the usual interpretation of Diane Arbus to its logical extremes, the photographs are 'explained' by constructing herself as a freak, and their power, from which derives their value as art, is legitimated by her suicide.²³

This leads us to a further misinterpretation of Lord by Armstrong. Armstrong writes that in the monograph,

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Armstrong, 34.

²¹Ibid.

²²Bolton, 119.

²³Ibid.

The photographs are sequenced in such a way as to refuse overt thematic or monographic coherence—with the exception of the *Untitled* 1970-71 series of images of mental-hospital patients placed with chronological consistency at the end of the book.²⁴

And at this juncture she gives a footnote reference leading to her second supposition. She claims "Lord . . . is right to compare the biographical construction of Arbus as good-girl-gone-wrong, whose suicide explains her work, to the popular valorisation of Van Gogh as mad genius."²⁵ Armstrong bases this assumption on the fact that Lord references Griselda Pollock's essay, *Artists, Mythology and Media: Genius, Madness and Art History*.²⁶ But from the configuration of the texts, it seems as though Lord offers the passage by Pollock, in relation to a passage quoted from Arbus herself, simply for contemplation, before launching her inquiry into the Bosworth biography. As previously mentioned, Lord concludes that in her opinion it is Bosworth who makes "blatant the usual tautologies of the monograph *genre*: the life generates significance for the art, which is in turn referred back to the life," whereas Armstrong misreads Lord believing it is Lord herself asserting this view.²⁷ But in making this blunder, Armstrong goes on to draw a very interesting conclusion:

There is one way in which the Aperture monograph falls right in line with that construction of Arbus—the *Untitled* series gets the same *roman à clef* pride of place as Van Gogh's *Wheatfield with Crows*—as a proof-of-disturbance, premonition-of-suicide 'last work.'²⁸

This is a gross over simplification if ever there was one, but fortunately this is not the main thesis of Armstrong's essay, the essence of which shall be discussed in depth in section 2.2 of this chapter. In the meantime, let

²⁴Armstrong, 35.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 35-36, note 12.

²⁶See Griselda Pollock, "Artists, Mythology, and Media: Genius, Madness and Art History," *Screen* 21:3 (1980), 58-59.

²⁷Bolton, 119.

²⁸Armstrong, 35-36, note 12.

us return to Ian Jeffrey's article, which is also based on the images from the monograph publication.

Jeffrey begins by considering what it might mean: to describe the work (as Doon Arbus did) as being able to 'speak for itself', deciding that it is in fact an 'invitation to be silent' with regard to argument and analysis of the work, judging that "in Arbus's case, that is a sensible injunction."²⁹ Accordingly, Jeffrey's somewhat pedestrian ramble takes us through Arbus's range of influences: Walker Evans, August Sander and Weegee are cited as both historical and genre influences, but Jeffrey focuses on the work of Lisette Model, placing her 'carnal' New Objectivity of the 1930's opposite Arbus's 'cathartic' manner of the 1960's.³⁰ He locates the emergence of the 'abnormal' subject, again in the 1930's, against the 'utopian' pictorialist photography that had preceded it, and indeed, he considers the political pressures that surrounded Model

²⁹Jeffrey, 95.

³⁰See Gunther Sander, ed., *August Sander: Citizens of the 20th Century (1892-1952)*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1986). This was described by Sander as a 'cultural work' divided into seven sections. Most notable in respect of possible influence on Arbus are Section 6: "The City," containing photographs of travelling people and gypsies from the circus and the fair, as well as images of 'Festivities' such as a masked ball, 'The Persecuted' and 'Political Prisoners.' See specifically *Inmate of an asylum*, 1930, *Disabled Miner*, 1928 and *Unemployed Man*, 1928. See also, particularly, Section 7: "The Last People" shows idiots, the sick, the insane and the dying. See specifically *Cretein*, c. 1924, *Blind Miner and blind soldier*, c. 1930, and *Dwarves*, 1913. Sander said, "I hate nothing more than sugary photos with tricks, poses and effects [. . .] Photography can reproduce things with impressive beauty, or even with cruel accuracy, but it can also be outrageously deceptive. In order to see truth we must be able to tolerate it, and above all we should pass it down to our fellow men and to posterity, whether it is in our favour or not." Sander quoted in *August Sander: 'In Photography there are no shadows!'* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1996), 21.

Walker Evans often photographed interiors of homes and buildings, often signs and shop fronts. He was also one of a group of photographers employed by the government on their propaganda exercise to record the Farm Security Administration's efforts to resettle immigrant farmers and land labourers during the 1930's depression in America. Later works by Evans that display possible influences for Arbus are his 1940's series of *Subway Portraits* and another series, *Corner of State and Randolph Streets, Chicago* 1946. Although unpopulated, the photographs *The Child's Room, Stockbridge, Massachusetts*, 1951 and *Jack Heliker's Bedroom Wall, Cranberry Island, Maine*, 1969 amongst others, have the sort of inventory style titling of Arbus's works published in the monograph. Also, there is a direct appropriation of titling from James Agee & Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: Three Tenant Families*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1941). Arbus titled her magazine series: *Let us Now Praise Dr. Gatch*, Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 100-105. See, for instance, *Walker Evans*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1971).

Weegee (Arthur Fellig) worked as a photojournalist, mainly for tabloid newspapers in New York. His work included images of murders, crime scenes, streetfights, and fires. Photographs notable for their possible influence on Arbus are: *This boy was arrested for dressing like a girl*, c. 1939, showing a transvestite, and *Shorty, the Bowery Cherub, New Year's Eve at Sammy's Bar*, 1943, shows a dwarf in his underwear. Other themes in Weegee's work are the circus, war parades, The Village, and lovers. See, for instance, *Weegee: Naked City*, (New York: Duell, Sloan, Pearce/Essential Books, 1945), Miles Barth, ed., *Weegee's World*, (New York: Bullfinch Press/International Center of Photography New York, 1997).

in her day, versus the social pressures that Arbus experienced by way of her privileged upbringing.

Jeffrey says that unlike Model's "ungainly subjects [that] were conspicuously superfluous and anachronistic in the new culture of workers and athletes," Arbus's "tactic was to invoke and then to endanger the normative by parody and disproportion [and] this is evident enough in her more emphatic paradoxes, in the shape of comely women who turn out to be men—and vice versa."³¹ To return then in response to his own question, "Do the photographs speak for themselves?" Jeffrey believes not, and therefore speaks on their behalf, giving hermeneutic analyses to a greater or lesser extent of a number of Arbus's well-known works from the monograph. Beginning with one of her 'more ordinary pictures,' *Girl in a coat lying on her bed, N.Y.C 1968* is interpreted thus:

The embodiment of charm lies in among some discreetly deranged signs: an inverted landscape painting, a cameo of a sailboat, a camel on a packet and a brimming ashtray, emblem of boredom. In that picture, [Arbus] deconstructs the idea of glamour, and infiltrates memories of waiting. It is a typical procedure, less in the sense of being a total demystification than of contaminating a demystification with her own nostalgias. A blonde in eye shadow and black tights is little more than a starlet-in-waiting; within the broader context of a more glamorous elsewhere and a tedious, lingering present, she becomes a princess in the making.³²

Jeffrey does not repeat this rather wordy overindulgence however, and returns to citing historical influences interwoven with short descriptions for the sake of comparison: while Robert Frank's book *The Americans* "deserves to be considered as a post-totalitarian and post-holocaust work, so completely is it given over to an iconography of control and submission"³³ (an "inevitable, but so far unrehearsed, reading" according to Jeffrey's footnote), Bruce Davidson's publication titled *East 100th Street* "envisages a different kind of catastrophe . . . in which a population of

³¹Jeffrey, 95-96.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., 97. See note 4.

survivors inhabits a darkness articulated by architectural details."³⁴ Thus, in relation to Frank and Davidson, Arbus's work is described as 'humanitarian,' but is later judged by Jeffrey to be 'anachronistic' in recalling Sander's New Objectivity.

Jeffrey does state earlier though that even if Arbus's subjects are "types," they cannot be "explained away": the photographs "have an ethical dimension, acknowledged by Doon Arbus admitting that 'the work speaks for itself'."³⁵ And here Jeffrey swiftly deals and dispenses with the seven images placed at the end of the monograph: the photographs showing women relegated to institutions on the grounds of alleged mental retardation. Jeffrey, however, lamely describes the subjects as "mentally infirm people involved in a festival," claiming that, "Any analysis of the details of these portraits would be beside the point, for the masquers live outside the social realm in a rudimentary happy land."³⁶ Of course Jeffrey fails to note that two photographs show women wearing day clothes and bathing costumes—these women are without masks or bonnets, in other words, are not conspicuously part of a 'festival.' He also fails to note the physiognomic signs of Down's syndrome displayed on the faces of some of the women. He goes on, however, displaying excessive adherence to scholarly protocol:

In the documentary portraits, objective commentary is also restrained by the etiquette attached to portraiture. Where a likeness has been contracted and vouchsafed, analysis would amount to a solecism. Even where commentary is called for as unavoidable it can touch on the unbearable and demeaning.³⁷

Jeffrey neatly glides past consideration of all the issues his customary niceties seek to hide, to another of Arbus's photographs which he believes should be considered on the same terms, stating, "This seems to be one of

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

the implications of her picture of a svelte topless dancer . . . [the dancer's] melancholy is justified by her knowledge that she is a function of her appearance."³⁸ But how can knowledge of their social position and function be the privilege of the so-called retarded women when it is precisely their believed abnormal cognitive ability and resulting social incompetence that has led to their abolition 'outside the social realm to a rudimentary happy land' in the first place? If the photographs made by Arbus at the institutions have some ethical dimension (as Jeffrey believes Doon Arbus believes) then why does Jeffrey fail to either focus upon or adequately expose their function? Instead, Jeffrey intended all along (although fails to mention until half way through) to introduce us to Philip Roth, whom Arbus, Jeffrey declares (after three pages of historical referencing) "is closer in her outlook to . . . than the majority of her contemporaries in photography."³⁹ Some paragraphs later, just as one is beginning to wonder who Roth is, and what his connection might be, Jeffrey kindly obliges:

The point about Roth the writer, apropos of Arbus the photographer, is his attitude to ambivalence. He is unable to decide and demonstrates what happens in the process. With the moral question as insistent as insoluble he turns, instead, to what can be known and described, and his books alternate between irreconcilable family scenes and gratuitous descriptions . . . Behind the multifarious surfaces of Roth's novels lie the ideas of the good life in which decisions are correctly taken. Underpinning Arbus's world is, perhaps, an image of paradise, or . . . 'rituals' and legends.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, not until another good few paragraphs and some, by now familiar sounding questions, later, such as, "But how is her photography meant? But is there a key to the whole of Arbus's *œuvre*?"⁴¹ (both of which Jeffrey never adequately answers on his own terms) are we finally illuminated that the sub-heading to Jeffrey's article is in fact the title of

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., 98.

⁴¹Ibid.

the book, *When She Was Good*, in which "Philip Roth describes a predicament close to that of Diane Arbus. Roth's leading lady in that novel lives subject to an idealising imagination in relation to which the world of actualities is hopelessly flawed."⁴² As Ian Jeffrey takes his tangential course into literature, this serves well as an inlet for the tributary assortment of essays that take recourse to comedy, theatre, poetry, and more literature.

For instance, Heather McPherson's contribution written in 1993 and titled *Diane Arbus's Grotesque 'Human Comedy'* is, again, a discussion based in and around the photographs published in the monograph of 1972.⁴³ After two paragraphs criticising the "dubious psycho-biographic take" of previous penmanship, McPherson declares: "This essay proposes a counter reading of Arbus's celebrated 'freak' photographs that will reconsider their hybrid aesthetic and the mixed signals they convey under the rubric of the 'comic grotesque'."⁴⁴ But this already seems contradictory in that McPherson perpetuates the notion of 'freak' instead of disputing the very use of such a term. According to McPherson, "Despite the apparent bleakness of her vision, Arbus's photographs embody aspects of comic theory and challenge aesthetic hierarchies by adopting the 'comic grotesque' as an artistic stratagem."⁴⁵ Interestingly though, McPherson then references the writer Henri Bergson, author of an essay titled *Laughter*, for his analysis on caricature.⁴⁶ Apparently, Bergson claims "the caricaturist makes his models grimace and delves beneath the skin to divine the recalcitrance of matter," and this is what McPherson believes Arbus did to her subjects.⁴⁷

⁴²Ibid. See Philip Roth, *When She Was Good*, (New York: Random House, 1967).

⁴³Heather McPherson, "Diane Arbus's Grotesque Human Comedy," *History of Photography*, Vol. 19, No. 2, (Summer 1995), 117-120.

⁴⁴Ibid., 117.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶See Henri Bergson, "Laughter," *Comedy*, ed. Wylie Sypher, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

⁴⁷McPherson, 119, note 9.

McPherson ensures the credibility of her notion of the "comic grotesque" as an "aesthetic category" by citing the theories of heavyweights such as Plato, Aristotle and Bakhtin, Hobbes, Freud and Kris, Baudelaire, Poe and Bergson.⁴⁸ McPherson does not question them but rather adopts their thinking as the bedrock for her essay: "The term grotesque, which originally designated a fanciful, hybrid form of decoration found in Ancient Rome, in the wake of romanticism acquired darker, more diffuse meanings and came to epitomise the modern."⁴⁹ Having clearly established the solidity of such an historical foundation, she turns to the photographs. Before reviewing specific examples though, McPherson imparts her more general feelings about Arbus's work and practice. She conceives thus:

In the '*freak*' photographs, Arbus, recorded her *cast of marginals* with harsh lighting and a *dispassionate eye*, immobilising them like *wild animals* hypnotised by the unexpected glare of headlights . . . [but] the subjects calmly pose, seemingly unaware of their *objectification* . . . there is a rigid, almost mechanical aspect to many of Arbus's photographs despite the *weirdness and exoticism* of the subjects. The particular fascination [of] these photographs . . . has to do with their uneasy blending of documentary and portrait conventions and Arbus's intentional blurring of the line separating art from voyeurism . . . the camera gave her a sense of *power* over her subjects (emphasis mine).⁵⁰

McPherson discusses four images from the selection published in the monograph: *A Jewish Giant at Home with his Parents in the Bronx, N.Y., 1970*, *Masked Woman in a Wheelchair, Pa., 1970*, *Hermaphrodite and a Dog in a carnival Trailer, Md., 1970* and *Child with a Toy Hand Grenade in Central Park, N.Y.C., 1962* and manages to describe all of these as 'comically grotesque' with the exception of the latter, where only the term 'grotesque' is used and only cursorily in respect of the boy's 'clawlike hand.' But let us first consider McPherson's application of the term 'comic grotesque' in respect of the other three photographs. Apparently,

⁴⁸Ibid., 117. McPherson notes various texts by these authors.

⁴⁹Ibid., 117.

⁵⁰Ibid., 118.

What makes the image of the giant comical, as well as grotesque, is its representation of the seemingly insurmountable difference separating the giant from his own parents . . . On a more subliminal level, [the] halloweenesque image [*Masked Woman*] recalls childhood fears of wicked witches. However, in this instance, the witch is wheelchair-bound, making her posturing comically grotesque rather than truly frightening . . . It is the incongruity of the figure [of the hermaphrodite] and setting together with the conflicting sexual signals that make the image profoundly disturbing but also comically grotesque.⁵¹

One could, of course, look to the images to dispute McPherson's argument, and claim that the photographs of the giant and the hermaphrodite might invoke, not an involuntary laugh induced by disgust, but perhaps instead an inflated curiosity—how often does one see a giant or hermaphrodite? For many, Arbus's images may present the first opportunity. And although McPherson posits, that in respect of *Masked Woman in a Wheelchair*, "Arbus utilises the principle of incongruity and subverts the viewer's expectations by short circuiting the stereotypical response of pity combined with innate superiority that physical disability usually evokes," one could argue here that because the subject covers her face with a mask, masquerading as a witch, are we to believe that the wheelchair is necessary?⁵² Could she also be masquerading as disabled? In other words, is this to be taken as a purely denoted element in the work? As McPherson suggests, the wheel-chair bound subject counteracts the more frightening aspect of the witch's mask, but does not seem to present the viewer with the 'comic grotesque.' It would seem that the photograph presents instead an interplay of potential outcomes, the true reading ultimately belonging to the viewer. And so to fix, as McPherson does, a singular meaning to such a photograph seems somewhat short-sighted. We might propose that the image generates in the viewer a curiousness about itself and its subject

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

matter, and in so doing, the image preserves the viewer's intrigue. But finally, the point about McPherson and her notion of the 'comic grotesque' is her very use of such a term in the first place. Although necessary to state at this time, this is not the place to fully develop a debate on terminology, and 'comic grotesque' will be discussed, amongst other terms, later in this thesis.

The term 'grotesque' is also used fleetingly by M. Darsie Alexander, however. She quotes Wolfgang Kayser, who claims, "Among the most persistent motifs of the grotesque, we find bodies reduced to puppets, marionettes, and automata, and their faces frozen into masks."⁵³ But Alexander's particular interest is theatre and masquerade: "Wearing a mask or disguising one's appearance is taken as an ominous sign in contemporary culture, which links masks to evil, madness and the abject."⁵⁴ She readily accepts Roland Barthes' assertion that, "Photography is a kind of primitive theatre, a kind of *tableau vivant*."⁵⁵ And also Gus Blaisdell's notion that, "Intrinsically, the photograph comes between itself and what it depicts. This enables photography's essential theatricality, that in its photo genesis it costumes and makes up what it depicts as easily as it documents it."⁵⁶ Alexander cites the domestic interior locations and myriad 'props, garments and accoutrements' as part of the theatrical, stage-setting seen, in her opinion, in many of Arbus's photographs. As with other writers, many of the examples employed by Alexander for her article are drawn from the monograph publication. For instance, she interprets *A Naked Man Being A Woman*, N.Y.C., 1968 thus:

⁵³M. Darsie Alexander, "Diane Arbus: A Theatre of Ambiguity," *History of Photography*, Vol. 19, No. 2, (Summer 1995), 120-123, 120. See Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weinstein, (New York: 1981), 183.

⁵⁴Alexander, 120.

⁵⁵Ibid. See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard, (New York: Farrer, Straus and Giroux, 1981), 31.

⁵⁶Alexander, 120. See Gus Blaisdell in the Afterword, *Joel-Peter Witkin: Gods of Heaven and Earth*, (Santa Fe: Twelvvetrees, 1989).

Arbus situates the subject in an in-between state, both literally and metaphorically. In the composition, he stands directly between two partially drawn curtains, which symbolically divide the space into downstage and upstage. In the theatre, the sphere of the downstage, located closest to the audience/spectator, is a public space, the site of drama and display. The upstage, forming the back half of the composition, might alternatively be labelled 'private', out of the immediate visual and psychological foreground.⁵⁷

Alexander declares Arbus's 'theatre' as "a site of living transformation, where actors are neither wholly defined nor limited by their nature."⁵⁸ This is illustrated by the man hiding his genitals between his legs while, with the exception of a handsome application of make-up on his face, he poses completely naked for the camera. Alexander describes this as the paradox of "display and disguise."⁵⁹ She also cites Carol Armstrong's article with reference to *A naked man being a woman*, claiming,

The condition that Armstrong insinuates, that the naked man engages in both acting and being (a body with both male and female attributes) is visually manifested by his location in between two realms—nature and theatre, privacy and display.⁶⁰

While one is convinced, quite literally by the image, of the man's 'acting and being,' Alexander does contradict herself by saying that his body has both male and female attributes. This is clearly not the case, and here again we are forced to make the distinction between the visual and the verbal, the natural and cultural. It seems that Alexander confuses the terms male/masculinity and female/femininity, misreads Armstrong, and misrepresents her argument in the process. Alexander seems confused about what is re-presented in the image, i.e., what we can see, and what we are told, through the title, i.e., *A naked man being a woman*. Armstrong on the other hand is quite clear about biological and self-constructed differences. In her article, Armstrong clearly states:

⁵⁷Alexander, 121.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

Though *A naked man being a woman* does not suggest any particular contradiction of 'nature,' it is at the same time fairly clear that his hiding of his penis does *not* make him a woman. His parody of femininity, for all this it is located in the body, does not make him female—all it makes of him is a man with a lean, graceful, more or less hairless body and a smooth, arched-eyebrowed, large-eyed face, made-up and posed to enhance the femininity of his features, and to *pretend* to be a woman.⁶¹

As mentioned earlier, we shall look into Armstrong's arguments more thoroughly in the next section of this chapter, but for now, let us return to Alexander. Pursuing her theme of masquerade, she progresses onto 'multiple selves, identities and realities' appropriating David Napier's argument in his book *Masks, Transformation and Paradox*, claiming that his "argument that the use of masks and disguise does not amount to a projection of a single and definable 'other' . . . offers some insight into Arbus's ambiguous positioning of what Napier calls 'the real' and 'the make-believe'."⁶² Alexander goes on to cite other examples of Arbus's monograph images, and although she seems to backtrack somewhat to her previous argument on male/female, masculine/feminine, she continues to attempt to stage her *Theatre of Ambiguity* by "reading within and between Arbus's photographs [revealing] a loosening of the boundaries between the natural and the enacted, the performance and that which is imitated."⁶³ Here Alexander considers *Two men dancing at a drag ball, N.Y.C., 1970*, compared with *Man dancing with a large woman, N.Y.C., 1967*, pointing out, "The difference is, of course, that one couple is a biological male/female duo while the other is not. The drag ball image features an elaborately dressed transvestite, bearing a wig, earrings and a feathered collar."⁶⁴ (We should bear in mind, however, the reason Alexander gives these seemingly superfluous descriptions is that there

⁶¹Armstrong, 50-51.

⁶²Alexander, 121. See David Napier, *Masks, Transformation and Paradox*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid.

are no images printed with her article.) Alexander goes on to speak of 'biological blurring,' declaring, "Were a visual appraisal of the images to be made without the aid of titles, ascertaining which 'woman' is female in fact versus female in fiction would prove difficult," concluding that, "Arbus's oeuvre is replete with excessively feminized male and female bodies, as both genders engage equally (though somewhat differently) in acting."⁶⁵ Before moving on to commandeer more characters for her set, but this time from *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, Alexander slots in a brief paragraph of "Samplings from elsewhere [in the monograph]."⁶⁶ She believes that these 'samplings' "attest to the potential (and often inevitable) fusion of 'the act' into 'the character'," and that, "Arbus's images of masked retardates, whose very frame of reference (and reality) is skewed, illustrates this merger."⁶⁷ While only three of the set of seven images titled *Untitled* and published in the monograph are of women in costume and wearing masks, and while four images show women in day clothes or bathing costumes, Alexander considers only the final image that shows a group of women wearing night clothes, some with masks, others with painted faces, giving a very cursory critique indeed:

Although a figure wearing what appears to be a nightgown presides, there is no clarification as to the nature of this event. Are the fanciful, clumsy, and oddly assembled outfits of the central figures costumes in a game of play-acting or are they the real garments of this unique set of individuals?⁶⁸

Strangely, there is no mention of biological differences, no mention of the fact that the subjects are all women; no mention of 'biological blurring' or indeed transvestism in respect of the young woman with the drawn on moustache [*Untitled*, 50]. Suddenly Alexander's preoccupation with detail, partially due to the absence of Arbus's photographs, seems to have

⁶⁵*Ibid.* See also, for instance, Diana Emery Hulick, "Diane Arbus's Women and Transvestites: Separate Selves," *History of Photography*, Vol. 16, No. 1, (Spring 1992), 34-39.

⁶⁶Alexander, 121.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

vanished: there is no description of the physiognomic signs of Down's syndrome on the face of the young woman in the centre of the group, the one bearing the moustache, and the only figure who is full face to the camera. It is *this* woman who presides in the photograph, and not the older woman leading her by the hand as Alexander would have us believe.

This surreptitious side-stepping leads us to conclude that Alexander's academic performance only perpetuates ambiguity, with regard to the *Untitled* photographs at least. But then, as outlined in the preceding section, Alexander is not the only procrastinator. Although the articles discussed present stimulating arguments relating Arbus's photographs to literature and the notion of ambivalence (Jeffrey), hybrid aesthetics and the comic grotesque (McPherson), and nature, theatricality and ambiguity (Alexander), all three historians give the *Untitled* images no more than a sideways glance. Similarly, these historians have adopted certain contentious terminology and styles of expression. But let us move on now to another writer, Carol Armstrong, whose essay approaches a number of topics in Arbus's work that are of concern to us in this thesis.

2.2 Armstrong on Arbus

Armstrong's article is often referenced by other historians, and is of particular interest here as Armstrong deals with precisely the issues given in her title: *Biology, Destiny, Photography: Difference According to Diane Arbus*. That said, she is prone to some academic indecision, however, with regard to adequately transmitting her own personal beliefs in respect of Arbus's work, and we shall reflect upon this later in this section.

Setting aside for the moment the issues discussed in section 1.2 of chapter one, namely those of the Estate of Diane Arbus, their censorship

policies, and the resulting backlash that precedes Armstrong's article, let us consider the photographs discussed within it. After a general opening statement where she mentions procreation, genesis, genetics, and most emphatically, 'the flaw,' Armstrong declares, "The topic of this essay is the Aperture monograph, Arbus's photographs as they appear in it, and the ways in which the monograph and its photographs might or might not contain a thematics of gender," though she later concedes, "I address the Aperture monograph because it gives me the best access to Arbus's (*or at least the Arbus estate's*) construction of her practice (my emphasis)."⁶⁹ Armstrong readily points out that her "thematics of gender" is quite a separate issue from whether Arbus's photographs are "overtly feminist," concluding categorically that "they are not":

While Arbus photographed important members of the feminist movement of the sixties and seventies, among them Germaine Greer and Ti Grace Atkinson, she was no believer. Even if the anecdotes contained in Patricia Bosworth's biography are not to be trusted, there is evidence aplenty in the images that she had not signed on.⁷⁰

But Armstrong does not cite any examples of the images she might be referring to, and so one is left completely in the dark in respect of Arbus's supposed non-involvement in feminist politics or practice. Armstrong then concedes, "Of course [the photographs'] production was conditioned by gender (and other) constraints and gender (and other) ideologies of the day."⁷¹ But she decides to turn a blind eye to this, stating:

I am simply less interested in investigating and giving an explanatory account of those conditions than I am in *reading* the photographs, reading the book of which they are a part, and reading in them Arbus's self construction as a *photographer*. So I leave aside the mythological area of Arbus's biography. I leave aside the material conditions of her practice and the ideological field in which she practised . . . and the specifically American, specifically New York City culture of the carnivalesque to which she was attracted, as well as the social and historical reasons for

⁶⁹Ibid., 33-34.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid.

that attraction. (I also do not mean to moralize about the questionable morality of her images, about the rightness or wrongness of photographing "freaks" —a question that interests me not at all, I must admit.)⁷²

Divesting them of their history and their social context, and without any consideration of ideological forces, one can only presume that Armstrong herself intends to imbue Arbus's photographs with meaning. She is quick to reference Susan Sontag's opinion, however, albeit relegated to a footnote. Sontag, in her essay, "America Seen Through Photographs, Darkly" gives an historically and socially contextualised discussion of the photographs, which Armstrong does not dispute:

I do not at all disagree with [Sontag's] summation of the politics and class position of Arbus's photography: as inflected by glamour industry strategies, by the distance, disinterestedness, and access of privilege, and by bourgeois conceptions of otherness—and, one could add, by a peculiar version of "family values."⁷³

Here, again, Armstrong offers no clarification of what she might mean by 'peculiar version of family values,' or indeed, what she believes impeccable family values to be. Although she previously practically condemned moralising in respect of Arbus's work (her tone suggesting that this was an irrelevant, overdone, even passé approach) it now seems that Armstrong throws in this moral aside just for good measure. She states in her footnote: "A body of images can entail both kinds of politics, [sociohistorical and gender], and those politics can easily be (indeed, often *have* to be) out of sync with one another. Such is the case, I believe, with Arbus's work."⁷⁴

Thus, clearly setting aside her criticisms in order to liberate herself from the methodological quagmire, Armstrong forges into the monograph, giving a lengthy three pages run-through of the more formal aspects of the

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid. See Sontag, "America Seen Through Photographs, Darkly," 27-48. Armstrong believes that the discussion offered by Sontag is based on a 'formalist' politics, however, ("more to do with image systems and medium definitions") rather than social ideology.

⁷⁴Alexander., note 10.

publication. She mentions the number of images, pages of text, style of titling— "each informing the reader as to *physiognomic* type . . . (my emphasis)"⁷⁵ —and range of subjects claiming,

The photographs are organized according to the same principles as those of the MOMA "New Documents" show of 1967, in which Arbus showed thirty-some examples of her work . . . For that reason and others, I think it is fair to accept the estate's posthumous presentation of Arbus as representative of Arbus's presentation of herself.⁷⁶

Again, Armstrong does not state what the 'other' reasons might be, but she does concede in a footnote that the monograph has more than twice the number of photographs and that many of them were made after 1967, adding, "Most of the pre-1967 photographs that were in the 1967 show are also in the monograph."⁷⁷ While acknowledging that the monograph denies thematic or chronological coherence, Armstrong points out that the *Untitled* series of images is the exception to this rule.⁷⁸ In a footnote to this she admits, "(It should be indicated that this series is the one part of the monograph that is not representative of Arbus's "intentions" —either in its numbered and untitled titling [*sic*], or in its placement as a group at the end of the book.)"⁷⁹

Having already listed Arbus's photographs of 'mental retardates' amongst those of the midgets and the giants, the hermaphrodites and the transvestites, the twins and the triplets, the nudists and the families, Armstrong asserts:

The effects of this 'Chinese Encyclopaedia' principle of organisation are severalfold: to make any attempt at classification hard going; to desystematize the world of 'differences' explored in the photographs; to scatter and mix up the domains of 'freaks' and 'normals' and thus to dehierarchialize and horizontalize, to level

⁷⁵Ibid., 35.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid., note 12. Armstrong [mis]interprets Catherine Lord's article as already mentioned in section 1.1 of this chapter. With regard to the comparison between Arbus as "good-girl-gone-wrong" and Van Gogh as "mad genius," Armstrong observes, "(needless to say, the Arbus myth contains a gender twist on that topos)." Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid., note 12.

and equate them; to evoke both the irrational and the personal . . . to delinearize the production of the 'author'; and yet, finally to suggest that the subject of the book is 'Diane Arbus' and Diane Arbus's project, rather than this or that or those documentary topics per se.⁸⁰

Armstrong cites Derrida and 'the logos' as subordinate to Arbus and 'the flaw.'⁸¹ Quoting copiously from the written frontispiece of the monograph, she goes on to talk of "the masterful scopophilia of photography" and "the development of a sort of *id* theory of photography, in which many of the aspects of the medium that stand for technical mastery are treated to a kind of off-hand (yet nonetheless quite deliberate) irreverence."⁸² She goes on to describe Arbus's impiety for

⁸⁰Ibid., 35-36.

⁸¹Ibid., 31. As Armstrong develops her introduction from the biblical standpoint of Adam and Eve and their fall from the Garden of Eden, (employing Arbus's *A husband and wife in the woods in a nudist camp*, N.J. 1963 as visual exegesis) she interestingly, although unfortunately all too superficially, credits photography as having the ability to scrutinize, to locate and display 'the flaw,' while 'the logos' (even in its original meaning, as the word of God) cannot do so. In respect of the latter, Armstrong somewhat sketchily references Jaques Derrida's *On Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). She claims she wants to use Derrida's analysis of logocentrism "only in the terms that I think are appropriate to the visuality of Arbus's photographs. Thus, I will not particularly mean to call on the discussion of 'phonocentrism' that is so central to that discourse . . . (The implications of that discourse are more specifically textual and literary than they are visual. While I am sure it is possible to transfer the terms of the discourse into those of visuality, I'm not sure that it would work out usefully for this project.)" 31-32, note 5. That being the case, why reference Derrida and logo/phonocentrism at all? Armstrong says: "I will, however, mean to call on the hierarchical, binary logic of that tradition's system (according to which not only speech and writing, origin and representation, but also mind/soul and body, man and animal, man and woman, culture and nature, etc., are hierarchically opposed.)" Ibid. Armstrong appears to be idling in the region of visual 'languages' in relation to language proper (the stuff we speak and write). It seems she thought it useful to use this linguistic paradigm to introduce her list of linguistic binarisms.

⁸²Ibid., 36. Armstrong appears to use the term scopophilia to describe a form of intensified looking, (which would relate to Armstrong's earlier assertions about the ability of photography to scrutinize,) but coming as it does from Sigmund Freud's theories, *On Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), it seems a somewhat inaccurate use of the term in this context. Freud defines scopophilia under the sub-heading, *Touching and Looking*: "A certain amount of touching is indispensable . . . before the normal sexual aim can be attained . . . everyone knows what a source of pleasure . . . is afforded by tactile sensations of the skin of the sexual object . . . lingering over the stage of touching can scarcely be counted a perversion, provided that in the long run the sexual act is carried further. The same holds true of seeing . . . Visual impressions remain the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused . . . It is usual for most normal people to linger to some extent over the intermediate sexual aim of a looking that has a sexual tinge to it . . . on the other hand, this pleasure in looking [scopophilia] becomes a perversion (a) if it is restricted exclusively to the genitals, or (b) if it is connected with the overriding of disgust (as in the case of voyeurs or people who look on at excretory functions), or (c) if, instead of being preparatory to the normal sexual aim, it supplants it . . . The force which opposes scopophilia, but which may be overridden by it (in a manner parallel to what we have previously seen in the case of disgust), is *shame*." Freud, 69-70.

Armstrong also suggests an *id* theory of photography; let us again take recourse to Freud. Although it would appear that Armstrong is in fact describing something in the realm of 'the decisive moment' (the term coined by Henri Cartier-Bresson to describe the moment the unconscious mind of the photographer and the release of the camera shutter coincided). Armstrong's use of Freud's term, the *id*, seems inappropriate in this context, and is therefore misleading. In his short essay, *Sigmund Freud: A Sketch of his Life and Ideas*, James Strachey writes: "Quite late in his life, indeed, influenced by the ambiguity of the term 'unconscious' and its many conflicting uses, [Freud] proposed a new structural account of the mind in which the uncoordinated instinctual trends were called the 'id', the organized realistic part the 'ego', and the critical and moralizing function the 'super-ego'—a new account which has certainly made for a clarification of many issues." Ibid., 23. This seems to be an appropriate and salutary approach to take to one's own terminology and use thereof.

photography and the camera.⁸³ But Armstrong offers no further explanation for her use of the term scopophilia, or her personal 'id theory' either. We should then reproach Armstrong for using terms of theorists from other, and very specific, discourses (in this particular case, Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis) without clarifying their meanings within the context of her argument and article, and hence, the necessity to use such terms at all.

Finally Armstrong gets to the photographs, beginning with the only photograph in the monograph that is reproduced three times over: *Identical twins, Roselle, N.J. 1967* is shown on both the dust jacket and the front cover, and again inside the book.⁸⁴ She sets forth her analysis: "*Identical twins, Roselle, N.J.* displays two 'identical' products of biological reproduction—of genetic repetition. At first glance, it is the sameness of the two girls that counts—a sameness that . . . is biological."⁸⁵ But then she changes her binary tack, going on to say,

[The] sameness that is first biological [is then] culturally supplemented by the wearing of identical dresses. The frontal, nearly centred presentation of the two girls within the square of the image enhances the immediate reading of their sameness—by means of nearly symmetrical placing and almost-identical posing: one is led to notice . . . their 'identical' facial features . . . their 'identical' dresses, their 'identical' white stockings, their 'identical' white headbands with bobby pins, their 'identical' haircuts, their 'identical' postures.⁸⁶

⁸³Thus photography [for Arbus] is transformed from a technical apparatus and its effects into a magical, a voodoo, a demonic medium that, unearthing something from a 'deep place,' amounts to a kind of possession—an event in which one is inhabited, interrupted, taken over by the Other." Armstrong, 37. Here Armstrong writes with tone and terminology not so far removed from that of Patricia Bosworth, whose biography of Arbus Armstrong herself has strongly criticised. (e.g. "The anecdotes contained in Patricia Bosworth's unscrupulously lurid biographical fiction are not to be trusted." Ibid., 34.) Likewise, Armstrong's words about the medium of photography being 'demonic . . . a kind of possession' could be interpreted as having a connection with Arbus's pre-suicidal state of mind.

⁸⁴Armstrong only notes the image as appearing twice in the monograph, but perhaps the copy she refers to has no dust jacket. She goes on to note another of Arbus's photographs is reproduced twice in the monograph publication, but not fully so: *Child with a toy hand grenade in Central Park, N.Y.C. 1962* is seen within the context of another photograph showing Arbus herself, which forms part of the frontispiece and precedes the fifteen pages of text in the monograph. Ibid., 37. The image was made by Stephen Frank in 1970 during a class at the Rhode Island School of Design.

⁸⁵Ibid., 38.

⁸⁶Ibid.

Here Armstrong has transferred her point of focus from natural (biological) to cultural. She does return to the identical, the biological, in respect of the faces of the twins though:

Almost as immediately, indeed, almost in tandem with this perception of sameness, comes the awareness of slight differences, *brought on* by the perception of sameness and the *almosts* that go with it . . . The facial features of the two girls are *not* exactly the same, after all—the slight differences between them are enhanced by the slight differences in facial expression.⁸⁷

Armstrong then goes on to list the minutiae of discrepancies. Let us return, however, to her comments regarding the faces of the twins; she says that the features of the girls are not *exactly* the same, and these differences, albeit slight, are 'enhanced' by their facial expressions. This is refutable though in that Armstrong tries to bring both sides of the binary into play at once, that is, the natural/cultural polarity. In other words, to say that the facial expression changes the superficial features of the girls is one thing; but to suggest, as Armstrong appears to, that there is a biological difference between them, is quite wrong. Here we must take recourse to language again, for it is the interrelation, and consequent binding of the words 'identical twins' with the photograph re-presenting the two physiognomically identical twins, that conveys to us the two girls are the product of the wholly symmetrical splitting of one egg, and borne of genetic synthesis. Thus, their facial *expressions* are confined to the cultural category only.

Armstrong continues to list 'differences' within the image's symmetry, with more formal analysis of the space in which the twins are located. She returns to her theme of the 'flaw', that she has appropriated from Arbus herself, proclaiming:

Finally, there is the detail of the crack in the white wall at the upper left corner—literally a flaw in the perfect, white, everywhere-the-same surface that joins photographic detail to material fissure to the disruption of sameness and balance . . . the crack in the wall is a

⁸⁷Ibid.

demonstration of the way in which the intentionality of photographic framing and the essential unintentionality of the photographic detail work together. As a disturbance in the surface, the crack in the wall also represents the 'gap' between the 'intentionality' of sameness and the 'effect' of difference.⁸⁸

We are forced to consider here where Armstrong draws the line between the scene, the reality-that-was, and the photograph: the selective, representation of it. Her use of the term 'literally,' as well as her expression, 'a disturbance in the surface' suggests that, while she aims to connect them to photography metaphorically, she does not distinguish between the surface of the de facto wall and the two-dimensional surface of the photograph. This interpretation holds when read in the context of Armstrong's next assertion:

[The crack in the wall] . . . is a flaw that helps to point up the simultaneity of two productions of difference within sameness: namely, that of the physical world and that of the photograph, and more specifically, here, that of the biological or the genetic world and that of the photographic detail.⁸⁹

And so it would seem that Armstrong takes the realist position, that the photograph is transparent, its frame representing a window onto the world, or in her own words "the way in which the intentionality of photographic framing and the essential unintentionality of the photographic detail work together."⁹⁰ She goes on further, claiming:

The photograph quite literally shows how sameness mutates into difference by means of the flaw at both the levels of biology and of photography, all in the context of a subject matter thematizing the aberration of identicalness. In this way the photograph puts biological and photographic reproductive processes together—and instead of photography-as-apparatus, it represents photography-as-reproduction-as-mutation, and thus it signifies "Arbus," or at least Arbus's view of the medium.⁹¹

Since Armstrong's argument is based in her own nature/culture binary, she is quite wrong to say that the image "*literally* shows how sameness

⁸⁸Armstrong, 39.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid., 40.

mutates into difference . . . at both the levels of biology and of photography (emphasis mine)."⁹² The photograph has merely reproduced the identical twins, along with their *cultural* differences: the differences in the way their clothes hang in relation to the differences in their physical posture, the differences in their facial expressions, and so on. There is, however, no *essential*, no *biological* mutation. Thus, the conclusion that Armstrong draws—that "instead of photography-as-apparatus, it represents photography-as-reproduction-as-mutation"—appears illogical.⁹³

She goes on to include *Triplets in their bedroom, N.J. 1963*. Armstrong talks of their identicalness, both biological and cultural—their facial likeness, identical clothing and similar posing. Interestingly though, Arbus has not titled them *Identical Triplets*, and so, even though they look very, very similar indeed, it is to this photograph that Armstrong's argument would be better suited, if only in terms of *slight* biological, facial differences. Armstrong contrasts these two examples with another photograph, this time noting the cultural sameness of the *Two girls in matching bathing suits, Coney Island, N.Y. 1967*. She comments upon their clothing, their cultural sameness, and their bodies, their biological difference.

In the next section of her article, Armstrong resolves to thematize the photographs published in the monograph, into categories termed "reproductive units, unions, pairings and groupings."⁹⁴ Having already dealt with the genetic aspect of the twins and the triplets, she next considers couples: *A young man and his pregnant wife in Washington Square Park, N.Y.C. 1965* are dubbed "an explicitly reproductive pair."⁹⁵ One

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Armstrong goes on to draw a further conclusion: "The photograph puts biological and photographic reproductive processes together—and instead of photography-as-apparatus, it represents photography-as-reproduction-as-mutation, and thus it signifies 'Arbus,' or at least Arbus's view of the medium." Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid., 42.

cannot see any evidence of the woman's predicament, however, and accordingly Armstrong concedes, "The title tells us . . . [she] is pregnant."⁹⁶ She then moves on to the category of the family, citing a number of Arbus's photographs. For example, she points out the 'middle-upper' and 'lower' class difference between *A family on their lawn one Sunday in Westchester, N.Y. 1968* and *A young Brooklyn family going for a Sunday outing, N.Y.C. 1966* respectively. Although she concedes that "these families are socially contrasted by means of their different contexts [and] attire," the other differences that Armstrong cites—"[their] occupations . . . the alienated, Pinteresque, upper-middle-class, pop-music-publisher family [and] the married-at-sixteen, Italian-immigrant, garage-mechanic family" —are details from the article, *Two American Families* written by Arbus and published in *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 1968.⁹⁷ Within the context of the monograph though, there is no such information, (except the locations given in the titles) and certainly no mention of class distinction. Trite to say perhaps: instead of interpreting the two photographs as they appear in the monograph, Armstrong takes recourse to *linguistic* sources to furnish her analysis; such sources intimate information not available to the viewer of the monograph photographs in isolation.

Describing these families as 'normal,' Armstrong puts forth a nudist family and *A Jewish giant at home with his parents in the Bronx, N.Y., 1970* in counterpoint. But what is 'abnormal' about the nudist family? Certainly, they do not appear to have any biological deficiencies; their only 'defect' is cultural, in that they spend interludes naked as opposed to the

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Ibid., 43. Armstrong notes some discrepancies in the written article: the locations given for the families are Westchester, Conn., and the Bronx respectively. Armstrong comments: "So much for documentary and journalistic accuracy." She fails to note in the first instance though, that the article was written by Arbus herself, and so one might conclude that these mistakes are indeed attributable to Arbus. See Diane Arbus, "Two American Families," *The Sunday Times Magazine*, (November 10, 1968), 56-57. The article and photographs were later reprinted together, and again recontextualised, in Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus Magazine Work*, 106-107.

accepted clothed existence of western, *civilised* society; we should note here though that the nudists must take refuge in a colony to do so.

In respect of the Jewish giant, Armstrong claims the photograph "bridges two categories, that of the family and that of the genetic 'freak' or mutant (. . . the *Identical Twins* and [the] *Triplets* really fall into this category as well)."⁹⁸ The photographs of all three allow the viewer to marvel at the wonder of nature: the biological sameness of the identical twins and the triplets, and the biological difference in stature between the giant and his parents. Armstrong returns to the previously discussed family photographs, saying, "The child who joins and divides the Brooklyn family by the difference of his bloneness is also a 'retarded' child—as witnessed in . . . his unmanaged features and facial expression."⁹⁹ But again, Armstrong has taken recourse to the magazine article to determine that the boy is 'retarded.' When viewed in the context of the monograph, however, (which is, after all, the source that Armstrong purports to be examining) we cannot tell that the child is 'retarded.'¹⁰⁰ Armstrong proclaims,

[The] monograph ends . . . with a thematization of the genetic 'freak' or mutant . . . an untitled series of seven photographs of 'mental retardates' (many of whom appear to have the physical characteristics of people born with Down's syndrome) . . . it is fair to say not only that the monograph finishes with the most disturbing and difficult-to-look-at moment in Arbus's production, but also with an insistence upon the theme of genetic mutation that is much more overt than elsewhere, and which makes a particular, uneasy kind of sense out of the monograph's diverse forms of 'freakishness.'¹⁰¹

Armstrong follows this statement with an analysis of the *Untitled* images. Although she refers to them as 'mental retardates,' there is no mention of this being the subjects' condition in the pages of text from the Arbus

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰The boy's somewhat peculiar expression and squirming stance could be attributed to the fact that he simply needs to go to the lavatory to relieve himself. We cannot know that he is mentally retarded from the photograph alone.

¹⁰¹Armstrong, 44.

interviews that precede the main body of photographs in the monograph.¹⁰² While Diane Arbus does talk of attending a dance for handicapped people, she did not have her camera with her at this particular event.¹⁰³ Arbus does, however, mention a man she danced with: "He was retarded and visually he was not interesting to me at all because there was nothing about him that looked strange. He just looked like any sixty year old man. He just looked sort of ordinary."¹⁰⁴

Armstrong writes that many of the subjects in these final seven images in the monograph "appear to have the physiognomic signs of Down's syndrome."¹⁰⁵ In fact, all the subjects shown full face to the camera display corporal evidence of the syndrome. The remainder of the subjects are either seen in profile, looking away from the camera, or are wearing masks. Armstrong says,

The difficulty of this series is the difficulty of facing such faces and allowing oneself to scrutinize them—one feels, almost as much in these photographs as in life, the taboo against staring and the discomfort felt when one does stare at someone one feels, or wishes to feel, as so irrevocably other. That which unnerves, here, is the particular expression (and gesture) and excess of expression (and gesture) seem to come together in the eerie, uncontrolled place of 'physical darkness' in which the animate and the inanimate are combined and indistinguishable. It is worth noticing, in this regard, that the effect of alternating inanimately masked and covered faces with unmasked, uncovered, animately unmanaged faces is to expose the likeness rather than the oppositeness of the two kinds of visage.¹⁰⁶

But Armstrong's analogy is again based on her own nature/culture binary, and although drawing a comparison between biological, natural faces and superficial, cultural masks is consistent within Armstrong's approach, it still seems incongruous. She does not dwell on the issues of

¹⁰²There is, however, mention of their alleged condition on the inside back of the dust jacket of the 25th Anniversary edition of the monograph published in 1997: "Notable among [Arbus's] late works is a series of photographs she took at residences for the mentally retarded. UNTITLED (Aperture, 1995) is a collection of fifty-one of these photographs."

¹⁰³Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*, 6-7.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵Armstrong, 45.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

'mental retardation' and Down's syndrome, however, but instead goes on to make some interesting observations about biological and photographic reproduction. Armstrong considers the *Untitled* images as the final chapter of the monograph's 'photographic menagerie,' and returning to what she calls her 'id' theory of photography, concludes:

It defines photography as a medium that reproduces nature's reproductions and that, by its own replications, variations, and deviations, acts to show the mutation inherent in the world and its process of reproduction. Indeed it is not too much to say that it identifies the replicatory process of photography with biological reproduction and genetic mutation.¹⁰⁷

While photographic and biological reproduction can be *identified* with each other, genetic mutation is an altogether different matter. Photographs can certainly show genetic mutation in their subjects, but one cannot say that the process of photography is its counterpart.¹⁰⁸ Any manipulation of the image or process is, as is any hermeneutic analysis, an entirely cultural (and not biological) activity. And so, because Armstrong works with an interpretative approach, and because she often takes recourse to linguistic sources and contexts outside the monograph itself, she manages to draw analyses and conclusions that often seem inconsistent, tangential, or even discrepant. Thus, it is necessary to consider alternative approaches and employ alternative methodologies in order to better understand Arbus's work; not as Armstrong does, in attempting to better understand Arbus herself, but rather in an attempt to discern what the real conditions of existence of Arbus's *Untitled* series of images are. In other words, we should aim to comprehend how these photographs coexist in relation, not only to photographic theories, but to the social, economic and ideological conditions in which they were produced, and importantly, their relation to the medium of photography itself.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 47.

¹⁰⁸Although on these terms, digital photography would certainly be worthy of discussion.

III Methodologies

3.1 Formalism: Practice and Analysis

In the first section of this chapter we shall consider the practice and methodology of formalism before turning in the second section to discuss its apparent nemesis: iconography. The third section in this chapter concerns photography as a medium in its own right, where we shall look at photography and discuss the nature of representation. Photography presents manifold complexities in terms of 'art' and 'representation' since it is a composite of machine, science and optical image. There may be an 'art' to taking/making photographs, but is photography 'art' proper? And indeed, does it actually matter whether it is or not? What might the true nature of photography be, and what methods might be best employed to undertake such an inquiry? These investigations will inevitably throw up linguistic classifications within photography, including those seemingly analogous, but potentially disparate terms: realism and documentary. We should not limit such terms by definition, however, but instead, endeavour to 'account for' them in relation to Arbus's *Untitled* series of published works. But we shall attend to these matters at a later stage.

For now, there are two questions that must be addressed: firstly, what constituents determine photographic formalism in practice, and what constituents determine formalism and iconography as methodologies; and secondly, is it possible to conceive of these methodologies as separate entities, even polarities, or are they inextricably entwined together? Accordingly, such findings undoubtedly vary depending upon which medium is reviewed, in this case photography, and consequently the results of this research will no doubt lead to more questions about the nature and limitations of methodologies. Indeed, in respect of the specificities of photography as a

distinct medium, these findings might present more questions than can be answered within the constraints of this dissertation.

So for now, let us return then—albeit momentarily and for the sake of empirical location—to Carol Armstrong's article, *Biology, Destiny, Photography: Difference According to Diane Arbus* discussed in the previous chapter. While Armstrong dallies somewhat with Freud and psychoanalysis, Derrida and logocentrism, what she claims to deliver is an exposition of Arbus's photographs—those published in the monograph—from the perspective of formalism; and it is precisely her focus on formal analysis that exonerates her from using other methodologies that would serve to historicise, contextualise, and importantly, politicise, Arbus's works.

Armstrong's article relies heavily on the visual aspects of Arbus's photographs, and one could logically claim that Arbus herself worked predominantly on a formal basis: consider, for instance, the physiognomic differences between *Russian midget friends in a living room on 100th Street, N.Y.C. 1963* and *A Jewish giant at home with his parents in the Bronx, N.Y. 1970*. Or taken singularly, in the manner the photographs are presented in the monograph: Arbus compels us to marvel at the puerile bodies of the midgets propped into adult sized chairs, the residual memory of which contrasts with the towering, hunched figure of the giant, which in turn contrasts with those of his diminutive parents. Here Arbus presents the cardinal sin of her oeuvre: in her own words—the 'flaw.' Normality, abnormality—it's all the same thing in Arbus's book.

Arbus continues with the formal, physiognomic sameness shown between *Identical twins, Roselle, N.J. 1967*, and again with *Triplets in their bedroom, N.J. 1963*. The formal theme of sartorial sameness is simultaneously introduced here, with each respective set of biological

'miracles' wearing identical clothes.¹ Arbus pursues formal authenticity in *Two girls in matching bathing suits, Coney Island, N.Y. 1967*, showing, again, physical difference and again, sartorial identicalness. The formal elements of *A young Brooklyn Family going for a Sunday outing, N.Y.C. 1966* and *A family on their lawn one Sunday in Westchester, N.Y. 1968* are threefold: we become witness to the corporal, sartorial and domestic disparity between the two families.

Armstrong discusses all of these images, with the exception of that of the midgets. She does not, however, stay true to formalism as one might initially think, and as noted in the preceding chapter, Armstrong makes a number of departures into other areas; for example, she takes into consideration the titling of Arbus's works. Armstrong also takes recourse to other linguistic based sources, citing a number of articles that are written by Arbus, but which are not presented alongside the selection of images in the monograph.² Again, we shall return to such issues later; for now let us deliberate upon both the practice of photographic formalism, and the methodology of formal analysis.

It would appear that, chronologically speaking, there was a discernible shift towards photographic formalism, variously known as straight photography, or photographic modernism, in the early part of the 20th century. This occurred in reaction to the earlier pictorial 'constructions' made in the days when photography was heralded as the answer to the tedious requirements of Renaissance perspective and, perhaps more significant, the final solution to shoddy draughtsmanship; in short, 'painterly' photographs were the order of the day. If photography were capable of doing this, then to what other purpose was it necessary to put it? Photography, it seemed, had more than fulfilled its

¹To reiterate from the previous chapter: Armstrong describes the twins and triplets as genetic 'freaks.'

²The articles mentioned by Armstrong are instead published in Arbus & Israel, Diane Arbus: Magazine Work.

artistic obligations. By this time though, photography had also been seized by the masses, and all sorts of images—artistic and otherwise—began to emerge, as the new mechanical means of making came into common hands.

In his essay, *The Salon of 1859: The Modern Public and Photography*, Charles Baudelaire writes of his concern over aesthetic concepts in light of the revelation of photography to the civic masses in Paris:

[. . .] The exclusive taste for the True (so noble a thing when it is limited to its proper applications) oppresses and stifles the taste of the Beautiful. Where one should see nothing but Beauty (I mean in a painting . . .), our public looks only for Truth . . . The idolatrous mob demanded an ideal worthy of itself and appropriate to its nature . . . In matters of painting . . . the present day *Credo* of the sophisticated, above all in France . . . is this: '[. . .] I believe that Art is, and cannot be other than, the exact reproduction of Nature . . . Thus an industry that could give us a result identical to Nature would be the absolute of art.' A revengeful God has given ear to the prayers of this multitude. Daguerre was his Messiah.³

Of course Baudelaire cites only Daguerre as inventor, and presumably for two very good reasons: to discredit the Nationalistic sensibilities of his own people, the French, at that time; and importantly, because Daguerre's process afforded only a single image and not multiples, the photograph, or rather the Daguerreotype as his version is known, retains its analogousness to the original, singular, and therefore unique, painting.⁴ Baudelaire writes that since the Daguerreotype could replicate, or reproduce nature so exactly, the masses believed photography and art to be the same thing. Baudelaire lambastes:

From that moment on our squalid society rushed, Narcissus to a man, to gaze at its trivial image on a scrap of metal. A madness, and extraordinary fanaticism took possession of all these new sun-worshippers. Strange abominations took form. By bringing

³Charles Baudelaire, "The Salon of 1859: The Modern Public and Photography," *Frascina & Harrison*, 19-21, 19.

⁴Had Baudelaire cited the other, and indeed the first published inventor of photography—the Englishman William Henry Fox Talbot—neither his nationality nor his reproducible photographic process, known as the Calotype, would suit the purpose of his argument. See, for instance, Helmut & Alison Gernsheim, *L. J. M. Daguerre: The History of the Diorama and The Daguerrotype*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1956) and also, for instance, Gail Buckland, *Fox Talbot and the Invention of Photography*, (London: Scolar Press, 1980).

together a group of male and female clowns, got up like butchers and laundry-maids at a carnival, and by begging these *heroes* to be so kind as to hold their chance grimaces for the time necessary for the performance, the operator flattered himself that he was reproducing tragic or elegant scenes from ancient history. Some democratic writer ought to have seen here a cheap method for disseminating a loathing for history and for painting among the people, thus committing a double sacrilege and insulting at one and the same time the divine art of painting and the noble art of the actor.⁵

Already, the masses polluted, not only painting with their 'abominations,' but significantly, their visual squandering demoted photography itself, as art medium at least; as a result, the notion of photography as 'poor relation' to painting was thus perpetuated.

In the early part of the 20th century, the emphasis on form in painting was the precursor to the later era of 1960's modernism in the plastic arts: proponents Clive Bell and Roger Fry were instrumental to the cause, and highly influential on the thinking of the later art critic, Clement Greenberg.⁶ But both Bell and Fry work from the perspective of aesthetics, that is to say, they work with aesthetics as a philosophical discipline.⁷ Generally speaking, in philosophy, two questions are asked:

⁵Frascina & Harrison, 20.

⁶Bell and Fry's essays were written in the early part of the 20th century, and although they are both proponents of form in the plastic arts, they do make some interesting observations about the medium of photography and its relation to painting at this time. Also, their writings on form emerged at the same time photographers were recognising the unique merits of their medium, which precipitated a shift away from pictorialism towards photographic formalism (modernism). Additionally, Bell and Fry's influence can be detected in a number of Greenberg's essays. See, for instance, "American-Type Painting," Frascina & Harrison, 92-103.

⁷Clive Bell begins his essay, "The Aesthetic Hypothesis," *Introductory Readings in Aesthetics*, ed. John Hospers, (New York: The Free Press, 1969), first published in *Art*, (Chatto & Windus: 1914), by outlining what the viewer should expect to feel when faced with an art object. He describes it thus: "The starting point for all systems of aesthetics must be the personal experience of a peculiar emotion. The objects that provoke this emotion we call works of art. All sensitive people agree that there is a peculiar emotion provoked by works of art . . . This emotion is called the AESTHETIC emotion; and if we can discover some quality common and peculiar to all objects that provoke it, we shall have solved what I take to be the central problem with aesthetics. We shall have discovered the essential quality in a work of art, the quality that distinguishes works of art from all other classes of objects." 87.

Bell puts it succinctly enough, and goes on to announce what this quality is: "What quality is common to Sta. Sophia and the windows at Chartes, Mexican sculpture, a Persian bowl, Chinese carpets, Giotto's frescoes at Padua, and the masterpieces of Poussin, Piero della Francesca, and Cezanne? Only one answer seems possible—significant form." 87-88.

Now, we note that Bell's examples are examples from the plastic arts, from weaving, and from stained glass; we note therefore that he does not cite a lithographic example nor a photographic one as having 'significant form,' and yet both of these media can easily be described as having "lines and colors combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms . . . aesthetically moving forms." In Bell's case though, he is ultimately describing painting: painting as one of the most noble arts, a most reliable inducer of 'aesthetic emotion,' a most sovereign example of 'significant form.' Bell states that the suggestion of anything beyond pure form in

What do you mean? And how do you know? It is essential to clarify what the practice of aesthetics entails. The following passage is a definition of aesthetics (as opposed to art appreciation or art criticism) written by John Hospers in *Introductory Readings in Aesthetics*:

In aesthetics, we attempt (1) to clarify the basic concepts we employ in thinking and talking about the objects of aesthetic experience (which are usually, but not always, works of art—they may also be objects of nature, such as hillsides, trees, sunsets, and human beings). We are interested in words too, not for their own sakes, but only for the sake of clarity in identifying and handling concepts. Among the concepts constantly used in talking about aesthetic matters, the following are typical: the aesthetic; beauty (or aesthetic value); aesthetic meaning; symbolism; representation; expression; truth; art. But in aesthetics we also attempt (2) to answer certain questions in which these concepts are embedded—questions such as: Under what circumstances can a work of art be said to exist? When is an object beautiful? Is there any way of deciding, when there are varying interpretations of a work of art, which one is correct, or is there no such thing as correctness of interpretation? Are there any criteria for distinguishing good works of art from bad ones? Are the criteria of value, if there are any, the same in works of literature as in works of music, for example? If not, how and why do they differ? What is the relation of art to nature? Has art anything to do with truth, or with morality?⁸

This citation introduces the many aspects from which objects—be they supposedly art or otherwise natural phenomena—might be aesthetically considered, and as already mentioned, we shall deal with the concept of representation in the third section of this chapter. And indeed, much later, the issues of truth, morality and ethics will come under scrutiny as

painting—lines, colours and the relations between these—is beneath the realm of aesthetic emotion, is therefore merely 'descriptive painting' and is therefore not art.

See also, Roger Fry, "An Essay in Aesthetics," *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*. ed. Francis Francina & Charles Harrison, (London: Harper & Row, Ltd., 1982), 79-87. First published in *New Quarterly*, (1909).

⁸Hospers, 2. According to Hospers, "Art appreciation consists largely in looking at (hearing, reading, and so on) works of art, on different occasions and in different moods, so that one may gradually come to enjoy and savor everything in a work of art that is there to be enjoyed and savored. This appreciation may involve lectures, demonstrations, and informal conversations with others; but many equally well be silent, consisting only of repeated exposure to the works of art. Art criticism does consist of words, words about works of art and designed to be of help in understanding and appreciating the work (or the style, or the period) under scrutiny. If an essay in art appreciation is successful, it will enable the reader to see in the work of art many features, lines of connection, and subtleties of detail that he did not perceive before. Art criticism is a means to an end. Art criticism is usually best conducted in the college or university department—literature, music, painting, sculpture, architecture, dance—in which the student is exposed to the works of art themselves. The persons best qualified to engage in criticism of works of art in a certain medium are usually those who are the most steeped in works of art in that medium." *Ibid.*, 2.

well. But for the moment, let us contemplate another perspective from which photography might be considered, a perspective that removes both objective and subjective responses from the equation: phenomenology. In his essay, *Five Notes for a Phenomenology of the Photographic Image*, Hubert Damisch begins by stating:

Theoretically speaking, photography is nothing other than a process of recording, a technique of inscribing, in an emulsion of silver salts, a stable image generated by a ray of light. This definition, we note, neither assumes the use of a camera, nor does it imply that the image obtained is that of an object or scene from the external world.⁹

Essentially then, what Damisch describes is the print with no subject, or rather, the print where no external objects caused the image, but was instead the outcome of light exposed to a responsive surface: the contact print is photography at its most basic, scientific level. Damisch writes that, "The prime value of this type of [phenomenological] endeavour is to induce a reflection on the nature and function of the photographic image."¹⁰ One could draw analogies here to form in painting, but that would be an erroneous conception since both Bell and Fry are concerned with aesthetics, and emotional responses to form. This is exactly what Damisch sets out to argue against, and argues instead for a photography that has no aesthetic, no history and no function: its existence is purely phenomenological—the photograph as purely an object of appearances. But Damisch quickly acknowledges the difficulties in such an endeavour, and that a phenomenology of the photographic image is ultimately futile. He concedes:

[. . .] The full purview of a photographic document clearly involves a certain number of 'theses' which, though not of a transcendental order, appear nevertheless as the conditions for apprehending the photographic image as such. To consider a document of this sort like any other image is to claim a bracketing of all knowledge—and even, as we shall see, of all prejudice—as to its genesis and

⁹Hubert Damisch, "Five Notes for a Phenomenology of the Photographic Image," Liz Wells, ed. *The Photography Reader*, (London: Routledge, 2003), 87-89, 87.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 87.

empirical functions. It therefore follows that the photographic situation cannot be defined a priori, the division of its fundamental components from its merely contingent aspects cannot be undertaken in the absolute.¹¹

The formalist photographers who emerged in reaction to the earlier pictorialists were similarly unconcerned with the photograph as object as such, but rather concentrated on their increasing awareness of photographic realism; they conceived of photography as a transparent medium that was not a product of Art history, was not constrained by that history, but rather marked it by means of its own individual science. But modern photography's reproductive nature also ensured its utility, and photography was logically put to work in multifarious contexts. Resultingly, the early practitioners of photographic formalism were quite opposite: European formalism favoured social and political agitation, while in America, the emphasis was placed more on the subjective, and the images were more stylised. Abigail Solomon-Godeau describes the difference thus:

The radical formalism that structured the new Soviet photography had little to do with the Anglo-American variety that propelled the photography of Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand, et al. toward a fully articulated modernist position, although there were common grounds in the two formalisms—shared convictions, for example, that the nature of the medium must properly determine its aesthetic and that photography must acknowledge its own specific characteristics . . . Anglo-American formalism insisted above all on the autonomy, purity, and self-reflexivity of the work of art. As such it remained throughout its modernist permutations an essentially idealist stance. Such concepts, as well as related notions of immanence and transcendence, with the parallel construct of the promethean artist, were, however, anathema to the Russian formalists [such as Alexander Rodchenko and El Lissitzky].¹²

But what can these criteria—autonomy, purity, and self-reflexivity of the work of art—achieve when the object in question does not belong to the

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "The Armed Vision Disarmed: Radical Formalism from Weapon to Style," Richard Bolton, ed. *The Contest of Meaning*, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989), 84-107, 86. Solomon-Godeau goes on to discuss the shift in formalism, from 'weapon to style,' that resulted from Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's move from the Bauhaus school in Dessau and his appointment to the Institute of Design (the new Bauhaus) in Chicago.

plastic arts, is neither a painting nor a sculpture, but rather, a mechanically produced image—a reflection of the world, rather than a representation of it?¹³ While formalism exists in photography, we must ask ourselves, is there any advantage, or indeed, any validity, in contemplating photographs from the perspective of formal analysis? In so doing, it seems as though we are regressing perilously close to the old days of 'photography as art': pictorialism and aesthetics.

In 1920's and 30's America, Alfred Stieglitz photographed cloud formations and rural landscapes, while Edward Weston photographed still-lives—all manner of vegetables, shells and fungi in various configurations. But both were idealistic photographers, and their work celebrated nature as flawless, and somehow, timeless; their work, while adhering to the straight photography imperative of the modernist era, nevertheless put the autonomy of the image first, thereby ensuring its place within aesthetic formalism, and thereby ensuring its exclusion from the later classification of 'documentary' photography. For now though, let us return to Baudelaire, Bell and Fry in order to better understand the significance of the assault that photography had on painting—the ubiquitous link from which formalist photographers tried to extricate themselves.

At the time of photography's disclosure to an unsuspecting art world, André Malraux declared, "From today, painting is dead." Baudelaire laments:

Each day art further diminishes its self-respect by bowing down before external reality; each day the painter becomes more and more given to painting not what he dreams but what he sees [. . .] Could you find an honest observer to declare that the invasion of photography and the great industrial madness of our time have no part in this deplorable result?¹⁴

13 We might argue that photography is not a plastic art, but Jean-Claude Lemagny argues otherwise. See his essay, "Is Photography a Plastic Art?" trans. Thomas Gunther, *Poetics of Space: A Critical Photographic Anthology*, ed. Steve Yates, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 133-143.

14Fracina & Harrison, 21.

All efforts are garnered to preserve painting against the perceived onslaught of photography, hence the necessity of Bell, Fry, and others, to elevate form to the highest order of the work of art; the pictorialists and aesthetic modernist photographers did likewise. Merited as more material than representation, form is the aesthetic antidote for vulgar content.

It is clear in the words of Bell and Baudelaire that nature is nature, and art is not nature. Therefore, if photography merely replicates nature, photography cannot be art. Bell speaks of the 'sensitive people' who are somehow more equipped to respond to objects (paintings) aesthetically (they are more equipped to have an aesthetic response to 'significant form,' and can therefore appreciate that what they see is art), while Baudelaire speaks of 'the idolatrous mob' who are only interested in recognising in painting what they already know to exist in nature. Bell also states, demeritoriously, that less sensitive people, "When confronted by a picture, instinctively . . . refer back its forms to the world from which they came. They treat created form as though it were imitated form, a picture as though it were a photograph."¹⁵ Ironically though, these are the very convictions that cast the foundation from which documentary photography established its principals. The very fact that photography could replicate nature meant that—for the common people and the pragmatic alike—the tonal range of the photograph at least described something: recognisable forms found in nature, in the world they themselves lived, could be identified in numerous different versions of photographs.

But again, it is Roger Fry who offers a more complex hypothesis about art and nature, separating 'real life' from the 'imaginative life':

¹⁵Hospers, 93.

Man has the peculiar faculty of calling up again in his mind the echo of past experience . . . of going over it again, in 'imagination' as we say. He has therefore the possibility of a double life; one the actual life, the other the imaginative life. Between these two lives there is this great distinction, that in the actual life the processes of natural selection have brought it about that the instinctive reaction, such for instance, as the flight from danger, shall be the important part of the whole process, and it is towards this that [a] man bends his whole conscious endeavour. But in the imaginative life no such action is necessary, and, therefore, the whole consciousness may be focused upon the perceptive and emotional aspects of the experience. In this way we get, in the imaginative life, a different set of values, and a different kind of perception.¹⁶

In order to back up his claims to the existence of the 'imaginative life,' Fry gives the example of the cinematograph in that it remarkably "resembles actual life in almost every respect, except . . . the conative part of our reaction to sensations, that is to say, the appropriate resultant action is cut off."¹⁷ Fry goes on to describe how viewing a scene from real life in a mirror can perform the same function: we can witness the actions of real people, and while we may experience an emotional response, we are absolved from actually responding to the events by physically intervening:

In the mirror, it is easier to abstract ourselves completely, and look upon the changing scene as a whole . . . The frame of the mirror . . . does to some extent turn the reflected scene from one that belongs to our actual life into one that belongs rather to the imaginative life . . . Art, then, is an expression and a stimulus of this imaginative life, which is separated from actual life by the absence of responsive action. Now this responsive action implies in actual life moral responsibility. In art we have no such moral responsibility—it presents a life freed from the binding necessities of our actual existence.¹⁸

Is not the reflection of real life in the mirror, and its subsequent defection to the imaginative life, the very mechanics of photographic realism?¹⁹

In counterpoint to transcendence and universality, and the idealism of formalist or straight photography, documentary photography is

¹⁶Frascina & Harrison, 79-80.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 80-81.

¹⁹Fry's hypothesis could account for the notion of 'desensitisation' that is increasingly prevalent in discussions of photographic and film records of military conflict, famine, death and disaster.

invested with the authority to show how the world really is: documentary photography became linked with sociology, and in turn, became a euphemism for the recording of society's underclass. In America, the farmers of the depression, the overworked and underpaid factory workers, women, children, criminals, the unemployed, the demented and the physically defective, were all subjects worthy of the 'truth,' and their plight was shown through documentary photography.

Joel Eisenger writes:

The desire to document the American crises of the [1930's] and [1940's] put a tremendous emphasis on the authenticity of photography and its unequalled power to capture reality. In this atmosphere, issues of individual expression, which had been paramount for the Pictorialists and straight photographers, were entirely eclipsed. The central theoretical issue in documentary photography was that of truth. But the discussion of photographic truth in the thirties and forties was very narrow.²⁰

Nevertheless, documentary photography was a significant departure from the earlier classifications of the medium, and a move towards showing the real issues and conditions of people's lives—hence the extension of the term to 'social documentary' photography. Thus, photographic realism superseded aesthetic autonomy, and finally photography was employed for its logical purpose; the documentary photographers shunned the canon of Art—both pictorialism and photographic formalism—in favour of social reality, whilst acknowledging that their photographs may still be perceived as such:

[Documentarians] did not wish to avoid the perception of their work as art, but they felt it best to avoid some qualities commonly associated with art while embracing others. If their work was to appear to the public as art, it was to do so because of its capacity to dramatize the actual or to capture particular truths while simultaneously transcending them to reach a level of universal truth. But documentary work was not to become art on the basis of personal vision or artifice. Although documentary photography was, in fact, deeply personal and full of artifice, these qualities were considered too subjective, too manipulative (and for the more

²⁰Eisenger, 79.

leftist documentarians, too laden with associations of privilege) to serve social truth at a time of crisis.²¹

Finally, let us reconsider: is it little more than a hypothesis to say that the viewer separates representation of pure form as distinct from representation of subject—from content? At first glance, the photograph might be considered the ultimate representation of nature—indeed, Fox Talbot eloquently described his early works as drawn by *The Pencil of Nature*.²² Nevertheless, we have still to deal with the seeming discord between photographic form and photographic content, so let us take iconography to be our next methodological concern.

3.2 Iconography

"Iconography is that branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form."²³ This is Erwin Panofsky's opening statement in his introductory

²¹Ibid., 80-81.

²²The Pencil of Nature was the publication borne of Talbot's frustration over the popularity of the Daguerrotype; he wanted to show what was peculiar to his Calotype process (a negative from which multiple prints could be made) and the result was a seminal work in photography publishing. See Buckland, chapter 5, "The Pencil of Nature," 78-96. Buckland writes: "The Pencil of Nature, Talbot's declaration of paper photography as a vital new medium, is an inspiring and sagacious work. In the history of photography and of publishing it is a seminal achievement. Even today, Talbot's words and pictures give anyone interested in modern visual communications much to reflect on. For Talbot was a genius and his ideas show a profound understanding of the viewer of mechanically produced images. The Pencil of Nature was meant as a stimulus for exploring the world of photographically and encouraged readers to think creatively about the uses of the medium. Just as Talbot had been committed to laying a satisfactory technical foundation for photography, so now he felt he must lay a theoretical foundation for the function, too." Ibid., 78. In a reprinted version, (New York: 1968), Beaumont Newhall wrote in his preface that The Pencil of Nature's "importance in the history of photography is comparable to that of the Gutenberg bible in printing." Ibid., 83.

²³Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1972), 3. First published (England: Oxford University Press, 1939). Panofsky did not argue his iconographic method against Bell and Fry, however, but instead responded to the formalism of Wölfflin, Riegl, and Cassirer. For a discussion of these historians, as well as Panofsky, see Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1984). Holly writes: "When Panofsky began writing essays on art in the second decade of this century, the discipline of art history was dominated by a preoccupation almost exclusively with form. In essence, formalism had always devoted itself single-mindedly to the aesthetic properties of the work and had deliberately, even forcefully, wrenched the object from its historical situation and broader human surroundings. Formalists are interested in the genius of the artist only insofar as it becomes expressed in the individual work. For the most part, all information extrinsic to the experience of the individual work on its own terms is relegated to auxiliary status—whether the information is biographical, historical, or sociological. The "pure visibility" trend in art criticism and Wölfflin's stylistic approach to the history of art, both of which tended to treat the subject matter of a work as a "mere pretext" for the exercise and display of significant visual constructs, epitomize this tendency in art theory in general in the opening years of this century. A concern either with subject matter per se or with

to *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*. It is of interest to note Panofsky's descriptive terminology: that iconography is a 'branch' of the history of art, and that subject matter, meaning, or content, is separated out from form to be something distinguishable in its own right. At the end of this introductory though, Panofsky asserts that the three separate strata that make up his iconographical methodology in fact constitute the collective components of a totality—namely the work of art as a whole: "So that, in actual work, the methods of approach which here appear as three unrelated operations of research merge with each other into one organic and indivisible whole."²⁴ And this 'organic and indivisible whole' includes what has hitherto been known as form, but which is now subsumed as the first stratum in Panofsky's methodology.

Before embarking on any analysis of Panofsky's synoptical table, however, it is important to note that his text and methods are based in the plastic arts, in particular, those of the Renaissance. Now, we are hardly concerned with Renaissance sculpture and painting within this thesis since our interest lies in photography in general, and specifically with Diane Arbus's *Untitled* series of images. But there are a number of Arbus's earlier works that can be discussed under the classification iconography, and we shall look at those in due course. So let us turn now to Panofsky's table in which 'the object of interpretation' (the work of art) has three strata which are distinguishable within the object's subject matter and meaning.

The first stratum contains the primary or natural subject matter which is then subdivided into factual and expressional; beyond the identification of the elements of pure form—line and colour and their varying

cultivating the viewer's sense that the work is the product of an identifiable milieu was deemed an impediment to the proper appreciation of its aesthetic complexities." Holly, 24.

²⁴Panofsky, 17.

configurations in painting, forms and shapes of stone or metal in sculpture—the viewer apprehends these forms to represent objects, such as animals, persons, plants, and so on. Panofsky goes on to say that beyond this stage of formal representation leading to the identification of objects, there is the identification of their mutual relations as *events*, and the viewer perceives *expressional* qualities, such as pose or gesture, as well as other atmospheric conditions: "The world of pure forms thus recognised as carriers of primary and natural meanings may be called the world of artistic *motifs*. An enumeration of these *motifs* would be a pre-iconographical description of the work of art."²⁵ This 'pre-iconographical description' (in Panofsky's table) comes under the heading of 'act of interpretation.' Here, the 'equipment for interpretation' required by the viewer is simply practical experience, that is, a sense of familiarity with objects and events from actual life. Panofsky claims the 'controlling principle of interpretation' to be the history of style, which he defines as "insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, *objects* and *events* were expressed by *forms*."²⁶

The second stratum pertaining to the 'object of interpretation' comprises secondary or conventional subject matter. This consists of the world of images, stories and allegories, and the 'act of interpretation' here is iconographical analysis, but as Panofsky states, it is "iconographical analysis in the narrower sense of the word."²⁷ By this Panofsky means the accurate connection of artistic motifs, or compositions, with themes or concepts. He explains it thus:

A correct *iconographical analysis in the narrower sense* presupposes a correct identification of the motifs. If the knife that enables us to identify a St. Bartholomew is not a knife but a cork-screw, the figure is not a St. Bartholomew.²⁸

²⁵Ibid., 5.

²⁶Ibid., 15.

²⁷Ibid., 14.

²⁸Ibid., 7.

Unlike the equipment for interpretation required for pre-iconographical analysis—the simple recognition of represented forms due to our practical experience of life—iconographical analysis requires a familiarity with specific themes and concepts furnished by a knowledge of literary sources, accumulated either through reading or by vocal tradition:

[An] Australian bushman would be unable to recognise the subject of a Last Supper; to him, it would only convey the idea of an excited dinner party. To understand the iconographical meaning of the picture he would have to familiarise himself with the content of the gospels. When it comes to representations of themes other than biblical stories or scenes from history and mythology which happen to be known to the average 'educated person,' all of us are Australian bushmen. In such cases we, too, must try to familiarise ourselves with what the author of those representations had read or otherwise knew.²⁹

The third stratum in Panofsky's scheme is certainly more complex. Here the viewer must attempt to discern the intrinsic meaning or content of the work. Accordingly the 'act of interpretation' is more advanced, and this involves iconographical interpretation in a deeper sense, further described by Panofsky as 'iconographical synthesis.' And here is where things become more complicated: Panofsky cites the 'equipment for interpretation' to be "*synthetic intuition (familiarity with the essential tendencies of the human mind), conditioned by personal psychology and [world view].*"³⁰ Resultingly, the controlling principle of interpretation is the "*History of cultural symptoms or symbols in general (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, essential tendencies of the human mind were expressed by specific themes and concepts).*"³¹

Panofsky clarifies thus:

The interpretation of the *intrinsic meaning or content*, dealing with what we have termed '*symbolical*' values instead of with *images, stories and allegories*, requires something more than a familiarity with specific *themes or concepts* as transmitted through literary

²⁹Ibid., 11-12. Although I have quoted Panofsky's example where he suggests that Australian bushmen are 'uneducated,' I do not concur that this is the case.

³⁰Ibid., 15. Panofsky, in his native language, uses the term *Weltanschauung* which I have translated here to 'world view.'

³¹Ibid.

sources. When we wish to get hold of those basic principles which underlie the choice and presentation of motifs, as well as the production and interpretation of images, stories and allegories, and which give meaning even to the formal arrangements and technical procedures employed, we cannot hope to find an individual text which would fit those basic principles as John xiii, 21 ss. fits the iconography of the Last Supper.³²

In this his third stratum of iconographical methodology, Panofsky recognises the limitations of the previous two strata, and that not all works can be neatly interpreted by practical experience (awareness of objects and events) and literary sources and materials alone. Panofsky admits,

To grasp these principles we need a mental faculty comparable to that of a diagnostician, —a faculty which I cannot describe better than by the rather discredited term '*synthetic intuition*,' and which may be better developed in a talented layman than in an erudite scholar.³³

He goes on to say that this intuitive approach should always be subject to the 'correctives and controls' established by pre-iconographical description and iconographical analysis in the narrower sense (strata one and two). The intuitive approach is both 'subjective and irrational,' and Panofsky warns: "When even our practical experience and our knowledge of literary sources may mislead us if indiscriminately applied to works of art, how much more dangerous would it be to trust our intuition pure and simple!"³⁴

We might consider then that it is fruitless to try to *understand* a work of art on the basis of formalism alone, for example in the manner of Clive Bell. Rather, it is only possible to appreciate form for its aesthetic properties. Indeed, Panofsky relegates form to a substratum in representational works of art: what the forms, lines and colours *represent* is one line of inquiry towards meaning, through iconographical methodology. Although Panofsky utilised his extensive knowledge of

³²ibid., 14.

³³ibid., 14-15.

³⁴ibid., 15.

literary sources for his readings of Renaissance works of art, he concedes that not all works come as directly recognisable representations of figures and stories of literary and mythical derivation. Panofsky asserts:

The art historian will have to check what he thinks the *intrinsic meaning* of the work, or group of works to which he devotes his attention, against what he thinks is the *intrinsic meaning* of as many other documents of civilisation historically related to that work or group of works . . . documents bearing witness to the political, poetical, religious, philosophical, and social tendencies of the personality, period or country under investigation.³⁵

Let us turn then to some examples of writing about Diane Arbus's photographs to better understand how Panofsky's methodology could be said to function in respect of photography. The essays written by Ian Jeffrey, Marie Czach, Diane Zuliani and Nigel Warburton all discuss various literary influences or make literary comparisons in relation to either Arbus herself, or her practice and resulting works.³⁶

For instance, Jeffrey initially considers Arbus's approach to photography as analogous to Philip Roth's approach to writing, before claiming that Arbus herself is analogous to Roth's protagonist in his novel, *When She Was Good*, who "lives subject to an idealising imagination in relation to which the world of actualities is hopelessly flawed."³⁷ It seems that Jeffrey has located a literary source that reveals a fictional character to have a mentality, or psychological tendency, which he in turn aligns with that of Arbus. Indeed, Jeffrey considers Arbus to be closer to Roth in her outlook than many of her contemporaries in photography.³⁸ Can we say though that this sort of correlation in some way contributes to our understanding of Arbus's photographs?

³⁵Ibid., 16.

³⁶Ian Jeffrey, "Diane Arbus and the Past: When She Was Good," *History of Photography*, Vol. 19, No.2, (Summer 1995), 95-99, Marie Czach, "Diane Arbus, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton: Astringent Poetry & Tragic Celebrity," *Ibid.*, 100-106, Diane Zuliani, "Diane Arbus & Franz Kafka: Canine Investigations," *Ibid.*, 127-129, Nigel Warburton, "Diane Arbus & Erving Goffman: Presentation of Self," *Ibid.*, 130-131.

³⁷Jeffrey, 43. See Philip Roth, *When She Was Good*, (Random House: New York, 1967), cited by Jeffrey.

³⁸See chapter 1, note 2, and chapter 2, note 30 for Arbus's influences according to Jeffrey.

Let us consider another, similar example: Marie Czach, in a decisively salient measure, discusses the issue of suicide and poetry, this being the obvious connection between Arbus and the poets Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton.³⁹ Czach does assert further literary (and other) connections, however:

There were other tangential, odd moments when the lives and work of these women intersected: Arbus and Sexton held Guggenheim fellowships. Plath and Sexton attended . . . classes at Boston University, met after class and discussed suicide . . . Sexton wrote a poem about Plath's death . . . Plath and Sexton occasionally wrote poetry about photographs . . . Arbus's immediate family [provided] literary influences. [Her] brother, the distinguished poet, Howard Nemerov, wrote thoughtfully about the differences between photography and poetry, on the distinction between photography and language.⁴⁰

Czach goes on to say that the publication, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work* "demonstrates that [Arbus] could be a writer of graceful prose, marked by Blakean cadences."⁴¹ While Czach's essay covers a more diverse range of observations than only suicide, sometimes considering social and political factors, such as the sites of publication of their works, and that the three women made intriguing subjects for writers with a feminist agenda, she does earlier state: "It is an inescapable fact that suicide informs every facet of Arbus's, Sexton's and Plath's work."⁴² How so? The act of suicide was the final, mortal gesture of these women. While it seems logical to view their work and practice from this perspective now—that 'suicide informs every facet of [their] work'—after the event, we might consider instead: how far did their lives and work precipitate their suicides? But these examples are better understood in terms of the third stratum of Panofsky's method: these relations are drawn between Arbus's photographs and the practice of Roth, Sexton and Plath.

³⁹Cf. Armstrong, Sontag, Lord.

⁴⁰Czach, 102.

⁴¹Ibid., 103.

⁴²Ibid.

A final example here in line with Panofsky's second stratum iconographical method: Diane Zuliani makes clear links between some of Arbus's photographs and the writings of Franz Kafka, citing Kafka's short story, *Investigations of a Dog*, (1924) as the influence behind one of her first photographs; Arbus apparently recounted a story to students who attended the classes she held in 1971 in her apartment in Manhattan, telling them that, "One of the first pictures I ever took must have been related to that story because it was of a dog."⁴³

Zuliani goes on to discuss the connection between a series of Kafka's short stories titled, *A Country Doctor*, drawing comparisons between the eponymous story and the photographs Arbus made of Dr. Gatch, although Kafka's story was written more than 50 years earlier.⁴⁴ According to the article accompanying Arbus's photographs, Dr. Gatch arrived at the bedside of an elderly woman who lived in an impoverished and remote settlement. When Dr. Gatch lifted her hand to check her pulse, her skin came away in his hand. He said, "I knew she was not dead . . . The skin felt alive in my fingers."⁴⁵ It turns out the woman's body was completely infested with maggots. This is very similar to the plight of the patient in Kafka's story, in this case, a young boy. When the doctor examines the wound in the boy's side, he discovers

a sight to make anyone whistle under his breath. Worms of the thickness and length of my little finger, rosy with their own blood as well as being flecked with it, are fastened inside the wound, wriggling their little white heads and many legs towards the light.⁴⁶

It is of course highly likely that Arbus knew of Kafka's country doctor story, as she had already indicated her knowledge of *Investigations of a*

⁴³Arbus quoted in Zuliani, 127. No source given.

⁴⁴"Let Us Now Praise Dr. Gatch," Arbus & Israel, Diane Arbus: Magazine Work, 100. The images are accompanied by the text written by Bynam Shaw, re-printed alongside Arbus's photographs. They were originally published in *Esquire*, (June 1968), 108-111, 152-156. According to Zuliani, Kafka's series of short stories were written between 1916 and 1918, but no source is given.

⁴⁵Dr. Gatch quoted in Bynam Shaw's essay, a fragment of which has been reprinted as part of the magazine style configuration in Arbus & Israel, Diane Arbus: Magazine Work, 100.

⁴⁶Kafka quoted in Zuliani, 128.

Dog. It would be quite wrong, however, to suggest that Arbus tried in any way to illustrate Kafka's story; the reason being that photography is a denotative medium and not an illustrative one, that is, photography cannot illustrate a text due to its causal relation to reality. Zuliani lists other similarities between their works:

Kafka's characters live out real everyday lives in the realm of the nightmarish and the absurd. The same characterisation applies equally well to Arbus. In the work of each, empirical explorations lead to the ironic and the improbable.⁴⁷

But Zuliani confuses the issues of real everyday lives, the absurd and the fictional. Hence, Zuliani is wrong to consider Kafka's practice as 'empirical': Kafka was a writer of fiction. One could hardly call the existence of the dying woman attended by Dr. Gatch as 'ironic and improbable.' Even though Arbus did not photograph the woman, the purpose of the assignment was to show the real conditions in which these people lived at that time, and this is what Arbus presented through the photographs, which were originally printed in *Esquire*.⁴⁸ Zuliani claims, "Kafka's and Arbus's subjects occupy a strikingly similar realm, a sphere of dark fables peopled by the hopeless and diseased in the respective country doctor stories."⁴⁹ But the existence of the poverty stricken in a poor community in Southern Carolina is hardly a 'fable,' as Arbus's images testify. While certain subject elements may provide grounds for analysis between the writer and photographer, Zuliani's approach highlights the problem of comparing different media which results in showing more disparities than similarities. In the absence of photographic evidence of the woman's body ridden with maggots, Zuliani can only compare the two written versions of events: one fictional, by Kafka, the other fact, according to Bynam Shaw who interviewed Dr. Gatch. Effectively then, the assessment offered by

⁴⁷Zuliani, 128.

⁴⁸See note 51 for full reference.

⁴⁹Zuliani, 128.

Zuliani is one between the writing of Kafka and the writing of Shaw, and not an iconological method of analysis of Arbus's photographs as her essay would suggest. Zuliani does proclaim however, "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."⁵⁰

This posits the question: is it possible for the photograph to be a simple illustration, or rather, representation of a text, without being an altogether separate system of communication? The crux of the matter appears to lie with the nature of representation itself. We shall take this to be our point of departure to the third section in this chapter, where we shall consider the questions: Is photography a representational art? And if not, what sets it apart, and why?

3.3 Representation: Scruton and Photography

In his book, *The Aesthetic Understanding*, Roger Scruton covers a diversity of topics, such as *The Aesthetics of Music*, *The Nature of Musical Expression*, and *Representation in Music*, as well as questioning the spheres of *Emotion and Culture*, *Laughter*, and *Art History and Aesthetic Judgement*. The latter essay is one we may return in due course to, but in this section let us focus entirely on another of Scruton's treatises in this volume: that of *Photography and Representation*.⁵¹

Now, as we noted at the end of section 3.1, Bell has unmitigated contempt for representation, while Fry acknowledges that where form

⁵⁰Ibid. Arbus said: "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 it's the real dog life of a dog. Actually, one of the first pictures I ever took must have been related to that story because it was of a dog. This was about twenty years ago and I was living in the summer on Martha's Vineyard. There was a dog that came at twilight every day. A big dog. Mind 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, no licking, just looking right through you. I don't think he liked me. I took a picture of him but it wasn't very good." Arbus quoted in Arbus & Israel, Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph, 8.

⁵¹Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetic Understanding*, (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, Ltd., 1983). See chapter 9, "Photography and Representation," 102-126.

ends and representation begins is not something that he wishes to attempt to substantiate. Panofsky's iconographical method relies heavily on literary sources and 'intuition' (the essential tendencies of the human mind) to search for intrinsic meanings or content, and form is regarded purely as the means to represent something or someone. But as their interest was essentially within the medium of painting, let us turn our attention to the medium under discussion in this dissertation: that of photography, although Scruton begins his essay by musing:

It seems odd to say that photography is not a mode of representation. For a photograph has in common with painting the property by which the painting represents the world, the property of sharing, in some sense, the appearance of its subject. Indeed, it is sometimes thought that since a photograph more effectively shares the appearance of its subject than a typical painting, photography is a better mode of representation.⁵²

Scruton goes on to say that it is of great importance to separate painting and photography as far as possible, in order to get to grips with his assertion that photography is not a representational art. Thus he dismisses the word representation entirely, replacing it with the double act of 'actual' painting and 'actual' photography, in order to favour an 'ideal' form of each medium.⁵³ And even if we were inclined to feel a certain scepticism towards Scruton's use of terminology, and his distinction between 'actual' and 'ideal,' he makes clear enough that, "The ideal of photography is not an ideal at which photography aims or ought to aim," (103) and describes 'ideal' photography as being, "On the contrary . . . a logical fiction, designed merely to capture what is

⁵²Scruton, 102. He goes on to say: "Painters have felt that if the aim of painting is really to reproduce the appearances of things only so as to capture the experience of observing them (the impression) and that the accurate copying of appearances will normally be at variance with this aim. Here we have the seeds of expressionism and the origin of the view (a view which not only is mistaken but which has also proved disastrous for the history of modern art) that painting is somehow purer when it is abstract and closer to its essence as an art." Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., 103. From here on in this section, material quoted from Scruton will be noted in the main text by page number. As an aside: Scruton claims that, "Actual photography is the result of the attempt by photographers to pollute the ideal of their craft with the aims and methods of painting." Scruton, 103. Can it not be said then that 'actual' painting (from the invention of photography onwards, of course) is the result of the attempt by painters to pollute the ideal of their craft with the aims and methods of photography? Think, for instance, of Degas' work, or more recently, the work of Gerhard Richter.

distinctive in the photographic relation and in our interest in it." (103) So what is this 'photographic relation' that Scruton speaks of?

The ideal photograph also stands in a certain relation to a subject: a photograph is a photograph *of* something. But the relation here is causal and not intentional. In other words, if a photograph is of a subject, it follows that the subject exists, and if *x* is a photograph of a man, there is a particular man of whom *x* is the photograph. In characterising the relation between the ideal photograph and its subject, one is characterising not an intention but a causal process, and while there is, as a rule, an intentional act involved, this is not an essential part of the photographic relation. The ideal photograph also yields an appearance, but the appearance is not interesting as the realisation of an intention but rather as a record of how an actual object looked. (103)

It is necessary though for Scruton to return to painting because his argument is to determine, not simply that photography is not a representational art, but also that painting is. He explains why:

The ideal painting stands in a certain 'intentional' relation to a subject. In other words, if a painting represents a subject, it does not follow that the subject exists nor, if it does exist, that the painting represents the subject as it is. Moreover, if *x* is a painting of a man, it does not follow that there is some *particular* man of which *x* is the painting. Furthermore, the painting stands in this intentional relation to its subject because of a representational act, the artist's act, and in characterising the relation between a painting and its subject we are also describing the artist's intention. The successful realisation of that intention lies in the creation of an appearance, an appearance which in some way leads the spectator to recognise the subject. (103)

Returning again to painting, Scruton's position is that of Fry, and at odds with Bell, in that Scruton maintains the represented object and the material object (the painting itself) to be almost indistinguishable. This, according to Scruton, is because "we can never separate our experience of human activity from our understanding of intention . . . [and] in the case of a picture we are dealing with an object that is manifestly the expression of thought." (104) In short, painting is an intentional act: it is the expression of the painter's thoughts about her chosen subject/object and her intention is to represent that subject/object by means of that medium. Painting is a representational act. Henceforth, photography is

also an intentional act. But the photograph is not the result of the photographer's intention to represent her subject/object because it is the subject/object combined with the scientific process of photography that together *cause* the reflected image of the subject to be recorded. Therefore photography is not a representational act.⁵⁴ The logical question then is: Despite these definitions of the two media in terms of representation, can they both be considered Art? According to Scruton they cannot, and this is due to the factor of the aesthetic interest of the viewer in representation, which is present only in painting:

Aesthetic interest in something is an interest in it for its own sake: the object is not treated as a surrogate for another; it is itself the principal object of attention . . . an aesthetic interest . . . must also involve a kind of interest in the picture and not merely in the thing represented [. . .] it could not be said that the painting is being treated as a surrogate for its subject: it is itself the object of interest and irreplaceable by the thing depicted [. . .] such an interest is not, and cannot be, an interest in the literal truth of the picture. (109-110)

Since photography is not a representational art, it does not, or rather cannot, arouse aesthetic interest in the viewer. This is due to photography's causal relation to reality, photography's ability to reproduce nature, as opposed to creating a fictional interpretation of nature as in painting:

The photograph lacks that quality of 'intentional inexistence' which is characteristic of painting [. . .] this fictional incompetence . . . severely limits the aesthetic significance of 'representation' in photography . . . representation in art has special significance precisely because of the possibility that we can understand it—in the sense of understanding its content—while being indifferent to, or unconcerned with, its literal truth. That is why fictional representation is not merely an important form of representational art but in fact the primary form of it. (112)

It seems we have now spent a considerable time concerning ourselves with the medium of painting. We have discovered the reasons Scruton classifies painting as art. And so what, then, is photography? What might

⁵⁴In section 3 of his essay, Scruton digresses into a 'semantic theory of art,' but this is of no relevance to this particular discussion on the nature of representation. See Scruton, 106-108.

the nature of photography be, and how might it function independently, out of the shadow of painting?

Thus Scruton sets about arguing against his already established claim that photography is not a representational art. He suggests ways in which the photograph might be considered to have representational features, and he reflects upon the ways in which the photographer might intervene in the causal process which would in turn cause representational qualities to manifest themselves. Scruton also ponders the choices the photographer makes in the first instance: can her very choice of subject constitute intentional thought? And if any, or all, of these claims can be substantiated, can photography then be said to be a medium competent enough to illicit an emotional response? And as a result, can photography join the noble ranks of the aesthetic? In other words, is photography a representational art? Scruton contends that,

Our attitude toward photography will be one of curiosity, not curiosity about the photograph but rather about its subject. The photograph addresses itself to our desire for knowledge of the world, knowledge of how things look or seem. The photograph is a means to the end of seeing its subject; in painting, on the other hand, the subject is the means to the end of its own representation. The photograph is transparent to its subject, and if it holds our interest it does so because it acts as a surrogate for the thing which it shows. Thus if one finds a photograph beautiful, it is because one finds something beautiful in its subject. A painting may be beautiful, on the other hand, even when it represents an ugly thing. (114)⁵⁵

Here Scruton has hit upon the very thing that others purported to be the 'death' of painting: the viewer of the photograph has no interest in the photograph for its own sake, that is, for its formal elements, but is only

⁵⁵Someone might accept the general difference I have indicated between an aesthetic interest and an attitude of curiosity, and accept too the implication that something is a representation only if it is capable of carrying a reference to its subject without merely standing as a surrogate for it. He might still argue, however, that it is possible to be interested in a photograph as a photograph and find it, and not just its subject, beautiful. But what is it to be interested in a photograph as a photograph? Of course one might have a purely abstract aesthetic interest in a photograph—an interest in the photograph as a construction of lines and shapes (as one is intended to appreciate Man Ray's *Rayogrammes*, for example). One can have a purely abstract aesthetic interest in anything; photography is only a representational art if our interest in a photograph as a photographic 'representation' is a type of aesthetic interest." Scruton, 114-115.

interested in its subject matter—the content of the photograph. This conflicts with everything that is unique in painting—representation.

Let us turn to the subject of the photograph. Since photography can replicate nature so precisely, and by mechanical means, there is no barrier (no representation) between the subject and the viewer. While Scruton says that the photograph also incites aesthetic interest, and brings about an emotional response, as paintings do, in photography these are entirely subject/content related. In terms of claims of 'truth' in painting and 'truth' in photography, Scruton asserts:

Truth is aesthetically relevant only insofar as it may be construed as truth to the situation presented rather than 'truth to the facts'. From the point of view of aesthetic interest, it is always irrelevant that there should be a particular object which is the object represented or, if there is such an object, that it should exist as portrayed [. . .] it is at least natural that we should be interested in [photographs] both because they are true to the facts and because they tell us useful things about their subject-matter . . . the emotional or 'aesthetic' qualities of a photograph tend to derive directly from the qualities of what it 'represents': if the photograph is sad, it is usually because its subject is sad; if the photograph is touching, it is because its subject is touching, and so on. It is worth reflecting that there could not be a photograph of a martyrdom that was other than horrifying. *One's curiosity here would be no different from one's curiosity in the act itself.* Hence it would be as difficult (and perhaps also as corrupt) to have an aesthetic interest in the photograph as it would be in the real situation (my emphasis). (115)⁵⁶

Let us remind ourselves of Roger Fry's claim of the 'imaginative life' as opposed to 'real life'. Fry contends that the viewer is able to 'abstract' herself from the reality of the event by watching its reflected image in a mirror.⁵⁷ Fry maintains that the cinematograph is the most convincing

⁵⁶"By contrast a painting of martyrdom may be serene, as is Mantegna's great Crucifixion in the Louvre. The painting has emotional qualities in defiance of the qualities of its subject." Scruton, 115.

⁵⁷Scruton says: "When I see someone in a mirror, I see him, not his representation . . . whether I look at him or look at the mirror, in either case it is him that I see." Scruton, 119. But Scruton's assertion here seems inaccurate: not on the grounds that it is not the representation of the man that we see in the mirror, since we have already agreed to Scruton's claim that photography is not a representational art. Rather, Scruton is wrong to claim that what we see when we see someone in a mirror, is that person. More simplistically, when one looks in the mirror, one does not see oneself. Rather one sees a reflection of oneself—not a representation, for it is oneself who is causing the reflection to be there. It is the same then for the photograph, albeit that this form provides a permanent 'reflection' since the image is scientifically secured to a sheet of paper. When shown a photograph of a man, the viewer may reply, "It's a man." But what she means,

manifestation of this, and that the viewer is then separated from actual life by 'absence of responsive action.' Fry states that there is therefore no moral responsibility on the part of the viewer. While on Scruton's terms it would be as 'corrupt' to have an aesthetic interest in a photograph of a martyrdom as it would the real event, the charge of corrupt may be better held by the absence of moral responsibility, as stated in Fry's argument. Hence the emotional response to a photograph, of a martyrdom for example, may turn from initial shock to that of guilt—guilt generated not by the photograph, but by viewer's vindication from moral responsibility. As Fry claims, this is due to the absence of real life, supplanted by the imaginative life and the viewer's resultant absolution from physical and emotional intervention in the fictional event.⁵⁸

Again, Scruton refutes the claim that photography is a representational art on the grounds of the viewer being unable to maintain an aesthetic interest in the photograph itself without having an aesthetic interest in its subject:

In the case of a photograph—say of the victim of some accident—one's attitude is determined by the knowledge that this is how things are. One's attitude is made practical by the knowledge of the causal relation between photograph and object . . . the real question is, Can we have such an interest in a photograph without

epistemically speaking, is, "It's a photograph of a man." It is inconceivable, that when pressed, the viewer would not concede this fact: to reply, "It's a man" is simply the sort of elliptical, 'economy of expression' we are all subject to use, admittedly inaccurately, on a day to day basis. Scruton likewise gives the example of viewing a street through a frame, selecting carefully everything that he would wish to include, shifting the frame to exclude those elements he does not wish to see. He states: "There I have described an activity which is as circumscribed by aesthetic intentions as anything within the experience of the normal photographer." This is true in respect of the pre-photograph stage. Scruton then contests: "But how could it be argued that what I see in the frame is not the street but a representation of it? The very suggestion is absurd." Scruton, 120. Quite so. But to say of a photograph of the street that what we see is the street is equally absurd. Furthermore, Scruton is mistaken in describing the frame through which he viewed the street is analogous to the framing device he used. The view one sees when looking through the camera (SLR camera) is the reflected image of the street in the camera's internal mirror.

⁵⁸This may hold more strongly for cinematic narratives, but what is the difference between the moving image in film as opposed to the static image of the photograph? The temporal nature of film is perhaps the most significant of all its attributes. Film can, however, falsely simulate time—propelling the viewer across centuries, taking her to geographically disparate places, driving the narrative through days, and even back again—whilst running in real time. Importantly, it is this dislocation from 'real' time that permits the viewer to enter into this seemingly factual, but actually fictional, state of limbo. In terms of photography, however, the photograph is instead the static end result of the mechanical and scientific process, and the static beginning of temporally unlimited observation, and perhaps more critically, unlimited contextualisation, and recontextualisation.

having the same interest in its subject? Can I have an aesthetic interest in the photograph of a dying soldier which is not also an aesthetic interest in the soldier's death? (115-116)⁵⁹

He goes on to consider two more possibilities though: the matter of detail, and the choice of subject. According to Scruton, the photographer has no photographic control over the former, but complete control over the latter. How consequential though is this control, or lack thereof, in terms of validating photography as a representational art? As Scruton states:

Here lies a fresh difficulty. The causal process of which the photographer is a victim puts almost every detail outside of his control. Even if he does, say, intentionally arrange each fold of his subject's dress and meticulously construct . . . the appropriate scenario, that would still hardly be relevant, since there seem to be few ways in which such intentions can be revealed in the photograph . . . The search for remaining in a photograph is therefore curtailed or thwarted: there is no point in an interest in detail since there is nothing that detail can show. Detail, like the photograph itself, is transparent to its subject. If the photograph is interesting, it is only because what it portrays is interesting, and not because of the manner in which the portrayal is effected. (117)

Scruton then goes on to explain that although the photographer's choice of subject may constitute aesthetic intention (as the artist displays through her painting) the photograph is ultimately the result of what photography does best: it is a record of a subject from a particular point of view, showing it from a perspective or in a light perhaps unfamiliar to the viewer of the object's everyday conditions. This, Scruton says, is what 'ideal photography' is capable of: "Effects which are wholly proper to the art of photography, which therefore has its own peculiar way of showing the world." (119)

If photographs lack representation, then they make up for it by their own peculiar attributes. According to Scruton, "When the photographer strives towards representational art, he inevitably seems to move away

⁵⁹Consider . . . photographs of old London. How is it possible to detach one's interest in their beauty from an interest in the beauty of London as it was? Regret is here the appropriate reaction to the photograph . . . "That is how it looked!" is the central index of one's emotion." Scruton, 116.

from [the] ideal of photography." (118)⁶⁰ And so one might consider, if the two media are indeed so different and aim at and achieve different outcomes, then why do historians create such hostility between them? Should we even concern ourselves in the slightest as to whether photography can be considered a representational art? Has the more interesting controversy not always been: not, is photography art? But rather: what is art when photographed? While one could argue that it is entirely possible to consider photographs on purely formal terms, we must ask ourselves: is it fruitful to do so? What we must now consider is this: if the viewer's singular interest in the photograph is its subject, then how, in contradistinction to aesthetic interest awakened by form and representation, do we set about comprehending that subject?

As discussed in section 3.2, Panofsky's iconographical method deals with the totality of form as representation, representation as content, and content as meaning; the latter two elements furnished through linguistic sources and our understanding of the world in the times in which we live. Bearing in mind that Panofsky applies his methods to Renaissance art, that is, painting and sculpture, is it possible to simply apply his reasoning to photographs? And even if it is possible, is it worthwhile? Panofsky claims that the intrinsic meaning of a work of art is derived from what the artist has purposely included, and from

⁶⁰Scruton sets out a number of examples of how the photographer might strive to make her photographs 'representational,' but he dismisses all of these on the grounds that in doing so, the photographer becomes a painter and props director respectively: "When the photographer sees the photographic plate, he may still wish to assert his control, choosing just this colour here, just that number of wrinkles or that texture of skin. He can proceed to paint things out or in, to touch up, alter or pastiche as he pleases. But of course he has now become a painter, precisely through taking representation seriously

[. . .] Occasionally, it is true, photographers have attempted to create entirely fictional scenes through photography and have arranged their models and surroundings, as one might on the stage, in order to produce a scene with a representational meaning. But, as I have argued, the resulting photograph would not be a representation. The process of representation was effected even before the photograph was taken. A photograph of a representation is no more a representation than a picture of a man is a man." Scruton, 117-119. He concludes thus: "Photography can be made [into representation] by being made into the principle vehicle of the representational thought. But one must then so interfere with the relation between the photograph and its subject that it ceases to be a photograph of its subject. Is that not enough to show that it is not just my ideal of photography which fails to be a mode of representation, but also that representation can never be achieved through photography alone?" Scruton, 120.

what the artist has intended to represent. But does this follow for the photograph?

Since we are from this point concerned solely with photography, it must be clear how photography functions in its own right. Given that we have established by means of Scruton's argument that photography is not a representational art, and that the viewer's interest in the photograph therefore lies not in form and aesthetic response, but in subject matter and content, and given that we may not discover the *intrinsic* meaning of every photograph on the grounds that there is none, what repercussions are there for the methodologies we have already discussed? Are they rendered obsolete? Should we now seek information outside the photograph itself? Are the sources that would illuminate the meaning of Arbus's photographs to be found instead in extrinsic locations, as Panofsky would have it, in 'intuition conditioned by personal psychology and [world view]'? Are the relations between the object—the photograph—and its subject and content more than mere arbitrary associations in the mind of the historian? In order to continue our investigation, we should focus on the most important and distinguished truth about photography we have established thus far: the photograph has a causal relation to the world. With this fact in mind, let us go on to examine Diane Arbus's *Untitled* photographs in greater detail.

IV Untitled

4.1 Visible 'Flaws'

Given that we have now established the fundamental truth of photography's causal relation to the world, and given that we have established the viewer's interest in the photograph to be its subject and not its formal qualities, let us return to consider the subject/subjects of Arbus's *Untitled* images. First though we must look at the original site of publication of only seven photographs titled *Untitled*, those which appeared as a short series at the end of the 1972 monograph; these photographs are numbered and dated, all made between 1970-71.

Now, in accordance with Panofsky's iconographical methodology, we can see at a glance what the photograph presents to us, but we refer to our existing knowledge of the world of objects in order to decipher what information we believe the image to hold, and therefore, what it is capable of communicating to us. Our immediate task then is to establish: What is the subject of the image?

Arbus's photograph, *Untitled (1) 1970-71* shows two women standing on the grass in front of an indiscernible brick building, their arms linked.¹ The two women wear bonnets made out of paper, tied under their chins with satin ribbons. The bonnets are adorned with large, multi-petal paper flowers; both women wear cardigans, both wear knee length stockings; both wear black lace up shoes, although the laces are missing from one pair. The woman on the left wears a blouse and skirt with her petticoat showing beneath it; the woman on the right wears a dress with a zip front, but the seam below is split. She also wears thick, black 1960's style spectacles, a large plastic looking brooch in the shape of a daisy pinned to her shoulder, a ring on her wedding finger, and she carries a handbag. This woman is smiling so broadly her eyes appear only as slits, while her gaping mouth displays a central black chasm

¹Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*, no page numbers.

flanked on either side by two white fangs. The other woman is smiling also, but she has a full set of teeth and is perhaps wearing lipstick. Other than these first stratum elements—the artistic motifs according to Panofsky's pre-iconographical description—it seems this image affords little more beyond.

Turning the page we come across the second image in this series, *Untitled (2) 1970-71*; again, this photograph shows two women. Both figures are standing very near the front edge of the image, but also close to each side. This leaves a central void between them through which the viewer's eye crosses the expanse of grass upon which the women stand, before the eye is further led to the horizon across which a row of dark trees stands guard. These women are younger than the previous two, perhaps in their mid-twenties. The woman on the left wears a striped shirtwaister, but the lines are buckled due to the material folding and gathering itself about her body. It looks as though she has been caught by the camera after landing again from jumping into the air, and her outstretched hands, seemingly used as a steadying device, would corroborate this. She also wears lace-up canvas shoes and white ankle socks. Her shoulder length hair veers away from her face, probably due to her movement as the camera shutter opened and closed again. Her face is semi-blurred. She is half smiling, half grimacing, and looks out to the right of the photograph.

The other woman wears a halter neck bathing suit, and the fabric is panelled down the front and decoratively swirled around the bust. This woman is in focus, but her arms are outstretched from the sides of her body as though she too may take her turn to jump up into the air. She also wears lace-up canvas shoes, but without socks. This woman is smiling in acknowledgement of the photographer. Here again we have completed the identification of 'motifs.' But are things really that simple?

Is there something more? We may not have noted anything in particular in the first image, were it not for the second: the woman standing on the left of *Untitled (1)*, although older looking, bears a facial resemblance to both women in *Untitled (2)*. And they all share a resemblance with the woman in *Untitled (5)*.

The woman in the photograph *Untitled (5)* stands alone in a similar landscape to the women in *Untitled (2)*: in the background there is an horizon line of trees with the suggestion of houses, behind which a low wooden post and wire fence runs in parallel with the woman's shoulders. On the left hand side of the image there lies a white paper hankie, or perhaps a scarf, left behind on the grass. The young woman wears a dress with a seam of lace running down the right hand side, a dark coloured cardigan, and she too sports on her head a paper bonnet with a single, large, dark paper bloom on top. She holds onto her hat with one hand, whilst holding a paper cup in the other. We cannot see whether this woman wears shoes or not as her feet exist beyond the front edge of the photograph, although her white ankle socks are still visible.

As already noted, this woman's facial physiognomy is similar to three of the women seen previously: these women look to share something akin to a family resemblance. Unlike the preceding photographs in the monograph, there is no inventory style titling divulging any details of consanguinity amongst them. Likewise, there is no mention of the seven *Untitled* photographs in the selected text at the beginning of the monograph. Thus far, they remain mysterious. The other four images in this series show figures, almost all discernible as women, most of them wearing fancy dress costumes, masks and some wearing face paint. Some wear day clothes or swimming costumes, others wear night clothes.

Apart from the first image, where the two women stand in front of a building of some sort, all the figures have been photographed in the open air, in a nondescript landscape with a distant, horizontal, dark boundary of trees. Again, it seems, there is little beyond a pre-iconographical reading of these photographs, unless of course, they are to be understood within the context of the whole of the monograph, as many scholars have opined.² One can understand how such mistaken hermeneutic analysis could come about however, given that so little information was made available at the time of the monograph publication. But is there something more, perhaps something the *Untitled* series of photographs do not, or cannot, show us? It was only with the publication of *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work* some twelve years after the monograph that more material, both written and photographic, was duly made available by the Estate of Diane Arbus. The Estate believed that the exclusivity of the monograph, whilst initially conceived of as an homage, had subsequently become misleading in respect of the entirety of Arbus's career.³

It is within *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work* that we are first confronted with another image, similar in its formal qualities to the seven *Untitled* photographs—a small reproduction placed next to Thomas W. Southall's essay printed at the end of the book. And here, significantly, there is a caption which in turn confronts us with a new concept; it reads: "One of a series of photographs Arbus took on Halloween, 1969, at a home for the retarded."⁴ This statement is similar in style to Arbus's earlier form of titling, giving location and date, but most critical and consequential is the inclusion of the word 'retarded': the women in the photographs are in fact inhabitants in an institution for the mentally retarded, and they were photographed by Arbus over a period of approximately two years, from

²See Sontag, McPherson and Armstrong for their 'passing comments' on the *Untitled* series in relation to the subject of 'freaks.'

³Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 5.

⁴*ibid.*, 171.

1969-1971. Arbus enthused: "I took the most terrific pictures. The ones at Halloween . . . of the retarded women . . . they are very blurred and variable, but some are gorgeous. FINALLY what I've been searching for."⁵

The photograph shown next to Southall's essay is small, but it is possible to discern that four of the five figures are women, although the fifth figure on the far right wears a dark jacket with white buttons and dark trousers. This figure remains ambiguous; as with the four women, this enigmatic character wears a mask over the eyes and so it is impossible to compare facial physiognomy here. Eleven years later, however, this is the very image presented to us on the front cover of *Untitled*; this volume was to be the latest edition of Arbus's photographs granted posthumous publication by the Estate in 1995.

Again, although the image is indeed larger, it is not possible to establish anything further about the women than already given, other than a clearer description of the garments worn by them. Three of the four discernible women appear to be wearing their night-gowns over their day clothes, and they are wearing socks and shoes. The woman on the far left however, wears a long, strapless, voluminous skirted, pale coloured ball gown over her day clothes of dress and cardigan. This image appears again further on inside the book. But the important distinction is that now we have at our disposal 51 images made by Arbus, and all on the same subject. She declared: "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 [the women]. I want to do lots."⁶ Even if one had no knowledge of Arbus's monograph publication, or indeed of *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, a cursory read of the text inside the dust jacket of the book informs us that,

⁵Arbus quoted by Southall, *Ibid.*

⁶*Ibid.*

UNTITLED is the third volume of Diane Arbus's work and the only one devoted exclusively to a single project. The photographs were taken at residences for the mentally retarded between 1969 and 1971, in the last years of Arbus's life. Although she considered doing a book on the subject, the vast majority of these pictures have remained unpublished until now.⁷

And if by chance the dust jacket were missing, then we would subsequently find a similar text at the end of the book following the photographs. Arbus's daughter Doon intimates:

These photographs, most of which have never been seen before, belong to what has come to be known as Diane Arbus's UNTITLED series—by default, in a sense, since the individual titles she might have given them were never done. The photographs were taken at residences for the mentally retarded between 1969 and 1971, places she kept going back to every few months or so, to picnics, dances, on Halloween, in the last years of her life. This is simply information. What's in the pictures lies much closer to home.⁸

Thus, importantly, we are now privy to the information that would come under Panofsky's second stratum of iconographical analysis: we now cognise the linguistic concept of mental retardation, and that the subjects of these photographs live in special residences for those so classified. How might we know this were it not for the additional text? We could not know the women live in residences for the mentally retarded from the photographs alone. With a small number of exceptions already discussed in chapter one, the images have all been made outside the institution: most often the women are located in an expanse of grass, or sometimes in a play park—sitting on a swing or at the bottom of a chute. Some women have been photographed in front of buildings, although there are no discerning features or signs to indicate what these buildings are, or where they are situated. More conspicuously though, how could we know the women are mentally retarded? What are the physiognomic manifestations of mental retardation? Let us momentarily return to our

⁷Arbus & Cuomo, dust jacket text.

⁸Ibid. Afterword written by Doon Arbus. No page number.

observations of the three photographs from the monograph series of seven.

The three images, as well as the four others, have also been reproduced within *Untitled*. Previously we noted a facial resemblance between some of the women: their faces are broad, round and flat; their eyes are small, puffy and somewhat slanting; their noses are modest, and their lips appear thick. Within *Untitled*, there are 17 photographs of subjects with these facial characteristics, showing a total of 21 women altogether. Again, there is nothing in the texts previously cited to illuminate the inordinate number of women with these facial similarities. We have been informed, however, that all the subjects in the book live in special homes for the mentally retarded, and have therefore been classified as such. Henceforth, these women are regarded as being mentally retarded and have unusual and unexplained facial similarities, and both these traits are attributes of a condition first described by J.L.H. Down in 1866. Down described those born with his eponymous syndrome thus:

The face is flat and broad and destitute of prominence. Cheeks are rounded and extended laterally. The eyes are obliquely placed and the internal canthi more than normally distant from one another. The palpebral fissure is very narrow. The lips are large and thick with transverse fissures. The tongue is long, thick and much roughened. The nose is small.⁹

In his book, *Down's Syndrome: An Introduction for Parents*, Cliff Cunningham considers the questions uppermost in parents' minds, such as: Will we cope? What are children with Down's syndrome like?¹⁰ In

⁹Peter Beighton & Greta Beighton, *The Man Behind the Syndrome*, (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1986), 41.

¹⁰Cliff Cunningham, *Down's Syndrome: An Introduction for Parents*, (London: Souvenir Press, 1982), 19-24. I acknowledge that Cunningham's research is based on British families and institutions, and indeed, Cunningham's discussion is based on the child living with the family and attending a special school, but not on residential, institutional living. Cunningham himself warns: "You should check carefully when books on this subject were written, and try to assess the main interests of the author." *Ibid.*, 132. In terms of Down's syndrome per se, however, his scientific material holds for any nationality: "Down's syndrome is found in all races of people, in all social and economic classes and all countries . . . No relationship between diet, illness, geographic area or climate and the occurrence of the syndrome has been substantiated . . . Estimates of the incidence vary between one in 500 and one in 900 births. These have already been

chapter two he considers feelings and reactions; amongst other responses, Cunningham respects that parents might feel shock and disbelief, experience feelings of inadequacy, have feelings of anger and hostility, and also share feelings of embarrassment: "Many will have a sense of loss and grief for the baby they had wanted. They will often feel angry and bitter and need to seek out the reasons for why it happened."¹¹

Cunningham duly discusses biological matters in chapter four of his book, but not before considering some more social implications of having a child with Down's syndrome: What effects will it have on the family? Again, he posits common questions asked by parents: How will I tell the other children? Does the presence of a child with Down's syndrome disrupt the marriage? Does the presence of the child restrict social activities? Do mothers find they can go out to work?¹² But in chapter four Cunningham discusses the etiology of the syndrome. In other words: what causes Down's syndrome?

Each species of animal has its own genetic code carried by its own special set of chromosomes. The size, shape and number of chromosomes generally differs from species to species . . . human beings typically have 46 chromosomes of different sizes . . . [A chromosome chain is] coded information which instructs and controls cell division, growth and function. These [chains] are called *genes* and there are many thousands on each chromosome . . . The information carried by the genes is called the *genetic code*.¹³

If the chromosomes fail to separate in the normal way, however, and one of them remains stuck together and therefore cannot conjoin with its intended counterpart, (one chromosome coming from the mother, one coming from the father) and if this chromosome (from either the mother

altered in some countries because the use of family planning has reduced the number of babies born to mothers over 40." Ibid., 92-93.

¹¹Ibid., 39.

¹²Ibid., chapter 3, 41-63. "Only a few mothers say they took the job to get away from the baby. The majority take it for financial reasons, or because they are anxious not to lose touch with a profession." Ibid., 62.

¹³Ibid., 67-68.

or the father) is the number 21 chromosome, then the person has Trisomy 21.¹⁴

People with trisomy 21 have a special set of characteristics which collectively are called Down's syndrome . . . It is the extra 21 chromosome material that produces the distinct physical and mental characteristics and development known as Down's syndrome. It is important to note that the extra chromosome producing the condition is a perfectly normal 21 chromosome which *can only come from either the mother or the father*. It is not a strange or unhealthy chromosome.¹⁵

And because of this, the child with Down's syndrome, logically, bears a resemblance to her family members. Cunningham reveals:

I have often heard both parents and professionals note with surprise that the child with Down's syndrome looks like his brothers or sisters. Yet since the child has inherited the genetic code of the family (with an extra set of genes) the likelihood of him or her being similar to the rest of the family must be high. If we are surprised it is because we do not fully understand the genetic base of the condition, and are still thinking of these children as strange or alien!¹⁶

Besides this, however, Down himself pondered: "[The] resemblance [of children with the syndrome] to each other was such that, when placed side by side, it is difficult to believe they are not the children of the same parents."¹⁷ This is due to the extensive physiognomic manifestations of the syndrome, hence the resemblances we have already noted amongst

¹⁴Human beings have 46 chromosomes in all cells except the red blood cells and the germ cells. The 46 chromosomes consist of 22 matched pairs and two sex chromosomes. The sex chromosomes determine whether the new person will be male or female. Each new human being needs a complement of 46 chromosomes, matched in pairs, and the mother and father must donate half, i.e. 23 each. When these combine, they will produce a cell with 23 pairs, 22 of which will be matched, and the two sex chromosomes will be paired and will determine the sex of the child. The fertilised egg begins to divide. It is important that each cell gets an identical set of chromosomes and hence the same coded instructions. Every cell will have a matching set of chromosomes and therefore have the same unique genetic code as the first cell. See *Ibid.*, 71-73. "However, sometimes the chromosomes of a pair will not separate and remain 'stuck together'. This is called 'nondisjunction' because the two chromosomes fail to disjoin or split up. Thus, when the number 21 pair stick together, a person has trisomy 21 (the two cells that did not separate plus a matched one from the other germ cell, known as a trisomy—tri meaning 'three', soma meaning 'of the body')." *Ibid.*, 73. For the three different types of Down's syndrome, see *Ibid.*, 76-79.

¹⁵If it had been a trisomy of pair number 13 or 18, the person would have either Patau's syndrome or Edward's syndrome. Both of these conditions are less common than Down's syndrome and have a different set of characteristics." *Ibid.*, 74-75.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 75-76. Most cases of Down's syndrome are not inherited. See *Ibid.*, 80-83.

¹⁷Down quoted in Beighton & Beighton, 41. For an extensive list of physical and medical characteristics most observable at birth in children with Down's syndrome, see Cunningham, 97-98.

the women in Arbus's photographs. Nevertheless, some of the facial signs of the syndrome have been observed in 'normal' people.¹⁸

Undoubtedly, the most interesting feature of Cunningham's work is the inclusion of 24 pages of photographs in the middle of the book, showing people, mainly children, born with Down's syndrome.¹⁹ Some of the images show other family members too. Cunningham writes:

In our research, when we first meet a family who has a baby with Down's syndrome, we ask them if they would like to see some photographs of children and young persons who also have Down's syndrome. We do this to try to give them some idea of the tremendous differences among children with the condition.²⁰

Cunningham does issue a warning in his book though, which does come across as somewhat odd, and a somewhat odd thing to do given that he is such an advocate of tolerance towards those with the syndrome. He claims he has offered in his book 'a range of photographs' of the children—not ones showing the most extreme characteristics of Down's syndrome, but not just the best images either. Cunningham then states: "WARNING Whilst most parents find looking at the photographs helps to dispel their worst fears and images, some find photographs distressing . . . if you feel you want to look at the pictures, do so; if not, skip to other chapters."²¹

Many parents may have an image of Down's syndrome. As one parent described it, this is an image "of some sort of monster—a

¹⁸Having begun to recognise the physical signs of the syndrome, many parents become worried when they 'see' the signs in their other children or themselves. But many normal children and adults will have some of the signs. For example, the folds of skin on the inner side of the eye (epicanthic folds) are reported in 60-70 percent of children and adults with Down's syndrome and the upward slant of the eyes in about 80-90 percent. These folds are also seen in about 20 percent of ordinary people and the slant of the eye in around 14 percent." Cunningham, 96.

"The inner folds of skin on the eyes tend to become less obvious as the head size increases. As teeth appear, the mouth alters shape and as the muscle tone of the jaws and tongue improve, many children will be able to keep the tongue in the mouth . . . However, most of the characteristics seen in the baby will persist and will be present in later life." Ibid., 101.

¹⁹Ibid. The images are collected and unpaginated between pages 96 and 97 of the text. The photographs are presented much like an album, and do not illustrate any specific points within Cunningham's text.

²⁰Ibid., 23.

²¹Ibid., 24. Cunningham writes: "I find fathers are often less inclined to look at the photographs than mothers: I have seen many a dad increasingly irritated as mother thrusts more pictures under his nose." Ibid. Cunningham does not make clear whether this is the case specifically with fathers of children with Down's syndrome, or if it is just a general disinterest of all fathers in being forced to view 'too many' photographs of their child.

person with tongue hanging out, head drooping forward with dull, sullen eyes." This seems to me to be the outdated image of the 'mongol' who has lived his or her life in a large institution with little help or stimulation.²²

It is only possible to make these comparisons between persons with Down's syndrome by way of the photograph as their physiognomy has been captured objectively by means of causality and scientific process. This would simply not be possible were we to compare paintings of people with Down's syndrome, for painting is always subjective.²³ But for the moment, let us return to the, now outdated, term for Down's syndrome: mongolism. This term came about through Down himself, as he believed those born with the syndrome to be a 'throw-back' to a primitive race.

[Down] was impressed by the Oriental appearance about the eyes and thought that his patients looked like Mongolians, whom he apparently believed to be 'primitive.' Thus the condition became known as 'mongolism.' This was in 1866 and Darwin had not long put forward his theory of evolution . . . could it be that the different ethnic races represent different evolutionary stages in [humanity]? If so, then people with 'mongolism' could be throw-backs, or representative of arrested development at some earlier evolutionary stage . . . when you realise what little was known of genetics at this time . . . Down's is not such a far-fetched idea . . . But it is less easy to understand how as late as 1924 a book was published in England called *The Mongol in Our Midst* which argued that the condition was reversion to the Orang-utan!²⁴

Cunningham confesses:

I have been asked, more than once, if the mental and physical differences of children with an imbalance in their chromosomes is due to a throw-back to the time when we were monkeys! The

²²Ibid., 23. "Of some importance is the absence of poor development of the air sinuses in the skull. Because of this, the sinuses can become easily blocked. The child will then breathe through the mouth. Mouth breathing will . . . encourage the 'open mouth, protruding tongue' look which is often associated with Down's syndrome . . . telling the child to "keep [her] mouth closed, breathe through your nose," etc. at every opportunity in the early years can often alleviate the mouth breathing and 'tongue out' problem. These early efforts can also prevent later social problems, because most people do not feel attracted to gaping mouths and protruding tongues." Ibid., 101.

²³Cf. chapter three, section 3.1.

²⁴Cunningham, 68. "Fortunately, the discovery of the extra chromosome in 1959 and our better understanding of genetics has meant that these theories, together with many others, especially those which blamed events during pregnancy, have once and for all been laid to rest." Ibid. On the topic of terminology, and the use of the nick-name mongol, Cunningham also quotes Dr. C. Benda, an eminent scholar on the subject of Down's syndrome. In 1949 Benda said, "[The use of the term Down's syndrome] gives the condition a scientific dignity which it has deserved for a long time." Ibid., 137.

answer is no, and neither is the extra chromosome a throw-back to a more primitive type of human being.²⁵

But looking back at the relation of ape to humanity can inform us quite saliently, and further our understanding of why people with Down's syndrome, or those without, but classified as mentally retarded, have in the past been (and in many cases still are) considered uncivilised 'primitives,' and therefore removed from society and relegated to institutions.

In his essay, *The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man*, Frederick Engels proclaims that the more and more erect posture of the ape—standing on the feet, thereby freeing the hands—was "*the decisive step in the transition from ape to humanity.*"²⁶ Henceforth, the hand was now free to develop tools, in the first instance to hunt for food, and at a later stage, to produce goods for trade.

The human hand . . . has been highly perfected by hundreds of thousands of years of labour . . . the hand of the lowest savage can perform hundreds of operations that no simian hand can imitate—no simian hand has ever fashioned even the crudest stone knife [. . .] the first flint could be fashioned into a knife by human hands . . . the decisive step had been taken, *the hand had become free* and could henceforth attain even greater dexterity; the greater flexibility thus acquired was inherited and increased from generation to generation. Thus the hand is not only the organ of labour, *it is also the product of labour*. Labour, adaptation to ever new operations, the inheritance of muscles, ligaments, and, over longer periods of time, bones that had undergone special development and the ever-renewed employment of this inherited finesse in new, more and more complicated operations, have given the human hand the degree of perfection required to conjure into being the pictures of a Raphael, the statues of a Thorwaldsen.²⁷

One of Arbus's photographs from the *Untitled* book shows three young women, two with obvious signs of Down's syndrome. The third woman, who takes her place in the middle of the other two, outside the institution in an expanse of grass, does not show her face to the camera. This is due

²⁵Ibid., 68.

²⁶Frederick Engels, "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man," *Selected Works*, Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1968), 354-364, 354. First published in the journal *Die Neue Zeit*, Bd. 2, No. 44, (1895-96).

²⁷Ibid., 355.

to the fact that she is bent over double and is resting on all fours. Here, one can see similarities with the walking methods of our anthropoid ancestors. Indeed, an earlier reading of this image claimed that Arbus reduced her subjects to mere animals—perhaps grazing innocuously, safe in their enclosure?²⁸

With the development of the hand, and the act of labour, there evolved a necessity for humans to communicate with each other to further their production and harvest. It was not, according to Engels, the hand alone which expedited humankind's transition from ape, but the physical development of the speech organs, and critically, the mastery of articulate sounds. In other words, the hand was the corporal, and visible, transformation from ape to humanity, while language was the incorporeal, invisible transformation. Engels describes it thus:

Mastery over nature began with the development of the hand, with labour, and widened [humankind's] horizon at every new advance. [Humankind was] continually discovering new, hitherto unknown properties in natural objects. On the other hand, the development of labour necessarily helped to bring members of society closer together by increasing cases of mutual support and joint activity, to each individual. In short, [humankind] in the making arrived at the point where *they had something to say* to each other. Necessity created the organ; the undeveloped larynx of the ape was slowly but surely transformed by modulation to produce constantly more developed modulation, and the organs of the mouth gradually learned to pronounce one articulate sound after another.²⁹

While Engels claims that labour is the basis of transition from ape to humanity, labour relations are precisely what the women with Down's syndrome, and those classified as mentally retarded—namely, the subjects in Arbus's photographs—were denied; they were instead incarcerated in homes that often had a detrimental effect on these skills. It

²⁸This reading was presented by Dr. David Hopkins in a lecture at the University of St Andrews on 14 March 1997. I believe this is not Hopkins' personal opinion, however, but extracted from another (unnamed) source. The original title that Arbus wrote for her series of photographs *Campers at Camp Lakecrest for overweight girls in Dutchess County, New York* could provoke a similarly controversial interpretation: *PLEASE DON'T FEED ME* is reminiscent of the reminder notices placed on animal enclosures in a zoo. Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 96-99. Originally published as "Please Don't Feed Me," *The Sunday Times Magazine*, (London), (April 14, 1968), with a text by Hunter Davies.

²⁹Marx & Engels, *Transition from Ape to Man*, 356.

is interesting to ponder that Engels works from the perspective of economics and class struggle towards egalitarianism, and although the teaching and medical professions worked from the same bases, these bases were for entirely opposite reasons, ideologically speaking, and were in turn geared towards an entirely opposite result.

The majority of children with Down's syndrome were classified as ineducable, and teachers and educators largely ignored the field of mental handicap. Thus, most of the early work and writing about Down's syndrome was left to the medical profession. Understandably this writing reflected their beliefs and their interests: it emphasised the physical characteristics and medical aspects which were important for diagnosis and health, and was rather limited and pessimistic about mental and social development. Rarely did it suggest that one might be able to help through training.³⁰

In respect of mentally retarded people, whether born with Down's syndrome or not, Robert Bogdon and Steven Taylor put their findings forth with far more potent conviction:

Negative stereotypes and prejudiced attitudes are by no means only the misguided views of an ignorant and backward public; such demeaning work can be found in the work of scholars and professionals in the field of mental retardation. Public prejudice toward the retarded has its roots in professional myths. Professionals have actively promoted images of the retarded as dangerous, immoral and sub-human . . . Indeed, researchers and human-service providers often have been the strongest advocates of forced sterilization, restrictive immigration policies, segregation and institutionalization, and school exclusion.³¹

Langdon Down however recognised the importance of teaching and training from the beginning. He wrote that people with Down's syndrome "are usually able to speak; the speech is thick and indistinct, but may be improved very greatly by a well-directed scheme of tongue gymnastics. The co-ordination faculty is abnormal, but not so defective that it cannot be greatly strengthened. By systematic training, considerable manipulation power may be obtained."³²

³⁰Cunningham, 132-133.

³¹Bogdon & Taylor, 14-15.

³²Cunningham, 132-133. "Before 1971 most children with Down's syndrome in [Britain] attended Junior Training Centres, that is they were considered to be ineducable and unable to benefit from education. These centres may not have provided the same quality of systematic teaching as is presently available in schools. They were controlled by the Department of Health and had very few qualified teachers. When the law was changed and all children attended schools, these centres came under the Department of Education." *Ibid.*, 134.

The view of the child with Down's syndrome to be mentally handicapped, unable to articulate herself adequately and behave appropriately, and therefore considered primitive, immoral, sub-human—a monster—is one corroborated by Engels' crucial observation concerning the differences between humanity and animals:

Comparison with animals proves that this explanation of the origin of language from and in the process of labour is the only correct one. The little that even the most highly-developed animals need to communicate to each other does not require articulate speech. In a state of nature, no animal feels handicapped by its inability to speak or to understand human speech.³³

The child born with Down's syndrome, however, has a smaller skull than normal, and consequently has a smaller brain as well. Engels states: "First labour, after it and then with it, speech—these were the two most essential stimuli under the influence of which the brain of the ape gradually changed into that of man, which for all its similarity is far larger and more perfect."³⁴ Cunningham admits that, biologically speaking, there is not enough known about the effect the smaller size of the brain has on social skills, although he points out that environment has a greater part to play than was first thought.³⁵ But we shall discuss the role of labour, as well as the efficacy of the institution, more thoroughly in the third section of this chapter.

The interesting visual aspect of Arbus's photographs is that she records the two types of woman together: those with Down's syndrome, and those without. Due to the informative text however, we assume all

³³Marx & Engels, *Transition from Ape to Man*, 356.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 357.

³⁵"There are a number of studies of older children and adults showing that they tend to take slightly longer to respond than ordinary people, or people with other types of mentally handicapping conditions. One reason for this lag in response is that there are differences in the nervous system and brain. This is a complex area of which present knowledge is very limited, and I am only able to give a brief overview. The brain, like the skull, tends to be smaller in relation to the size of the body than in ordinary people. However, this by itself does not account for the mental handicap. Parts of the brain, particularly the brain stem and cerebellum, have been reported as being smaller relative to the size of the whole brain than in ordinary people. It has been suggested that this would account for the hypotonia, and perhaps for the difficulties found in co-ordinated motor activities such as balanced sitting and walking unaided, as these parts of the brain are concerned with these activities. However, knowing about the association between the parts of the brain and the behaviour does not tell us why or how the difficulties arise, and much more information is needed." Cunningham, 112.

the women to be mentally retarded. Before investigating this 'invisible' concept further though, we must return to the visible elements in the photographs of women without Down's syndrome.

There are 13 images showing 31 women who do not show signs of the syndrome. While many do have distinct faces, such as a broad forehead or protruding teeth, these are features any 'normal' person might have. What is significant though, and this is also the case with the women with Down's syndrome, is that their clothing, although appropriate in most instances, often looks dishevelled and ill-fitting. Cliff Cunningham advises:

Equally important is the dress and appearance of the growing child. Far too often one sees older children with Down's syndrome dressed in clothes more suitable for younger children. Such clothes may fit them, because they are smaller, and to some degree may relate to their mental and behavioural level; but they will do nothing to help the young person feel he or she is growing up. One needs to find clothes which fit into the appropriate age group, and do not accentuate physical differences.³⁶

Of course, many of Arbus's photographs were made at Easter celebrations, or at Halloween, and the bonnets, face masks and fancy dress clothes reflect this. But instead of changing from their normal day clothes into their costumes, the women have simply put them on over the top. This means that the women are wearing two layers of clothing, with their day clothes protruding underneath in a somewhat unsightly manner. Some women are basically wearing night-gowns or pyjamas, which gives the impression they are sleepwalking, or more controversially, that they are roaming in the institution grounds, as the large group photograph near the back of the book suggests.

But there are some garments that almost all of these women wear that are part of their everyday apparel, and yet in most cases, stand out as unsuitable for their age group. Usually adult women would wear nylon

³⁶Ibid., 107.

stockings and more often dress shoes. Almost all the women in Arbus's photographs, however, wear short or longer white, or sometimes black, socks, as young girls would commonly wear. Likewise, almost all the women wear flat black lace up shoes, or lace up canvas shoes, although some are barefoot (presumably because it is summer—one can tell this from the light dresses and bathing costumes worn by a number of the women). As noted earlier, some women wear pyjamas, and three women are seen wearing trousers; these are all worn in the event of dressing-up however, and notably, all the other women wear skirts or dresses. Another noticeable, and genericising feature, is the women's hair: their hair is short, shoulder length, and often cut with a fringe, and is not fashioned or groomed into any sort of 'style.' It seems to have been cut with pragmatism, and not elegance, in mind. Not a single woman has long hair.

Thus far, we have identified the women who display signs of Down's syndrome, and the women who do not, but we have one further category to consider: the many women whose faces are hidden by masks. There are 21 photographs showing 47 women wearing a variety of different camouflages. Most women wear small paper masks covering only their eyes; nine wear shop-bought plastic moulded masks; others wear extended, hand-made paper ones which have additional features painted on, such as eyebrows and eyelashes; some of these are also decorated to look like animals—sometimes a rabbit, sometimes a cat. But bizarrely, eight women wear brown paper bags over their heads. All of these disguises have eye and nose holes cut out, and are similarly decorated with pencil to accentuate the features; some are designed as

animals, with ears and whiskers, but others have a mop of frizzy, paper hair, giving the impression of a persona, half clown/half monster.³⁷

4.2 *The Invisible Concept*

Having considered the visible 'flaws' of the women in Arbus's *Untitled* photographs, let us now move on to consider the 'invisible' concept of mental retardation. In the previous section, we looked at the images to examine the physiognomic similarities, and differences, evident between the women. We established certain physiognomic characteristics to be the result of Down's syndrome. Besides these physical manifestations though are the differences in mental functioning that also accompany the syndrome. We have already been informed through the additional editorial text that all of the women photographed by Arbus during this period were residents in state institutions. We also looked at the sartorial peculiarities of the women, and noted that many of the women wear masks of one sort or another over their faces.

But not all of the women show signs of Down's syndrome, so how could we know the women who do not are mentally retarded just by looking at them? Simply put, we cannot: mental retardation is an 'invisible' concept that cannot be shown through the medium of photography—or any other visual medium for that matter. Cliff Cunningham asks:

Do the baby's "looks" tell you how handicapped he or she will be?
 . . . In the late 1950's and 1960's, several research studies tried to find a relationship between physical features and mental functioning . . . Overall, the weight of the evidence is that no significant relationship can be found between the physical characteristics and the person's mental functioning.³⁸

³⁷See Kunsthalle Wien, Sabine Folie & Gerald Matt, eds., *Inge Morath*, (Munich: Keyhayoff Verlag & Kunsthalle Wien, 1999) for Morath's photographs, "The Saul Steinberg Mask Series," 150-157. See also David Lynch's film, *Elephant Man*.

³⁸Cunningham, 100.

Cunningham was referring, of course, to babies born with Down's syndrome, and not those persons who might look 'normal,' but who are equally classified as mentally retarded. But taking the fact that we have been informed that the women all live in mental institutions, let us first investigate the term 'mentally retarded.'

In their book, *The Social Meaning of Mental Retardation: Two Life Stories*, Robert Bogdon and Steven Taylor begin by exploring the very concept of mental retardation:

What is mental retardation? How do we know if someone is retarded? While professionals disagree on the answers to these questions, most answer them in terms of intelligence quotient (IQ) and so-called adaptive behaviour, waiting for the advancement of science to provide precise diagnostic techniques. They believe mental retardation is a condition people have. They do not question that; they only want to improve the ways we have of diagnosing 'it.'³⁹

The descriptive terms—for what is here called mental retardation—have changed considerably from the turn of the nineteenth century and over the twentieth century. To persons who had an IQ. level of 75 or below, the old scientific terms assigned were: idiot, imbecile, moron and feeble-minded; these described the lowest on the scale to the highest respectively, under the general heading mental deficiency. In the 1950's and 1960's however, this general classification changed to mental subnormality, with the sub-sets of severely subnormal and subnormal. The terms used from 1968, and suggested by the World Health Organisation, came under the rubric mental retardation—the term in use when Arbus was making her photographs of the women in mental

³⁹Bogdon & Taylor, 6. The authors state: "In this book we present two life stories, told from their own point of view, of two 'retarded' people: a twenty-seven-year-old-man we shall call Ed Murphy and a twenty-year-old-woman we have given the name of Pattie Burt. Both have been labelled 'mentally retarded' by their families, school teachers, and others in their lives. In presenting Ed's and Pattie's stories in their own words, we hope to help the reader experience what life has been like for these people and how they view the world and themselves. But beyond that, these life histories should enable us to understand society better, specifically, to understand the meaning of mental retardation in our culture." Ibid., 3-4. Even though this accounts for the greater part of Bogdon and Taylor's book, the argument in this thesis lies, not in autobiographical or biographical detail, but rather in the mechanisms that structure western industrialised society, and the effect that Arbus's photographs might be considered to have on these structures.

institutions in the period 1969-71. The sub-terms in this category changed accordingly too: there were levels of profound, severe, moderate and mild mental retardation, again describing from the lowest to the highest level of IQ. respectively, with the upper limit remaining at 75 throughout.⁴⁰ But in their ninth edition manual, the American Association on Mental Retardation state that in 1959, the year of their fifth edition, the IQ. 'ceiling' was raised to 85. Conversely, their sixth edition manual of 1973 lowered the ceiling to "two standard deviations below the mean": that is, an IQ. of 70 or below.⁴¹

Cunningham states: "I like to think that the changes in terminology in mental handicap have also brought respect and dignity to those members of society who are mentally handicapped. After all, it could be any one of us."⁴² But should we conceive of those so-called as being handicapped at all? Is it not grossly improper to refer to 'those members of society' since many people, and most certainly the women in Arbus's photographs, have been removed from society-at-large, are not treated with 'respect' and consequently fail to have any sort of 'dignity' within the institution?

We shall look more closely at the institution in the next section, but meanwhile, let us digress slightly to Cunningham's final comment about why people classified as mentally handicapped should be treated with respect; he says: "It could be any one of us." David Hevey is highly critical of this sort of 'tokenism' though. In his book, *The Creatures Time Forgot: Photography and Disability Imagery*, he makes his perspective quite clear: "Disabled people are visually needed, but as metaphorical symbols

⁴⁰Cunningham, 137. The term in current usage is, I believe, 'hard of learning.' I acknowledge, however, that this may only be in use in Britain.

⁴¹*Mental Retardation: Definition, Classification, and Systems of Supports*, (Washington: American Association on Mental Retardation, 1992), 9th edition, ix. See also, for instance, Edward Zigler & Robert M. Hodapp, *Understanding Mental Retardation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), in particular Part II, "Definition, classification, etiology, and prevalence," 43-110, and especially "The issue of labeling," "Labeling by ability," "The retardation stigma," and "Labelling the unknown," 54-59.

⁴²Cunningham, 137.

for other meanings and practices. Who better to do this than those with apparent body differences?"⁴³ Hevey is, of course, referring to non-disabled photographers who make images of the disabled, thereby confirming the difference between able and disabled bodies. Moreover, Hevey's book is concerned with people who have physical, visible disabilities. His discussion is essentially based around obvious body differences that can be recorded by means of photography, resulting in a form of visual representation which Hevey believes to be ultimately oppressive:

Photo-surveillance by non-disabled photographers of disabled people crosses most positional and ideological barriers and is in danger of becoming an epidemic. The presence and pressure of the disability movement has meant that arts funding bodies in particular are prioritising disability and in turn pressurizing their client organizations to 'do the disabled.' In a word, [*sic*] the political gains of the disability movement have paradoxically created a growth in the presence of disability imagery in a number of competitions, exhibitions and magazines. The growth of consciousness of the issue of disability has led to an increase in the incidence of oppressive representation.⁴⁴

It would seem from this statement that, in respect of making the disabled visible through photography, Hevey argues the antithesis of Cunningham. In Cunningham's case though, he concerns himself specifically with making photographs of children with Down's syndrome available, in the first instance to parents whose new-born has been so diagnosed, as noted in the previous section of this chapter.

It may seem that we have returned here to the visible 'flaw,' but this is what Hevey very much concerns himself with. He gives an extensive—and uncompromising—critique of Arbus's photographs, dividing her work into three distinct periods, utilising the polarities of the disabled people (the subjects in the photographs) against their

⁴³David Hevey, *The Creatures Time Forgot: Photography and Disability Imagery*, (London: Routledge, 1992), 8. See Alexa Wright's digitally manipulated images of disability. The artist/photographer has digitally grafted her own head onto another person's disabled body, as well as amalgamating the disabled bodies and heads of other able bodied persons.

⁴⁴*Ibid.* See previous note.

oppressor (the photographer—in this case, Arbus).⁴⁵ Titling his chapter, "The enfreakment of photography," Hevey announces:

I ask the reader to join me on a journey into oppressive disability imagery. At times, particularly in the work of Diane Arbus, it can be depressing. However this chapter is here because I feel we have to take the fight against constructed oppression (whether by non-access or by representation) into the camp of the oppressors.⁴⁶

Eventually Hevey gets round to the *Untitled* images, the series of seven that were originally published with individual titles, numbers and dates at the end of the monograph, although his earlier argument based on the dichotomy of power is not so convincing here. This is due to a number of factors, which we shall consider in due course. It is worth noting here though that Hevey's book was published in 1992, some three years before that of the extended volume *Untitled* which includes the seven images from the monograph, although he did have access to *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, published in 1985. Even so, Hevey makes a number of careless mistakes, such as identifying a young woman to be a man.

Untitled (7) 1970-71 shows a large group of women, all of whom are wearing either night-gowns or pyjamas. In the midst of this group is the young woman in question: a young woman, not only with the facial characteristics of Down's syndrome, but with a black painted on moustache and goatee. Two of the other women wear small paper masks over their eyes. None of the women look towards the camera—they are preoccupied, they are en route, moving in from the left and moving out to the right of the picture plane; it is most likely an occasion, such as Halloween, or a fancy dress party, as Arbus herself has confirmed in a number of statements concerning the making of these photographs. Hevey also fails to note that all the subjects in this limited series of seven images are indeed women. While previously berating Arbus for calling

⁴⁵See Hevey for his discussions on images showing disabled people, selected from the monograph publication, under the chapter heading, "The enfreakment of photography," 53-73.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 53.

these women 'retardees' (Arbus's name, according to Hevey, for people with Down's syndrome) he refers to them instead as 'disabled people':

In the final image of the monograph, nine disabled people pass across the view of the camera. Of the nine, only one turns towards the camera. His gaze misses the camera; consequently the possibilities that might have been opened up by a direct gaze are, for Arbus, lost. He joins the rest of the crowd who come into the frame for no purpose and leave the frame with no purpose.⁴⁷

Hevey never states what Arbus's 'lost possibilities' were. He never makes note of the fact that all the subjects in this series of photographs are women. He never ponders over the photographs showing subjects wearing masks or wearing paper bags over their heads.⁴⁸ But most significant of all: he neither addresses nor contemplates the topics of Down's syndrome and mental retardation.

Whereas Hevey considers the visible aspects of disability (those which can be seen, and which can be recorded by means of photography) Bogdon and Taylor scrutinise language itself, claiming that the labelling of certain persons as mentally retarded, engenders the creation of mentally retarded people. This in turn sets up a relationship between those classified as mentally retarded and those who are not. Effectively, the label mentally retarded allows 'normal' people to treat those so-called as lesser beings, essentially as sub-humans. Bogdon and Taylor assert:

Words—labels and names—structure how we think and act about others. Labels like 'retarded' have a dramatic effect on those who use them as well as on those to whom they are applied. They direct our attention to specific aspects of designated people. They suggest how we should think about and treat them as well as provide a justification for action directed toward them. As we shall see, in the case of the 'retarded,' names *can* hurt.⁴⁹

In their ninth edition manual, the American Association on Mental Retardation declare:

⁴⁷Ibid., 64.

⁴⁸Even though their faces are hidden, I think we can reasonably assume these subjects are women due to their wearing skirts and dresses. And also, Arbus herself commented on the photographs she had made of the women in institutions for the mentally retarded. See Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 171.

⁴⁹Bogdon & Taylor, 4-5.

Since its founding in 1876, [the Association] has led the field of mental retardation in understanding, defining, and classifying the phenomenon of mental retardation. The Association has attempted to fulfill its responsibility by formulating and disseminating manuals and related information on terminology and classification through the years [. . .] The [ninth] manual retains the term mental retardation. Many individuals with this disability urge elimination of the term because it is stigmatizing and is frequently mistakenly used as a global summary about complex human beings. After considerable deliberation, we concluded that we were unable at this time to eliminate the term, despite its acknowledged shortcomings. The purpose of this manual was to define and create a contemporary system of classification for the disability currently known as mental retardation and, in order to accomplish that, we had to use the commonly understood term for the disability.⁵⁰

The Association published their ninth manual in 1992 and so, some twenty years after their last change in terminology, the label 'mentally retarded' still stands. Absurdly though, this term has been retained on the basis that it is a commonly recognised concept, in other words: a concept the non-mentally retarded population of both lay persons and professionals understands. Bogdon and Taylor state: "The abuses of labelling and the dangers of mislabelling are acknowledged in the field of mental retardation . . . Scholars have debated exactly how many people are retarded and who should be called retarded."⁵¹

We must consider then, what is the relationship of the words 'mentally retarded' to Arbus's photographs of the women so-labelled? If the words have no direct referent in the photograph, how can the combination of word and image form any alliance to render the photograph evidential—a document which corresponds to the discourses of truth?⁵² John Berger writes: "At one level there are no photographs

⁵⁰American Association of Mental Retardation, 9th edition, ix & xi.

⁵¹Bogdon & Taylor, 5. One particular grey area concerning the level-label attached to people, are those persons considered to be in the 'mildly retarded' category. Bogdon and Taylor reference other professionals in the field, but nevertheless assert: "Although we share some of the conclusions of these researchers, 'mental retardation' is a defective concept—a concept conceived in ignorance at a time when our understanding of human beings derived from the supernatural [. . .] Mental retardation is thought of as an absolute condition—people are either mentally retarded or they are not. Indeed, the concept of 'pseudo-feeble-mindedness' has been used in the mental-retardation field to retain belief in the absolute nature of retardation when professionals have been confronted with people who appeared retarded in some situations but not in others." *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵²See John Tagg, "Power and photography—a means of surveillance: the photograph as evidence in law," *Culture, Ideology and Social Process*, eds., Tony Bennett, Graham Martin, Colin Mercer &

which can be denied. All photographs have the status of fact. What has to be examined is in what way photographs can and cannot give meaning to facts."⁵³

Throughout the monograph publication, the images made by Arbus are titled. Not content with single words, nor even two or three, she gives a detailed account of each image, in the form of an inventory. Arbus checks her list: age, status, sex, nationality, location, time, day, intention, state, year, and significantly, any distinguishing feature or 'flaw.' For example, *Puerto Rican woman with a beauty mark, N.Y.C. 1965, Lady at a masked ball with two roses on her dress, N.Y.C. 1967, Lady in a rooming house parlour, Albion, N.Y. 1963, Woman with a locket in Washington Square Park, N.Y.C. 1965, A woman with pearl necklace and earrings, N.Y.C. 1967.* The question is, after issuing such an elaborate description of each subject's particulars, is it necessary to retain the photograph? But of course: the photograph is not only the document that allowed the inventory to be drawn up in the first place, but the document that corroborates the words, while in turn the words illuminate the photograph. Berger explains the relation thus:

In the relation between a photograph and words, the photograph begs for an interpretation, and the words usually supply it. The photograph, irrefutable as evidence but weak in meaning, is given a meaning by the words. And the words, which remain by themselves at the level of generalisation, are given specific authenticity by the irrefutability of the photograph. *Together* the two then become very powerful; an open question appears to have been fully answered.⁵⁴

Janet Woollacott, (London: Batsford Academic & Educational Ltd, 1981), 285-307. Tagg gives accounts of how, in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, photography was utilised by the institutions of law, medicine and significantly, psychiatry. *Ibid.*, 293-295. Here Tagg considers the use of photography to examine the physiognomy of insanity, quoting Dr. Hugh Welch Diamond: "[Photography presented] a perfect and faithful record, free altogether from the painful caricaturing which so disfigures almost all the published portraits of the insane as to render them nearly valueless either for purposes of art or of science . . . The Photographer [*sic*] needs in many cases no aid from any language of his own, but prefers to listen, with the picture before him, to the silent but telling language of nature . . . the picture speaks for itself with the most marked precision and indicates the exact point which has been reached in the scale of unhappiness between the first sensation and its utmost height." *Ibid.*, 294.

⁵³John Berger & Jean Mohr, *Another Way of Telling*, (London: Granta, 1989), 98.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 91-92.

Even though there are women who do not show signs of Down's syndrome in many of Arbus's *Untitled* photographs, we reconcile our visual reading of the images with our comprehension that these women live in 'institutions for the mentally retarded' —information provided for us through the written editorial. Henceforth, our understanding of the photographs is complete: only some of the women have Down's syndrome, but all of the women are mentally retarded. Susan Sontag says: "Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it. In one version of its utility, the camera record incriminates."⁵⁵ The words and the photograph form a reciprocal agreement, sealing their, now irrevocable, pact of culpability—photo-journalism is their logical culmination.⁵⁶

Let us return to Arbus's images of the women photographed in institutions for the mentally retarded. Contrary to her earlier works published in the monograph and *Magazine Work*, the single subject volume has only a collective title: *Untitled*. Doon Arbus reminds us that, "These photographs, most of which have never been seen before, belong to what has become known as Diane Arbus's UNTITLED series—by *default* in a sense, since the individual titles she might have given them were never done."⁵⁷ On the one hand we might sense the Estate's avoidance of using the terms Down's syndrome and mentally retarded (while the editorial on the dust jacket states that 'the photographs were taken at residences for the mentally retarded,' it does not actually refer to the

⁵⁵Sontag, 5.

⁵⁶Let us consider one of Arbus's magazine assignments, for example, *Miss Cora Pratt, the Counterfeit Lady*. This is the title presented in *Magazine Work*, besides which two photographs are shown. One image shows a middle-aged woman, smartly dressed, although there is nothing particularly remarkable about her; the other image shows a rather bizarre looking character, a woman, with bad skin and protruding teeth. There are no similarities between the two. It is not until one reads the accompanying text, however, that one learns they are in fact the same person: "Miss Cora Pratt, The Counterfeit Lady, is fashioned of a set of teeth, an old wig, beads, brooches, feathers and laces out of the attic, pencil, padding, and the whimsical inclinations of Polly Bushong who has been practising this little hoax for nearly twelve years . . . If Polly is a delightful, witty and talented Dr. Jekyll, Cora is a guileless, rapturous and preposterous Mr. Hyde, who commits the most unerring blunders and cheerfully treads where angels fear to." Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 21-23.

⁵⁷Arbus & Cuomo, Afterword written by Doon Arbus, no page number.

women as being mentally retarded); on the other hand, we might conclude that the photographs take refuge in their non-specific title—and that *Untitled* affords the women asylum from simplistic and unnecessary labelling. Thus, instead of being moored by individual titles or texts, the *Untitled* images seem to exist in the seclusion of their own company—untainted and unadulterated by words. Doon Arbus observes:

If [Diane Arbus's] allegiance to the facts and a respect for their integrity dictated her approach to making photographs, the results are paradoxical. [The *Untitled* images] have none of the comforting dependability of science. Her photographs are full of information, which nonetheless provides no names or addresses, no vital statistics, and seems to refuse to add up to reliable conclusions. They're full of details, but many of them are details we feel we've never seen before, composed of the stuff life keeps hidden in the seams between one second and the next.⁵⁸

While, ironically, there is no irrefutable photographic evidence as such, we know from Arbus herself that she made this series of works at residences for the mentally retarded between 1969 and 1971. Arbus confided: "I do feel I have some slight corner on something about the quality of things. I mean it's very subtle and a little embarrassing to me, but I really believe there are things which nobody would see unless I photographed them."⁵⁹ In the case of the women in the *Untitled* series, this was quite literally true: the women were hidden away in clandestine institutions—out of sight, out of mind.

4.3 *Prisoners of Fate*

At the turn of the [nineteenth] century, a new legislation defined the power to punish as a general function of society that was exercised in the same manner over all its members, and in which each individual was equally represented: but in making detention the penalty par excellence, it introduced procedures of domination characteristic of a particular type of power. A justice that is supposed to be 'equal,' a legal machinery that is supposed to be 'autonomous,' but which contains all the asymmetries of disciplinary subjection, this

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Diane Arbus quoted in Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*, 15.

conjunction marked the birth of the prison, 'the penalty of civilised societies.'

—Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

Although John Tagg aligns state apparatuses with the increased use of photography as a means of surveillance, and therefore power, and importantly, that these apparatuses grant photography its evidential currency as 'document of truth,' he advises that it is the systems that use photography that should be scrutinised, and not photography per se.⁶⁰ Thus, we shall consider the state apparatus created to deal with mentally retarded people as analogous to the state apparatus created to deal with criminals and delinquents. In other words, we shall draw comparisons between the institution of the prison and the institution for the mentally retarded. Bearing in mind this will inevitably highlight both similarities and differences, we shall discover in due course that the prison reform system is ultimately the more humane one, and for good reason. First though, let us consider the history of American institutions for those classified as mentally retarded.

While it is usual for publications on the subject to give most time and effort to accurate diagnosis and classification of mental retardation, Zigler and Hodapp dedicate a two chapter section to 'Caring for retarded people,' opening with the statement: "A continuing problem in the field of mental retardation is where and how retarded people shall live."⁶¹ Although a private institution was already in operation in 1848, the earliest public institution for the mentally retarded emerged in Boston in 1850, and by 1890 there were some 20 residential institutions in 15

⁶⁰It is in the emergence . . . of new institutions of knowledge [the hospital, the asylum, the school, the prison, the police force] that we must seek the mechanism which could enable the photograph to function, in certain contexts, as a kind of proof." John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*, (London: Macmillan, 1988), 63. See in particular Chapter 2: "Evidence, Truth and Order: Photographic Records and the Growth of the State," 60-65.

⁶¹Zigler & Hodapp, 203. See Part V, 'Caring for retarded people,' 202-247.

different states.⁶² In the early days, however, these institutions were seen as humanitarian organisations created to educate and rehabilitate those less fortunate members of society—those persons classified as mentally retarded. Around the same time in France, Edouard Seguin was developing a programme of 'physiological education' for retarded people, and although this was adopted in America, it soon gave way to Seguin's other approach, that of 'moral education.' But there was enormous scepticism towards these schools:

State legislators were particularly wary of spending large sums of money on such uncertain ventures . . . Administrators felt a need to "show results"; hence the practice of admitting only the "highest-grade defectives" to most institutions, the many public exhibitions of the skills learned by the residents, and the encouragement of visitors to the first residences, to come and "see for themselves."⁶³

And while many retarded people did benefit from this system, few became self-sufficient enough to stand on their own two feet and return to society. Many people believed that the genetic basis of low-intelligence was a permanent 'state of mind' inherited by certain persons through blood, thus environmental factors, speech therapy and the mastery of transferable work skills were essentially seen as time-wasting, and the circumvention of biological fact. Many people—lay persons, families and health professionals—believed that mentally retarded people should simply be prohibited from living in society and placed in residential institutions, thereby allowing the course of civilisation—in other words, the growth of the capitalist state—to prosper unhindered. Consequently, "The emphasis began shifting from the residential school designed to teach retarded children during the school years to the long-term custodial facility."⁶⁴ Michel Foucault says objectively: "[Prison] is the detestable

⁶²Ibid., 203.

⁶³Ibid., 205-206.

⁶⁴Ibid., 206.

solution, which one seems unable to do without."⁶⁵ Many considered institutions for the mentally retarded to be a similar necessity.

Part four of Foucault's treatise *Discipline and Punish* is devoted to 'Prison'; in section one, titled 'Complete and Austere Institutions,' he describes the role of the prison, the variations in conditions, and the treatment of prisoners within it.⁶⁶ Most important of all, Foucault outlines the results these conditions were intended to bring about in those persons interned there, and here we can draw an etiological analogy between the thinking of the medical professionals within their field, and the prison authorities within their own jurisdiction. Zigler and Hodapp write that, "Genetic explanations for mental retardation, the linking of retardation to other social ills, and the knowledge of how prevalent and intractable retardation was led to what [Walter] Fernauld called 'the legend of the feeble-minded'."⁶⁷ In 1912, Fernauld mordantly proclaimed:

The feeble-minded are a parasitic, predatory class, never capable of self-support or of managing their own affairs. The great majority ultimately become public charges in some form [. . .] Every feeble-minded person, especially the high grade imbecile, is a potential criminal, needing only the proper environment and opportunity for the development and expression of [her] criminal tendencies.⁶⁸

Henceforth, genetic, and therefore immutable, biological forces were seen to be the origin of mental retardation, and after initial forays into educating and training retarded individuals, many so-called retarded people were simply put away behind closed doors in residential institutions and all but forgotten. While the convicted criminal was likewise detained within the walls of the prison, in counterpoint to the biological sources of mental retardation, it was rather the biographical credentials and earlier life events of the 'delinquent' that were scrutinised

⁶⁵Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. trans. Alan Sheridan. (London: Allen Lane, 1977), 232. First published as *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*. (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1975).

⁶⁶Ibid. See Part Four: Prison, 229-308, and also Section One: Complete and Austere Institutions, 231-256.

⁶⁷Zigler & Hodapp, 207.

⁶⁸Ibid., 207.

to determine the root cause of her crime. Foucault explains the distinction between the offence and the perpetrator thus:

The delinquent is to be distinguished from the offender by the fact that it is not so much [her] act as [her] life that is relevant in characterizing her. The penitentiary operation, if it is to be a genuine re-education, must become the sum total existence of the delinquent, making of the prison a sort of artificial and coercive theatre in which her life will be examined from top to bottom . . . The observation of the delinquent 'should go back not only to the circumstances, but also to the causes of [her] crime; they must be sought in the story of [her] life, from the triple point of view of psychology and upbringing, in order to discover the dangerous proclivities of the first, the harmful predispositions of the second and the bad antecedents of the third.'⁶⁹

Much akin to the classification and diagnosis of mental retardation through which the medical profession engendered people mentally retarded, henceforth the courts and the penitentiary created the delinquent. Both establishments then sagaciously alleviated these 'scourges of society' by isolation and treatment, and all of this judiciously concealed behind the private edifices of repressive state apparatuses.⁷⁰

Bogdon and Taylor assert:

The concept [of mental retardation] has been so thoroughly accepted by the expansionist scientists of [the twentieth] century that, despite general acknowledgement that there is no adequate definition of the term, it is affirmed that 3 percent of the population is retarded and that retardation compares to cardiac disease and cancer in the extent to which it is a major health problem . . . Our research suggests, however, that the concept of mental retardation is not just less than useful, it is actually seriously misleading. The term's scientific aura is deceptive in that it conceals subjective moral and cultural value judgements.⁷¹

The same subjective moral and cultural value judgements can easily be attached to the so-called delinquent. Foucault claims:

In fabricating delinquency, [the prison] gave to criminal justice a unitary field of objects, authenticated by the 'sciences,' and thus enabled it to function on a general horizon of 'truth.' The prison, that darkest region in the apparatus of justice, is the place where

⁶⁹Foucault, 251-252.

⁷⁰See Marx & Engels, *Selected Works*. See also Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, (London, 1988), 123-173.

⁷¹Bogdon & Taylor, 5-6.

the power to punish, which no longer dares to manifest itself openly, silently organizes a field of objectivity in which punishment will be able to function openly as treatment and the sentence be inscribed among the discourses of knowledge.⁷²

Both the prison and the institution for the retarded are similar in that they detain individuals in residential centres with the primary objective being to protect society from their presence and their delinquency. There are a number of analogies and disanalogous between the penitentiary and the institution for the mentally retarded; for example, unlike the institution where the individual could be incarcerated for the whole of her life, the prison custodial sentence is a limited one. In the mid 1920's however, institutions for the retarded were re-evaluated and a 'parole' system was set up which in turn became the vanguard of community care:

With the awareness that many retarded individuals could adjust to the community, "parole" from institutions was attempted to a limited degree. For the most part, much extra-institutional care was entrusted to the retarded person's immediate family or other relatives. A study in 1922 . . . found that 17 of 26 institutions surveyed had a parole system in operation, although most involved only small numbers of residents. These systems operated throughout the United States.⁷³

There were also additional moves towards community care, such as early diagnosis and parental counselling. This meant that families could keep their child at home without resorting to state residential care. Even more impressive was the setting up of colonies for groups of ten to twenty people. But even more important than giving the mentally retarded a non-institutional home, these colonies gave the retarded a community: not one that was manufactured by their common denominator—mental retardation, but instead, a community that was constructed through the communal act of labour. The instigation of this humanitarianism however, meant that the financial burden of 'community care' for the

⁷²Foucault, 256.

⁷³Zigler & Hodapp, 209. See additional moves towards community care in "Early diagnosis and parental counseling and Colonies," 209-210.

mentally retarded person was placed upon the family, while correspondingly, the financial burden on the state was lessened.

The prison apparatus does not merely detain, but seeks to determine the cause of the criminal's actions through her individual history and living conditions; it seeks to re-educate the criminal and return her to society once she has demonstrated suitable remorse for her crime. But most important of all—subsuming all other factors—the penitentiary is a place of work. Foucault states: "Work is defined, with isolation, as an agent of carceral transformation."⁷⁴ Here we can see how the culturally defined system of the prison, the state apparatus put in place by humankind, embodies the naturally occurring system of human evolution. The prison seeks to reform the criminal through work, the very factor, according to Engels, that engendered the transformation of ape to humanity:

The reaction on labour and speech of the development of the brain and its attendant senses, of the increasing clarity of consciousness, power of abstraction and of judgement, gave both labour and speech an ever-renewed impulse to further development. This development did not reach its conclusion when [humanity] finally became distinct from the ape, but on the whole made further powerful progress . . . This further development has been strongly urged forward . . . by a new element which came into play with the appearance of fully-fledged [humanity], namely, *society*. Hundreds of thousands of years . . . elapsed before human society arose out of a troupe of tree-climbing monkeys. Yet it did finally appear. And what do we find once more as the characteristic difference between the troupe of monkeys and human society? *Labour*.⁷⁵

⁷⁴Foucault, 241.

⁷⁵Marx & Engels, *Transition from Ape to Man*, 357-358. Foucault refers to the idea (as many believe of the person with Down's syndrome and the mentally retarded person), that criminals are some sort of sub-class of human being, a throw back from an earlier period of evolution: "The delinquent, the strange manifestation of an overall phenomenon of criminality, is to be found in quasi-natural classes, each endowed with its own characteristics and requiring special treatment, what Marquet-Wasselot called in 1841 the 'ethnography of the prisons'; the convicts are . . . another people within the same people; with its own habits, instincts, morals. We are still very close here to the 'picturesque' descriptions of the world of the malefactors—an old tradition that goes back a long way and gained new vigour in the early nineteenth century, at a time when the perception of another form of life was being articulated upon that of another class and another human species. A zoology of social sub-species and an ethnology of the civilisations of malefactors, with their own rites and language, was beginning to emerge in a parody form. But an attempt was also being made to constitute a new objectivity in which the criminal belongs to a typology that is both natural and deviant. Delinquency, a pathological gap in the human species, may be analysed as morbid syndromes of great teratological forms." Foucault, 253. Again, this relates to previously cited authors correlations between Arbus, her subjects, freaks and monsters.

While Engels' perspective is based upon labour, central to Marx and Engels argument of class struggle between the bourgeois and the proletarians, and exemplified in the *Communist Manifesto*, the prison system instead always maintains this hierarchy of power. Hence its position as a repressive state apparatus in a capitalist society, and perversely, labour is its principle:

Penal labour . . . is intrinsically useful, not as an activity of production, but by virtue of the effect it has on the human mechanism . . . Penal labour must be seen as the very machinery that transforms the violent, agitated, unreflective convict into a part that plays its role with perfect regularity. The prison is not a workshop; it is, it must be of itself, a machine whose convict-workers are both the cogs and the products . . . If, in the final analysis, the work of the prison has an economic effect, it is by producing individuals mechanized according to the general norms of an industrial society.⁷⁶

The institution for the mentally retarded functions likewise as a repressive apparatus, but has an entirely different mechanism for entirely opposite reasons. Both the prison and the institution require state funding, and this economic fact is the foundation upon which their power relations function.⁷⁷ It is therefore imperative to return the docile mind and disciplined body of the convict into society where she can re-join the labour force; conversely, it is imperative to withhold the mentally retarded person from the workforce whence she cannot hamper the efficiency of their efforts.

While John Tagg includes the uses of photography to document slum clearances, the insane and the criminal, he argues that it is the institutions behind the photographs that give them their evidential

⁷⁶Foucault, 242. "Work is the providence of the modern peoples; it replaces morality, fill the gap left by beliefs and is regarded as the principle of all good. Work must be the religion of the prisons. For a machine-society, purely mechanical means of reform are required." L. Faucher, *De la réforme des prisons*, (1838), quoted in Foucault, 64.

⁷⁷The prison governor is likened to an accountant: "The governor must not lose sight of a single inmate, because in whatever part of the prison the inmate is to be found, whether [she] is entering or leaving, or whether [she] is staying there, the governor must also justify the motives for [her] staying in a particular classification or for [her] movement from one to another. He is a veritable accountant. Each inmate is for him, in the sphere of individual education, a capital invested with penitentiary interest." *Ibid.*, 251.

currency, and not photography in itself.⁷⁸ Susan Sontag extends this claim by adding, "Photographs became a useful tool of modern states in the surveillance and control of their increasingly mobile populations."⁷⁹ But in America these 'increasingly mobile populations' were most often immigrants, whose arrival and number were deemed to give rise to increasing social problems which state organisations were in turn devised to control. The systems that were to exert their power over these errant masses—the legal system, the schooling system and the medical profession—were the very network that created delinquency and mental retardation, and subsequently assumed a connection between them. But even more disturbing was Fernault's statement concerning mentally retarded women. He declared: "Feeble-minded women are almost invariably immoral and if at large usually become carriers of venereal disease or give birth to children as defective as themselves."⁸⁰ Not content with the mere segregation of the sexes, the medical profession interpreted this greatly misguided view as threatening an epidemic of mentally retarded dependants. Resultingly, the state initiated sterilisation laws, the first in Indiana in 1907, but by 1936, 25 states were authorised to systematically enforce involuntary sterilisation in both men and women.⁸¹ Not only were the so-called mentally retarded excluded from their families and their communities and incarcerated in anonymous residences, the presiding repressive state apparatuses ensured that many of these people would never procreate. In effect, eugenic rectification replaced penal labour.

⁷⁸See Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*.

⁷⁹Sontag, 5.

⁸⁰Fernault quoted in Zigler & Hodapp, 207.

⁸¹Zigler & Hodapp, 207-208.

V Women's Work

5.1 Routine Roles

Retarded people are [regarded as] essentially immoral, degenerate, and depraved [. . .] Nowhere are such condescending beliefs seen more clearly than in mandatory sterilisation laws. Passed in many states so that retarded persons could not propagate their "defects," these laws denied them an integral part of their humanity.¹

Not content with simply labelling the women 'mentally retarded,' (their cultural definition) the medical profession ensures their very nature—femaleness, and therefore reproductiveness—is rendered invalid. Enforced sterilisation was carried out to prevent 'mentally retarded' women from producing 'more of the same.' This was the presumed result originating from a corrupt mind, and these women were in the process regarded as a potential source of sexually transmitted infection. Fernald claimed that, "Feeble-minded women are almost invariably immoral and if at large usually become carriers of venereal disease or give birth to children as defective as themselves."² Thus sexual profligacy was conveniently aligned with a lack of sexual self-discipline. While the later state policy of post-1970's 'normalisation' would endeavour to ensure that "to the highest degree and in as many areas of life as feasible, a (devalued) person or group have the opportunity to be personally integrated into the valued life of society," the line was quite the reverse up to and including the time that Arbus made her photographs of the 'mentally retarded' women in their residential homes.³ In their book, *Normalisation*, Hilary Brown and Helen Smith state:

The notion of *devaluation* implies the existence of an individual or group who are actively exercising power over others, it is not a passive condition. These more valued individuals do the devaluing, but within normalisation they are also portrayed as

¹Zigler & Hodapp, 116.

²Fernald quoted in *Ibid.*, 207.

³W. Wolfensberger & S. Thomas quoted in Eric Emerson, "What is normalisation?" *Normalisation: A Reader for the Nineties*, eds., Hilary Brown & Helen Smith, (London: Routledge, 1992), 1-18, 8.

models of appropriate behaviour and as the arbiters of what is valuable.⁴

In other words, medical ethics hitherto measured morality. Thus, the women who endured enforced sterilisation were sexually 'normalised,' that is: they were brought into line with the prevailing moral code at that time.

Historically though, let us consider how such moral attitudes originated: again, Frederick Engels asserts that family structure is inextricably bound with labour and working conditions; the ongoing process of civilisation and the advance of the capitalist state brought about the garnering of wealth and therefore private property, and most important, the subsequent inheritance thereof. But before all this, things were more than a little unconventional, when "every woman belonged equally to every man, and similarly, every man to every woman."⁵ Engels was referring, of course, to the group family where within clans and tribes sexual relations between human beings were not simply restricted to man and wife as they are in monogamous marriage today, but instead, extended to all the members of the group.⁶ Incest had not yet been invented, and resultingly, human beings were, in a word, promiscuous. Engels notes:

It has become the fashion of late to deny the existence of this initial stage in the sexual life of [humankind]. The aim is to spare humanity this "shame." Apart from pointing to the absence of any direct evidence, reference is particularly made to the example of

⁴Hilary Brown & Helen Smith, "Assertion, not assimilation: A feminist perspective on the normalisation principle," *Ibid.*, 149-171, 150. Brown and Smith state: "Normalisation, like feminism, is often posited as being either politically right nor left wing: the difference, however, is fundamental to any movement seeking to re-establish people with disabilities in valued roles in society. Right-wing philosophy rests on a hierarchy which is either based on birth or merit, while left-wing ideologies are based on the notion of equal rights for all, regardless of race, creed or class. The position of people with disabilities in a right-wing society inevitably depends on charity: in a left-wing society, disabled people can assert their rights to be treated equitably with other citizens. Being in receipt of charity or pity is, ipso facto, accepting a socially devalued role." *Ibid.*, 158.

⁵Frederick Engels, "The Origin of The Family, Private Property and The State," Marx & Engels, 461-566, 468. First published in Zurich in 1884.

⁶See Marx & Engels, *Origin of Family*, for details of the consanguine and panaluan families, 472.

the rest of the animal world . . . to show that here, too, complete sexual promiscuity belongs to a lower stage [of evolution].⁷

Since in group marriage the man could be the father of more than one woman's children, likewise, the woman could be the mother of more than one man's children. But rather than being viewed as the result of promiscuous behaviour and the woman branded immoral, as she would today, at that time this instead gave the woman the dominant, privileged status. This is the logical outcome of her natural function, based in the very essence of her femaleness. Engels states:

In all forms of the group family it is uncertain who the father of a child is, but it is certain who the mother is. Although she calls *all* the children of the aggregate family her children and is charged with the duties of a mother towards them, she, nevertheless, knows her natural children from the others. It is thus clear that, wherever group marriage exists, descent is traceable only on the *maternal* side, and thus the *female line* alone is recognised. This, in fact, is the case among all savage peoples and among those belonging to the lower stage of barbarism . . . Bachoven . . . terms this exclusive recognition of lineage through the mother, and the inheritance relations that arose out of it in the course of time, mother right.⁸

Through time though, the restriction of sexual relations with consanguineous members meant that clans and tribes began to intermix. Consequently, the gene pool of the human species was broadened, and therefore strengthened. Thus the pairing family emerged, and this combined with increased wealth, in the form of cattle and tools as the results of labour, created the impetus for the father to overthrow the prevailing rule of mother right so that his children, and not his clan as was previously the case, could inherit his private property.⁹ Here Engels summarises the displacement that could be considered the foundational shift that the women's suffrage, the women's movement, and feminism

⁷Ibid., 469.

⁸Ibid., 476.

⁹At this [pairing family] stage one man lives with one woman, yet in such a manner that polygamy and occasional infidelity remain men's privileges, even though the former is seldom practised for economic reasons; at the same time, the strictest fidelity is demanded of the woman during the period of cohabitation, adultery on her part being cruelly punished." Marx & Engels, *Origin of Family*, 480.

were subsequently built upon: "The overthrow of mother right was the world-historic defeat of the female sex. The man seized the reins in the house also, the woman was degraded, enthralled, the slave of the man's lust, a mere instrument for breeding children."¹⁰ Thus the monogamian family evolved, and in a complete reversal of mother right, the male was now the privileged and dominant sex. The exclusivity of sexual relations between one man and one woman was purely and simply to ensure the paternity of the children, thereby protecting the private property of the father and the children's right to his material legacy.

According to Engels, the monogamian marriage brought about the first example of class oppression—the archetype of all other oppressive relations that would at later stages emerge as the result of ever advancing capitalism:

The first class antagonism which appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamian marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male. Monogamy was a great historical advance, but at the same time it inaugurated, along with slavery and private wealth, that epoch, lasting until today, in which every advance is likewise a relative regression, in which the well-being and development of the one group are attained by the misery and repression of the other. It is the cellular form of civilised society, in which we can already study the nature of the antagonisms and contradictions which fully develop in the latter.¹¹

We can therefore trace the oppression of the woman back to her reduced status as mere childbearing apparatus. As a result, she is expected to remain at home to care for the family, and assured of his paternal status, the man's role is that of provider and patriarch. The women who were sterilised in consequence of their alleged 'mental retardation,' and resulting alleged promiscuous tendencies, were not afforded the liberty of procreation, however: their natural, sexual aspirations were viewed as

¹⁰Ibid., 488. "The reckoning of descent through the female line and the right of inheritance through the mother were hereby overthrown and male lineage and right of inheritance from the father instituted. We know nothing as to how and when this revolution was effected among the civilised peoples. It falls entirely within prehistoric times." Ibid., 487.

¹¹Ibid., 495.

a reversion to a time before civilisation and the inventions of incest and monogamy, a time when promiscuity was the natural law, and not the cultural corruption associated with prostitution it is believed to be today. In accordance with these beliefs, many women regarded as 'mentally retarded' were made sexually obsolete by repressive state legislation. Procreation may be woman's natural objective, but it is also the very source and cause of her oppression.¹² On the other hand, even in marriage men retain their promiscuous freedom of old, and this double standard ensures female domination, and therefore, male supremacy. Engels writes:

The heritage bequeathed to civilisation by group marriage is double sided, just as everything engendered by civilisation is double-sided, double-tongued, self contradictory and antagonistic: on the one hand, monogamy, on the other, hetaerism, including its most extreme form, prostitution. Hetaerism is as much a social institution as any other; it is a continuation of the old sexual freedom—in favour of the men. Although, in reality, it is not only tolerated but even practised with gusto, particularly by the ruling classes, it is condemned in words. In reality, however, this condemnation by no means hits the men who indulge in it, it hits only the women: they are ostracised and cast out in order to proclaim once again the absolute domination of the male over the female sex as the fundamental law of society.¹³

¹²The advent of the contraceptive pill gave women, not only the choice to control conception, but more significantly, it allowed women sexual freedom. Ironically though, it did little to raise consciousness of women's issues and oppression under patriarchal domination. Mary O'Brien writes: "The first wave of women's liberation set great store by sexual freedom. This development was greeted with considerable enthusiasm by many male radicals. Moments of tedium in revolutionary activity could be whiled away in pleasurable erotic dalliance, while a pool of female labour still remained to type up the minutes of class struggle. Women soon discovered that the emphasis on sexual liberation did little to create a feminist consciousness, or a true feminist sociability. This emphasis in fact increased the personal sense of sexuality as commodity, of women as sex-objects." Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1981), 190.

¹³Marx & Engels, *Origin of Family*, 495-496. Women were not just sexually oppressed, but also domestically and therefore socially as well. Engels writes: "In the old communistic household, which embraced numerous couples and their children, the administration of the household, entrusted to the women, was just as much a public, a socially necessary industry as the providing of food by the men. This situation changed with the patriarchal family, and even more with the monogamian individual family. The administration of the household lost its public character. It was no longer the concern of society. It became a private service. The wife became the first domestic servant, pushed out of participation in social production. Only modern large-scale industry again threw open to her—and only to the proletarian woman at that—the avenue to social production; but in such a way that, when she fulfils her duties in the private service of her family, she remains excluded from public production and cannot earn anything; and when she wishes to take part in public industry and earn her living independently, she is not in a position to fulfil her family duties. What applies to the woman in the factory applies to her in all the professions, right up to medicine and law. The modern individual family is based on the open or disguised domestic enslavement for the woman; and modern society is a mass composed solely of individual families as its molecules." *Ibid.*, 501.

Given that we have established the source of women's oppression to be their sexual and resulting domestic and social existences, let us now move on to consider photography within the context of feminism. We shall discover, in due course, just why photography was so important to feminist artists, and in furthering the cause of women—publicly, and therefore, politically.

5.2 The Feminist Frame

While unanimity was supposedly both expected and expedient of the cause, since the 1970's the women's movement, by this time renamed feminism, has suffered serious undercurrents of internal discord regarding the appropriate behaviour, actions, and even emotions, of its participants. Initially the movement assumed unity through the generality of its appeal: women would bond simply on the basis of shared experiences of male oppression and exploitation. It is this group empathy that presupposes that any woman can speak on behalf of all women. But what was not, and essentially could not have been foreseen, was the dissent that occurred with the recognition of individuality amongst feminists and the realisation, not only of their differing interpretations of feminism and its objectives, but also in the differences between their social, racial and economic backgrounds. This in turn provided the impetus for women to question their whole understanding of, hence requirements from, the feminist movement. Women discovered that they may be united by their biological sex, but often little else. Thus sub-categories of women were created, and each group considered their own brand of feminism to be the constructive one whilst the other forms existed instead for the purposes of criticism. It was these divisions beneath the surface of assumed harmony that initiated debate as to what exactly the strategies of the movement were or should be. In response to

the question: What is feminism? Dale Spencer proclaims, "There is nothing more important than feminism. My sanity and survival have depended on it: the sanity and the survival of the species depends on it."¹⁴

As we established in the previous section, the two main elements of women's oppression under the domination of patriarchy are those of their enforced sexual and domestic existences, entirely beneficial to the male, and determined entirely by women's biological predisposition to conceive. But the advancement of photography, and later, its descendants film and television and their 'natural' adoption by the world of advertising, brought about a visual revolution in the way women were presented and portrayed through media representations.¹⁵ Henceforth, feminists realised they would have to challenge this legacy; they recognised that feminism was not simply a remote set of beliefs from which women could counteract patriarchy. Instead, women recognised that they would have to take their own visual image into consideration, and this would involve all social classifications of women, and importantly, they would have to study the differing contexts of their portrayals through certain visual media.¹⁶

¹⁴Dale Spencer, "What is Feminism? A Personal Answer," *What is Feminism?* eds. Juliet Mitchell & Ann Oakley, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 208-223, 217.

¹⁵See Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," *Image, Music, Text*, (London: Fontana, 1982), 32-51. Although this essay is about advertising rhetoric, and specifically an Italian foods advert, it is nonetheless particularly interesting in terms of photographic signs and the reciprocal relation between image and text.

¹⁶Feminism required change, and subsequently presented itself as a new category within which women could regard themselves as feminists, based not solely on their beliefs, but also, significantly, on their self image. Feminists did this consciously to bring the movement into a contemporary context to give feminism a new social identity. Many feminists endeavoured to reject the conventional, fantasised male image of women for their own more complex image of the nature of femininity. Some women, though not all, refused to wear make-up, replaced their high heels with sturdy boots and restrictive dresses and skirts with loose fitting jackets and trousers. The suppression of gender by 'sexless' clothing, however, merely confirmed the loss of the woman's individuality through fashion. Rosalind Coward writes: "One thing that fashion is quite categorically not is an expression of individuality . . . fashion of course is not necessarily the same thing as clothes used in individual ways. Being fashionable is different. It is always the acceptance of the prevailing ideals." Rosalind Coward, *Female Desires: How they are sought, bought, and packaged*, (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 29. See Part One: "The Look," and the essays "Being Fashionable" and "The Body Beautiful." Also related: Angela Neustatter, *Hyenas in Petticoats: A Look at Twenty Years of Feminism*, (London: Penguin, 1990), Chapter Five, "Woman à la mode: The Politics of Appearance." See also, significantly, Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, "The Garment System," 25-27, where he gives a semiological account of how clothing can express meaning.

As a result of a media and advertising sector dominated by men, and therefore the male gaze, woman's social and sexual status was filtered through the camera and the medium of photography. Perpetuated by male cultural ideals, men constructed their fantasies of the female body—its physical perfection, its adornment for sexual appeal, and its fetishistic manipulation—by means of the photographic image.¹⁷ Henceforth, feminists sought to challenge existing representations of women, and in the process, politicise woman's image using the very same site appropriated by men: woman's body was to become the locus and sign of feminist struggle. Most significant of all though, woman's body would be recorded by feminist photographers and the results distributed into various contexts, but notably under the canon of Art.¹⁸ This in turn exposed the paradox within feminist art practice. In their book, *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1971-1984*, Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock note the antagonism:

To define oneself as an artist without the qualifier woman is to repress the important and desirable fact of being a woman. [But to] be labelled a woman artist is to be placed in a separate sphere where only gender matters, where gender is assumed biologically to determine the kind of art that is made.¹⁹

Women photographers, however, would have to counter the resistance of their medium as well. Both Susan Sontag and John Tagg bring to light the confounding paradox of photography:

¹⁷Paradoxically, women desire this image for themselves, in order to compete with other women, ultimately for the attention of the male gaze. Feminists attempted to deny this by constructing other identities. Arbus photographed some members of the feminist movement, and one can see the differences between the various women's bodies, hairstyles and clothing. See Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 122-125, particularly the group photograph of 'A radical feminist group and feminist leaders,' 'The Red Stockings.' This was originally published in *The Sunday Times Magazine* (London), (September 14, 1969), and was accompanied by a text written by Irma Kurtz titled "Make War not Love." Kurtz later became 'agony aunt' for *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

¹⁸Not all women artists and photographers from the 1970's on were feminist artists and photographers. In the 1960's and 1970's the work of prominent artists such as Georgia O'Keefe, Barbara Hepworth and Elisabeth Frink was not informed by feminism. Indeed, there is no evidence to suggest that Arbus's own practice was informed by feminist theories either. Therefore I do not wish to rank Arbus and her work as feminist, but rather consider feminism as a legitimate context within which her work might appropriate political meanings from the combination of the type of subjects of her work, and in particular the subjects of her *Untitled* series: women with Down's syndrome and women considered mentally retarded, and within their context of Arbus's chosen medium: photography.

¹⁹Roszika Parker & Griselda Pollock, *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1971-1984* (London: Routledge, 1987), 87.

As industrialisation provided social uses for the operations of the photographer, so the reaction against these uses reinforced the self-consciousness of photography as art . . . photography is not practised by most people as an art. It is mainly a social rite, a defence against anxiety, and a tool of power.²⁰

An ideological contradiction was negotiated so that a burgeoning photographic industry could be divided between the domain of artistic property, whose privilege, resting on copyright protection, was a function of its lack of power, and the scientifico-technical domain, whose power was a function of its renunciation of privilege.²¹

This presents the question: how can women artists change existing representations of women, and counteract women's oppression by patriarchy, through the value system of Art? Given that the photograph must relinquish its status—Art or social document, one for the other—how can women use photography as a political vehicle to drive their policies into public consciousness? It seems that to assert gender as a basis for equal rights is little more than a non-starter. Let us return to the other devalued group under consideration by Hevey—'disabled people'—and inquire the same of them: What can 'disabled' artists do to change existing representations of the 'disabled,' and counteract oppression of 'disabled' people by the able-bodied in society? In his unrelenting critique of Arbus's images, David Hevey criticises Arbus as able-bodied—and therefore oppressive—photographer:

[Arbus's] images tell us nothing about the actual lives of disabled people, but they add to the history of oppressive representation. Whether beauty or the beast, they are outsiders. The basis for this border in society is real. It is physical and it is called segregation. The social absence of disabled people creates a vacuum in which the visual meanings attributable (symbolically, metaphorically, psychically, etc.) to impairment and disablement appear free-floating and devoid of an actual people. In the absence of disabled people, the meaning in the disabled person and their body is made by those who survey. They attempt to shift the disablement on to the impairment, and the impairment into a flaw. The very absence

²⁰Sontag, 8.

²¹Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 63.

of disabled people in positions of power and representation deepens the use of this flaw in their images. The repression of disabled people makes it more likely that the symbolic use of disablement by non-disabled people is a sinister or mythologist one. Disablement re-enters the social world through photographic representation, but in the re-entry its meaning is tied not by the observed, disabled people, but by the non-disabled observers.²²

As was the problem with feminism—where representations of women, in other words those based in gender, would only ever be read as 'other' by the male viewer—according to Hevey, likewise the meaning of the representation of the 'disabled' body will only ever be read as 'other' by the able-bodied. How then are Arbus's photographs of the women born with Down's syndrome and those classified as 'mentally retarded' to be understood, given that Arbus's images are presented to the public through a well known and respected art photography publisher in the congenial form of the book? As we previously noted, the state use of photography as a means of surveillance greatly exceeded its classification as Art. Let us now return then to Arbus's *Untitled* photographs to try to establish their currency—not as Art, nor as state licence of control, but rather as social documents encompassing both visual and linguistic translations of integration, and importantly, transgressing the boundaries of both photographic and social classifications.

²²Hevey, 71-72. See also Jo Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture: A personal, political and photographic autobiography*, (London: Camden Press, 1986). In the chapter titled, "The picture of health? 1982 onwards," Spence employs photography autobiographically to document her personal experience of breast cancer and her treatment by orthodox and alternative medical practitioners. Her work is a very clear example of feminist art practice, illustrating 'the personal is political' as she questions her own body image, her responses and the response of others to her sense of femininity after her partial mastectomy. Spence says she wanted a talisman to remind her that she still had some rights over her own body. To this end she used photography, stating: "These images are part of a health project—the body as the site of struggle . . . where I am trying to make available visually what is visually unknown, unseen or feared by most [women]: a struggle for health during the mind/body crisis around having breast cancer." Spence quoted in *Looking On: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media*, ed. Rosemary Betterton, (London: Pandora Press, 1987), 276. Spence also admitted: "I decided to keep a record of the changing outward condition of my body. This stopped me disavowing that I have cancer, and helped me to come to terms with something I initially found shocking and abhorrent." Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, 166.

5.3 Family Album

In May 1968, Diane Arbus wrote, "The working title, if you can call it that, for my book which I keep postponing is Family Album."²³ In November 1969, she again wrote of her intention to make a book, but this time she specified her subject:

I think about doing a book on the retarded [women] . . . 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.²⁴

Arbus failed to produce either book in her lifetime. But the Estate's decision to publish her last, and most extended, corpus of images as *Untitled* effectively locates Arbus's photographs of the 'mentally retarded' women in a new context, still in book form, but importantly, separate from the earlier Arbus work published in the monograph. Hence, it is now possible to consider these photographs as independent, and therefore, the book as a work in its own right. Arbus herself commented on the 'multiplicity' of her chosen subject, and it is essentially the volume of images that Arbus amassed over a period of approximately two years on her numerous visits to these institutions that have made this single subject collection possible.

In counterpoint to her earlier works, the *Untitled* series differs significantly in terms of Arbus's choice of subject matter. Whilst previously Arbus personally looked for and identified the 'flaw' in her subjects, the women in the *Untitled* images had already been identified as 'flawed' and labelled 'mentally retarded' prior to her photographing them. As we can see from Arbus's photographs, both women with Down's syndrome and those classified as 'mentally retarded' were reputedly installed together in the same anonymous, but usually unseen, residential institutions.

²³Arbus quoted in Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 171.

²⁴*ibid.*

The 'mentally retarded' are viewed by advanced capitalism as worthless: they are considered unfit to work, and therefore cannot contribute to society financially—they cannot 'pay their way.' It is not simply the evaluation of their intelligence quotient as below average and the consequent poor cognitive attainments of these women that has determined their incarceration, but perhaps more significantly, their presumed anti-social behaviour.²⁵ Moreover, women are considered an increased threat due to their natural instinct to reproduce, and part of their confinement is to ensure that they, as 'sub-humans,' do not bear children of similar constitution. Thus, the price for them is exile as society purges itself of the burden of socially incapable and, more conspicuously, *socially unacceptable*, women.

We have already considered a number of factors in the *Untitled* book in the preceding chapters: the absence of individual titles, the subjects themselves—the women with Down's syndrome, the 'mentally retarded,' and their location—the institution. This of course leads us to consider where the residents have been removed from: society-at-large, yes, but more significantly, they have been removed from a microcosm of society: the social unit, the institution of the family. The *Untitled* photographs show the subjects looking towards the camera, quite clearly posing for Arbus, or at least aware of her presence; Arbus did not violate any code of privacy. We could speculate then, that over a period of time, Arbus established a position of trust and subsequently developed friendships with these women; she perhaps even began to consider them as some sort of family of her own—an extended family.²⁶ As we look at the images, turning the pages of the book, we begin to consider how the photographs

²⁵Some 'mental retardates' . . . particularly borderline cases, are so classified on the basis of social rather than cognitive competence. Indeed, it has been suggested that in the British Mental Deficiency Act of 1913 (superseded in 1958) mental deficiency was defined almost exclusively in terms of 'social competence.' *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, Alan Bullock, Oliver Stallybrass & Stephen Trombley, eds., (London: Fontana Press, 1988), 518.

²⁶Hevey claims, "Arbus first loved then hated this last work." Hevey, 64. He does not substantiate this, however, and one can only assume this is Hevey's personal opinion, and not Arbus's.

relate to each other, and what the relationship between each of the subjects is. While it is impossible to determine what her intentions were exactly, it is possible to conceive of Arbus's collected *Untitled* images as an 'alternative' family album.²⁷

Whilst Tagg focuses on photography as an apparatus of state surveillance, Sontag gives some thought to the social uses of photography, as does Pierre Bourdieu, only Bourdieu makes an expansive sociological study of the phenomenon. One aspect they all agree on though is that photography as Art is a subordinate category—in essence, obsolete—in which photography disconnects itself from the discourse of truth, and instead affiliates itself with aesthetics. Thus photography as Art cannot in any way extend itself beyond this realm and claim any function other than autonomy. In his book, *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*, Bourdieu writes:

In every way the opposite of a pure aesthetic, the popular 'aesthetic' expressed in photographs and in the judgements passed on photographs follows on logically from the social functions conferred upon photography, and from the fact that it is always given a social function.²⁸

Let us consider then the part that photography plays in recording, not only members of the family, but also, importantly, the events in which they have been involved, and their significance to the family. Since the photograph has an unquestionable causal relation to reality, this is also the foundation of its dominant social use as documentation. According to Bourdieu, the family becomes subject to a set of photographic ideals that

²⁷See also, for instance, the photographs of Nan Goldin and Sally Mann.

²⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*. trans. Shaun Whiteside, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 80. First published as *Un art moyen* by Les Editions de Minuit, 1965. Bourdieu writes: "In as much as the practice is only photography of the photographable, it is associated with those moments, which in both senses of the word, define it. The artistic attitude, the permanent and generalised disposition to promote any object to the status of the work of art, which, itself defining the principle behind its selections, is defined by the definition of its objects, is different in kind from a practice that does not contain within itself the principle of its own existence and definition. . . aspiration to a practice directed towards aesthetic ends is not systematically or exclusively the property of the most cultivated individuals, those most likely to apply to a specific activity a general disposition acquired by education; rather it is encountered among those who share the lowest level of integration into society, either by reason of their age, their matrimonial status or their professional situation." Bourdieu, 39.

must be adhered to if the image is to make sense to its viewer, who translates it from the perspective of the popular 'aesthetic,' in other words: the viewer seeks to determine the social function of the photograph.

Pivotal to this photographic protocol is the popular choice of subject matter: it is not only logical to make photographs of one's family, it is expected. Thus, Bourdieu claims the function of the photograph for the family to be the *social function* it not only performs, but also provides:

Apart from a tiny minority of aesthetes, photographers see the recording of family life as the primary function of photography, continuing to conform to the strained, posed and stereotyped photography of the family album, however harsh their judgement upon it may be, because they see it as being just as inevitable as the social ceremonies it solemnizes.²⁹

The capacity the photograph has for recording reality as it is, guarantees its engagement to immortalise the experiences of the family; it is this capacity that endures to show *how it was*, hence the photograph is also considered a substitute for memory, and memories. Not only does the image show the physical appearance of its subjects, but importantly, it triggers recollections about those subjects that account for the making of the image in the first place. In essence though, all potential meaning within the family photograph depends upon the viewer alone, or rather, all potential meaning depends upon the viewer's position of consanguinity.³⁰

The viewer regards the photograph as a source of evidence, and she strives to supplement this by conjoining, what we shall here call photographic integrity, with recollected doubt. One could say then that the viewer looks to the photograph to convey a sense of truth. But it is the willingness of the viewer to modify meaning into what she wants to

²⁹Ibid., 30.

³⁰Is there anything more dull than being subjected to other people's photographs of their family? This is because the photographs only have a social function for the family they portray, integrate and unify. To all other viewers, the images are merely aesthetic objects, autonomous, and therefore meaningless.

believe as truth that contributes to her singular reading of the image, and consequently, truth remains at the level of abstraction: a linguistic concept rather than a photographic 'reality.' As this is the mythical substructure on which family photographs are based, logically then, one can see that the absence of photographs of certain family members reduces memory, therefore the viewer can adjust her recollections accordingly, and in the process, reduce omitted family members to mere traces of memory. In other words, because no photograph exists to intervene, the viewer is free to reconstruct her household to suit herself.³¹ Through this version of events, the concept of the family becomes fragmented.

Let us return now to consider Arbus's photographs of the 'retarded' women: if the predominant social use of photography is to memorialise the family, we must begin to reflect upon the social history of the residents, that is, their position within the family; the fact is, however, they have no position within the family because they have been expelled from it. Many similarities exist between the *Untitled* series and earlier works made by Arbus, and indeed, it appears that she consistently

³¹Again, see Spence, "Phototherapy: New Portraits for Old." In 1983, Jo Spence, along with fellow photographer Rosy Martin, developed the process of 'phototherapy' whereby a subject would re-enact scenes, or rather memories, from her past experiences. Beginning with childhood, Spence and Martin began exploring the existing meanings in their respective histories from their family snapshot albums; they wanted to deconstruct the photographic images previously constructed through the social and family dictates of the time (c. 1950's). According to Spence and Martin, most family photographs appear to be staged, or depict happy times in a bid to later evoke happy memories. Spence said, "I began to reverse the process of the way I had been constructed as a woman by deconstructing myself visually in an attempt to identify the process by which I had been put together." Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, 83. Hence it is a form of reality, or rather, a form of truth, that Spence and Martin attempt to evaluate through the process of phototherapy, these forms being similar to memories evoked by the snapshot images in their family albums. Thus the processes of remembering, re-enactment and their subsequent documentation allow the subject, and author, to enter the realm of subjectivity. The intention is to dredge up the residues of past experience which have long been embedded in the depths of the subconscious. Spence and Martin worked as co-counsellors in phototherapy: individually, working with each other, and then with other women, all within the sphere of 'identity crisis,' utilising images from their childhoods. They gathered together school photographs and family album snapshots to create a starting point for discussion and subsequent deconstruction. Spence claims: "Such photos are surrounded by vast chains of connections and buried memories. We need to dredge them up, reconstruct them, even re-invent them, so that they work in *our* interests, rather than remaining the mythologies of others as photographic archetypes." Betterton, *Looking On . . .*, 268. In accordance with a feminist position, Spence and Martin aim to open up a present consciousness, and placing oneself in front of the camera becomes synonymous with self-disclosure, thereby claiming emancipation from past traumatic emotional restraints. They consider family album snapshots to be constructions, and as such, they can reconstruct them in the way they want to: "Setting up the pictures: once the camera and lighting had been set up, we took turns to take centre stage, presenting what we wanted to the camera, seeking suggestions for the possible improvement or heightening of effect, then waiting to be photographed." *Ibid.*, 270.

photographed her subjects within the *modus operandi* of what Bourdieu terms the popular 'aesthetic.' But her choice of subject matter in the *Untitled* series marks a meaningful egress for Arbus. She herself admitted, "I'm very little drawn to photographing people that are known or even subjects that are known."³² Arbus, as photographer, separates her subject from her medium, just as the viewer of the family snapshot does. Although the photograph is revered as a document that conveys reliable information of someone or something having been there, it is nevertheless the subject of the image that is of both immediate and lasting importance for the viewer.

Every image in the *Untitled* series contains a human figure, and every figure is female. While the images themselves cannot be separated—either literally, as they are bound together in the book, or metaphorically, as they all depict the same subject, those women categorised as 'mentally retarded'—one can identify particular elements that are in keeping with the predominant social use of photography; that is, the use of the photograph as a means to record, not simply the physical existence of the family members, but also, crucially, to reify the concept of the family. Within Arbus's *Untitled* images, we bear witness to specific themes suited to this very purpose: the documenting of events such as Halloween and fancy dress parties; the inclusion of children's toys; the location of the subjects within children's play areas; and most noticeable, the location of the subjects without the institution. And this last observation is a highly significant one; we must ask ourselves: why did Arbus make photographs of the 'mentally retarded' women without the presence of the institution personnel, and outside the interiors of the institutions? Admittedly, a number of exceptions to the latter do exist, and we noted these anomalies in the second section of chapter one. Five

³²Arbus quoted Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*, 3.

photographs do show residents within the institution: four of these picture young children and one shows an adolescent [*Untitled*, 6, 9, 12, 22, 31]. These images effectively establish the subjects' dependency as minors, and visually confirm their enforced dependency upon the institution, which has of course supplanted the support of the minors' families.

One photograph shows a close up of a young child looking directly into the camera [*Untitled*, 9]. But the child is drooling. This image is analogous to Arbus's earlier image, *Mother holding her child, N.J. 1967*.³³ It does, however, as the title confirms, include the mother too, thereby securing the child to the concept of the family. While the child in this image is undoubtedly only a baby, the child in the photograph from the *Untitled* series is older. Thus, Arbus's earlier photograph is accepted as portraying a suitable photographic subject: that of mother and child. The child from the *Untitled* image though, is considered repellent, and therefore the photograph is considered redundant because there appears to be no logical purpose to the image: the child has no *visible* mother, the photograph bears no name, thus the child remains unidentified; and within the context of the other images, those of the 'mentally retarded' women—and especially the women born with Down's syndrome—the action of drooling is specifically linked, in the mind of the viewer, to the subject's inability to control her own physical impulses.³⁴

These five photographs are not a departure from Arbus's chosen formula for the remaining images however—those made without the institution; we might be fooled into thinking that they are simply representative of some of the interior spaces of the institution. What these

³³Ibid., no page number. This image was originally published in *The Sunday Times Magazine* under the title, "Pauline Peters on People: How to Train a Derby Winner," which showed three photographs of participants at a New Jersey diaper derby, with a text by Pauline Peters. This particular image is of a saliva contest, which although distasteful, was certainly still socially acceptable as it was part of a 'family event.'

³⁴See chapter 4, note 22 for details of 'open mouth, protruding tongue' condition of children with Down's syndrome.

few photographs do though, is bind the totality of the works to the problematic of the subjects as 'appropriate' subjects for the photograph. How so? If these images had not been interspersed throughout the book, if the book had contained only images made without the institution, the viewer might be allowed to delude herself into thinking that the institution simply did not exist. The viewer of the photograph is entirely passive: she is not receptive to anything that is not *visible*. These five images are therefore crucial to remind us of the circumstances in which these children are trapped. In Bogdon and Taylor's words:

[They] are victims of the absurd belief that [mentally retarded people] need less than other people—that a pleasant and decent place to live, meaningful activities, stimulating and challenging tasks, human kindness and affection, and dignity are less necessary to them than to 'normal' people.³⁵

It is also significant to the viewer that the subjects are children and not adults; these photographs offer little more than the subjects themselves located in pictorially limited spaces within the institution: the children do not play, rather, they appear discontent and bored in their confinement. These particular photographs are not documentation of an occasion or event: these images show the moments 'in between.' In other words, these photographs would be rejected from the family album, that is, if these scenes were considered worthy of photographing in the first place. The photographs show their subjects have no purpose: the children are simply passing time, while time passes them by. These images represent the past, present and future for their subjects, and without this photographic, visible evidence, the viewer would conveniently turn a blind eye to the fact that the subjects are indeed residents of a state controlled institution for the 'mentally retarded.'

In counterpoint to the photographs of young people, all made within the residence, the images made without the

³⁵Bogdon & Taylor, 16.

institution—presumably most of these were made in the surrounding grounds of the residences—suggest a limited freedom. The resident is thus afforded a certain autonomy, which she gains, not only when participating in social events, but importantly, she is emancipated by allowing herself to be photographed by Arbus.

As previously determined, *Untitled* contains photographs of women who cover almost the entire spectrum of life, ranging from adolescence through middle to old age. But there is nothing to signify the relationship, if any, that exists amongst the women. There is, however, a certain photograph of an older looking woman [*Untitled*, 14]. This woman, as with most others in Arbus's photographs, stands right in the centre of the image, close enough to the front edge of the picture plane so that we do not see her lower legs or feet. She is located in the by now familiar out of focus and unidentifiable expanse of grass—the foreground to the by now familiar distant boundary of trees. In contrast, the woman is in almost perfect focus, and she wears a loose fitting sleeveless dress that has diagonal stripes on the bodice and vertical stripes on the skirt; her hair is cut short, and rather badly, making her look more than a little mannish. Her eyes are deep set and she positively stares into the camera. Her mouth is held in an open grimace, and she looks an altogether menacing and formidable character. While her right arm is placed behind her back out of sight, in the crook of her left arm she cradles a doll. The doll is clothed, with short hair, and with its head facing towards the woman, the doll appears to be gazing at its guardian. The woman also clutches a small plastic toy in her left hand. It looks like a small animal, but with a cartoon face—the sort of toy a young child would play with. Through the scheme of this picture there seemingly emerges an incongruous lineage of species. One would not commonly see a woman of this age with such a toy, as usually toys remain within the realm of

childhood. The child who plays with the doll as a surrogate baby does so in a safe pretence of adulthood. It seems as though the woman treats the doll as an actual baby—her own child perhaps? The woman's face seems to express she is both proprietor and protector of the 'child.' Even if this woman had earlier given birth to a child of her own, she is no longer a mother since being incarcerated in the institution. Perhaps that was the very reason for her exclusion from her family: she may have had a child out of wedlock. Whatever the reason, she has no status within her own family anymore, and this photograph is a poignant reminder and symbol of the natural and cultural devaluation and degradation of all the women shut away in institutions. The relationship between the woman and the doll is further visual testimony of the woman's level of 'mental immaturity' as determined by an oppressive medical establishment, and further perpetuated by the residential institution. Indeed, it is quite possible that many of these women have spent most of their lives in institutions, and have never experienced the normality of family life.

Significantly, their displacement to the institution renders them hidden, invisible, not only from their families, but notably, from their family albums: not only is the 'mentally retarded' woman considered unfit to hold a position and role within her family, and within society, she is likewise considered an unsuitable subject for the photograph. This is in no way associated to a pure aesthetic, or any formal sense of subject matter, but rather, it is attributable to the social use of photography specific to the implicit ideals of the family photograph—those of integration and unity—which consequently form the family's photographic heritage. Bourdieu claims,

Because [photography] is always aimed at the fulfilment of social and socially defined functions, ordinary practice is necessarily ritualistic and ceremonial, and therefore stereotyped as much in its choice of objects as in its expressive techniques: as an institutional piety, it is only carried out in consecrated circumstances and places

and, associated with the solemnization of the solemn and the consecration of the sacred, it is free of the ambition to accord the status of 'that which is photographed' to anything not objectively (that is, socially) defined as 'photographable' and everything that 'must be photographed,' because the very principle that defines the basis of its existence also determines its limits.³⁶

The family photograph must fulfil certain functions to become a valid contribution to the album, and it is most often the photograph of the 'event' that does so most authoritatively. For instance, a photograph made on a child's birthday conveys an accurate historical record as well as providing a visual testimonial of family unity. More often than not, the child will be seen in a domestic setting—the family home—alongside her birthday cake, at her birthday party, which confirms the purpose, and thus value, of the photograph, which importantly, is in turn the value of the child. Sontag explains this peculiarity thus:

Memorialising the achievements of individuals considered as members of families (as well as other groups) is the earliest possible use of photography . . . Cameras go with family life . . . Not to take pictures of one's children, particularly when they are small, is a sign of parental indifference.³⁷

Many of Arbus's images of the women who live in the institution show the women in fancy dress, and wearing masks and bonnets; one can clearly link these images to the social use of photography to document the event. Other images show residents wearing bathing suits, confirming that it is summertime, and this again corresponds to one of the most major events photographed by the family: that of the family holiday. As well as constituting proof that the family have been on holiday, this in itself giving them financial and social status, the holiday photograph is a sign of integration and unity; so we can conclude that the photograph of the event has purpose, and that it was intentionally made because of this.

³⁶Bourdieu, 38-39.

³⁷Sontag, 8.

Bourdieu maintains that the social use of photography to immortalise the family is based on a system of implicit precepts that demand absolute outcomes. For instance, in accordance with the popular 'aesthetic,' the viewer will simply reject the image if there is no possibility of recognition resulting in meaning. That is to say, the viewer only seeks to understand the function of the image, and naturally it seems, the function is also its meaning. This is determined by a series of standard inquiries: Who is the subject? What is her relation to me as viewer, and to others, both within and without the image? Why has the photograph been made? Bourdieu describes how the mother uses the images as a photographic family tree:

The photograph must only supply a representation that is true and precise enough to permit recognition . . . by means of a comparison of fragments of knowledge and experiences, each person is located with reference to his or her family line, and the reading of old . . . photographs often takes the form of a course in genealogical science, in which the mother, a specialist in the subject, teaches the child about the connections which bind him or her to each of the people shown. She works out how the couples came about; she analyzes and compares the sphere of social connections of . . . the families; she remarks on absences, which indicate quarrels, and on presences, which do the family an honour.³⁸

In other words, the subject must hold a certain status, occupy a social role, and the overall image itself works best if linked to an event. Even if the image does not display visual aspects of the 'occasion,' it must nevertheless hold a latent discourse, that is, the photograph must provoke a narrative. In short, the subject must be within the realm of the photographable. Bourdieu declares:

Nothing may be photographed apart from that which must be photographed. The ceremony may be photographed because it is outside of the daily routine, and must be photographed because it realises the image the group seeks to give itself as a group. What is photographed and what is perceived by the reader of the photographs is not, properly speaking, individuals in their capacity as individuals, but social roles . . . or social relationships.³⁹

³⁸Bourdieu, 22.

³⁹Bourdieu, 24.

One expects photography to give a narrative symbolism, and as a sign or, more precisely, an allegory, unequivocally to express transcendental meaning and increase the notations that could unambiguously constitute the virtual discourse that it is supposed to bear.⁴⁰

Let us remind ourselves: the women in the institution have no social role and have been socially devalued due to their classification as 'mentally retarded.' Also, the social relationships they once had with their families have been severed: Arbus's photographs of the women bear testimony, not to family unity, but inversely, to their exclusion from the family.⁴¹

Arbus made her photographs of these women using the standard conventions of the family snapshot. Most of the images show their subjects participating in an event and most subjects face the camera; if not, the mannerisms and poses of the women suggest they are at least aware of the presence of the photographer. We could reason that the images have all the qualities necessary to qualify for the classification 'family photograph,' that is, they are in accordance with the popular 'aesthetic' and would therefore be appropriate to be included within a family album. We cannot consider Arbus's book *Untitled* to be a conventional family album, however; its discrepancy is not that the ideals already mentioned are not fulfilled, because as we just noted, most of Arbus's *Untitled* photographs adhere to these criteria. But it is the subjects' removal from the social sphere of their families that render them unsuitable as photographic subjects; hence we could deem Arbus's photographs to be outside the limits of the popular 'aesthetic.' As a result, these photographs serve as aide memoirs of the exclusion of the women

⁴⁰Ibid., 91.

⁴¹Hevey infers: "Arbus had experienced, in her own family, the emotional and psychological cost of wealth in terms of the painful subjectivity and isolation of the individual hidden and silenced within the outward signs of bourgeois upward mobility and success. In terms of disability, however, Arbus read the bodily impairment of her disabled subject as a sign of disorder, even chaos; that is, as a physical manifestation of *her* chaos, *her* horror. Despite her relationships with disabled people (often lasting a decade or more) she viewed these not as social and equal relationships but as encounters with souls from an underworld." Hevey, 58. This is Hevey's personal opinion, again unsubstantiated.

from their families. While their dismissal was based on the grounds that they were socially unacceptable to their families, so too are the photographs of them. Although Arbus works within certain formal conventions—the frontality of the subject, the pose, the event—she also subjects these conventions to interrogation by working in the margins just outside them, by photographing the marginalised—those members of society deemed to be borderline human beings; she does this conspicuously, of course, by photographing women born with Down's syndrome and women classified as 'mentally retarded,' women strategically removed from society and hidden from view. Bourdieu professes that through the simple convention of the pose,

The sitter addresses to the viewer an act of reverence, of courtesy, according to conventional rules, and demands that the viewer obeys the same conventions and the same norms. [She] stands face on and demands to be looked at face on . . . this need for reciprocal deference being the essence of frontality.⁴²

This may be the real assault these images make on the viewer: 'mental retardation' is the latent discourse seemingly reified through the photograph. While the images merely show us the physical appearance of the women, it is by photographing them, notably amongst women who display physiognomic signs of Down's syndrome, that Arbus issues *a licence to stare*. The photograph may always demand to be looked at, but it is the subject who commands and sustains the gaze.⁴³ As a result, Arbus's subjects are considered threatening: the 'mentally retarded' have

⁴²Bourdieu, 82. He goes on to say, "It is always as if, by means of obeying the principal of frontality and adopting the most conventional posture, one were seeking as far as possible to control the objectification of one's own image. Axial composition, in accordance with the principle of frontality, provides an impression that is as clearly legible as possible, as if one were seeking to avoid any misunderstanding, even if this were to mean sacrificing 'naturalness.' Looking without being seen, without being seen looking and without being looked at, or candidly, so to speak, and, to an even greater extent, taking photographs in this way, amounts to the theft of the images of other people. Looking at the person who is looking (or who is taking the photograph), correcting one's posture, one presents oneself to be looked at as one seeks to be looked at; one presents one's own image. In short, faced with a look which captures and immobilizes appearances, adopting the most ceremonial bearing means reducing the risk of clumsiness and *gaucherie* and giving others an image of oneself that is affected and pre-defined. Like respect for etiquette, frontality is a means of effecting one's own objectification: offering a regulated image of oneself is a way of imposing the rules of one's own perception." Ibid., 83.

⁴³See Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 25-60, for his discussion on *studium* and *punctum*.

no social rights and they have no status within the family; the 'mentally retarded' have no right to look and demand the look be returned, because they have no right to be seen, therefore no right to be photographed.⁴⁴ Bourdieu's describes his understanding of the family album:

The family album expresses the essence of social memory. There is nothing more unlike the introspective 'search for lost time' than those displays of family photographs with their commentaries, the ritual of integration that the family makes its new members undergo. The images of the past arranged in chronological order, the logical order of social memory, evoke and communicate the memory of events which deserve to be preserved because the group sees a factor of unification in the monuments of its past unity or—which amounts to the same thing—because it draws its present unity from its past: this is why there is nothing more decent, reassuring and edifying than a family album.⁴⁵

But Arbus's version of events form the antithesis of this: *Untitled* is far from reassuring. Arbus's book might be edifying in its own way, but to the viewer, it is the apparent nemesis of the 'normal' family album. The family is a biological and social construction, and the concept of the family is fabricated and made manifest through the photograph, and these units of integration are themselves eventually unified by their inclusion within the family album. As Arbus herself said,

Very often an event happens scattered and the account of it will look to you in your mind like it's going to be very straight and photographable. But actually one person is over there and another person is over here and they don't get together. Even when you go to do a family, you want to show the whole family, but how often are the mother and father and the two kids all on the same side of the room? Unless you tell them to go there.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Hevey claims that Arbus 'normalised' subjects ('disabled' subjects, according to Hevey, although we should again dispute this term) such as the Mexican dwarf, the Russian midgets and the Jewish giant, by "placing them in that great site of bourgeois culture and consumption, the home." Hevey, 59. In respect of the Jewish giant, Hevey proclaims: "The 'horror' of Arbus's work is not that she has created Frankenstein but that she moved him in next door! What is more, the freak had brought his family! The 'shock' for hundreds of thousands of non-disabled viewers was that these portraits revealed a hinterland existing in spite of the segregationist non-disabled world view." Ibid., 59. Diametrically then, the women in the *Untitled* series of photographs have been transferred from their homes, eliminated from their families, exiled from society, and incarcerated in mental institutions.

⁴⁵Bourdieu, 30-31.

⁴⁶Arbus quoted in Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*, 12.

And this is how the family is perceived—as a unity, that is to say, its unification is achieved through the photograph and the family album. But can we consider the mentally retarded women to be suitable subjects for both photographs, and subsequently, a family album? Bourdieu claims a set of implicit rules governs the choice of subject matter:

One does not photograph simply anything, or, perhaps, not everything is suitable to be photographed; this is the thesis which, implicitly present in all the judgements, provides proof that aesthetic opinions are not simply arbitrary but, like the practice, obey cultural models. 'It's not something you'd take a picture of,' 'That's not a photograph' —these judgements, peremptory and clear cut, often accompanied by scandalized gestures, negatively express something immediately self-evident. The fact that contravention of a rule may be apparent without the rule being perceived or, even less, formulated as such, does not rule out the possibility that the key to aesthetic judgement, applied to a particular case, lies in a system of implicit principles and rules which it betrays more than it states.⁴⁷

Arbus succeeded in redefining the aesthetic norm of the photographic subject through the monograph publication containing her earlier works: 'freaks' and 'normals' were photographed and filed together in Arbus's demographic of 20th century America. These subjects are accepted by the viewer because, while some of these individuals display the 'flaw' they were born with, others constructed theirs around their social or sexual preferences, or work prospects. Arbus said, "Not content with what [flaw] we were given, we create a whole other set. Our whole guise is like giving a sign to the world to think of us in a certain way."⁴⁸ We could say we would never have seen these people were it not for Arbus's photographs, but the impact of their images is greatly reduced by Arbus's explicit titling: everyone is identified, every attribute is labelled, and this is the key to our understanding of the image and our subsequent acceptance thereof. Importantly though, Arbus's 'freaks' and 'normals' were photographed within society, and in spite of their looks or

⁴⁷Bourdieu, 85.

⁴⁸Arbus quoted in Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*, 1.

professions, these individuals are free to inhabit whatever community they chose.⁴⁹

But in making her final series of photographs, Arbus betrays us by offering up the real thing: the *Untitled* collection shows 'freaks' and 'normals' too, does it not? As defined by the implicit regulations of the popular 'aesthetic,' however, not only are the women with Down's

⁴⁹The monograph of Arbus's work shows many of her photographs, the subjects of which Arbus herself described as 'freaks.' These are, however, liberally interspersed with 'normals.' For example, *A young man in curlers at home on West 20th Street*, N.Y.C. 1966 is followed by *The Junior Interstate Ballroom Dance Champions, Yonkers*, N.Y. 1962, which shows an adolescent couple posing with their trophies. Conversely, *A young man and his girlfriend with hot dogs in the park*, N.Y.C. 1971 is followed by *Transvestite at her birthday party*, N.Y.C. 1969, which shows a transvestite lounging on her bed with her birthday cake at her side; the walls of her room are adorned with balloons. Other 'normals' include *A family on their lawn on Sunday in Westchester*, N.Y. 1968, *Boy with a straw hat waiting to march in a pro-war parade*, N.Y.C. 1967, *Girl in a coat lying on her bed*, N.Y.C. 1968, *Elderly couple on a park bench*, N.Y.C. 1969, *A Jewish couple dancing*, N.Y.C. 1963, *A widow in her bedroom*, N.Y.C. 1963, *Girl in a shiny dress*, N.Y.C. 1967 and *Two friends at home*, N.Y.C. 1965 amongst a number of others. The 'freaks' include *Russian midget friends in a living room on 100th Street*, N.Y.C. 1963, *Retired man and his wife at home in a nudist camp one morning*, N.J. 1963, *Mexican dwarf in his hotel room* in N.Y.C. 1970, *A Jewish giant at home with his parents in the Bronx*, N.Y. 1970, *Two men dancing at a drag ball*, N.Y.C. 1970, *A husband and wife in the woods at the nudist camp*, N.J. 1963, *Hermaphrodite and a dog in a carnival trailer*, Md. 1970, and *Topless dancer in her dressing room*, San Francisco, Cal. 1968. But what is so freakish about them? Are Russian midgets not allowed to have friends? Are nudists not supposed to be nude when resident in their chosen nudist camp? Can a Jewish giant not live quite happily at home with his parents? Mexicans can be dwarfs, and hermaphrodites can own dogs. Two men dance together at a drag ball—so what? Is that not what men at drag balls are supposed to do? So what if the topless dancer is topless? Is that not the whole point? Undoubtedly, the subjects look different—the midgets, the dwarf, the giant, and so on—but they nevertheless inhabit society in spite of their 'flaws.' Because Arbus locates her 'freaks' in domestic or work environments, such as the living room (the midgets), the hotel room (the dwarf), at home (the giant), at a drag ball (the transvestites), the nudist camp (the nudists), the carnival trailer (the hermaphrodite), and the dressing room (the topless dancer), their physical differences (their visible abnormalities, their 'flaws') become subsumed by their logical, therefore, mundane, surroundings. For instance, the hermaphrodite might possess both male and female sex organs—admittedly not the biological norm—but [s]he is in the right place: the hermaphrodite belongs to the carnival. If anything, the peculiarity of this photograph is the inclusion of the dog. But why? After all, a dog is supposedly [wo]man's best friend. Let us return then to the 'normals.' These subjects appear, or essentially look 'normal'. But because photography records a moment in time, we might imagine histories for these people, or even what their futures might hold. Consider the family on their lawn at the weekend: the parents are lying on lounge chairs; the child is in the background bending over a paddling pool. While the wife appears composed, her eyes closed, (perhaps she is thinking about buying a new dress, or having her hair done—she just looks the 'type') in contrast her husband looks uncomfortable: his feet protrude awkwardly over the edge of the sun-lounger and although he rests one hand on its arm, his fingers are tensely splayed while he uses his other hand to shield his eyes. What is going on? What might happen beyond the photograph? Could it be that he is tired of his young son whining and is actually plotting to drown him in the paddling pool? Could it be that he is sick of his nagging wife and intends to murder her as well? Might he bury them both in the back yard and return to work as normal on Monday morning? Stranger things have happened. Consider the boy with the straw hat; he is waiting to march in a *pro-war* parade. He may look young and innocent, but he patriotically displays two badges on the lapels of his jacket: the larger one reads, GOD BLESS AMERICA: SUPPORT OUR BOYS IN VIETNAM, while the smaller, but ultimately more sinister, states quite unselfconsciously: BOMB HANOI. Could we be looking into the face of a potential killer? Similarly, the girl in a coat lying on her bed might conceivably be a prostitute, the elderly couple might be in the middle of an argument concerning the husband's recent adultery, the jewellery-laden Jewish couple dancing could have made their fortune through fraud, the widow in her bedroom could be waiting for her handsome and virile young lover to arrive, (even though she knows he's only after her money), the girl in the shiny dress could be a drug addict, a 'speed freak,' and the two friends at home could be lovers, only the seemingly passive and physically modest young man is actually a sadist, while his physically dominant girlfriend is a masochist—she actually enjoys the pain. This, of course, is corroborated by the fact they are standing, albeit fully clothed, next to a rather soiled looking bed with crumpled sheets. And the girl does have two scratches on her openly displayed arm. Feint perhaps, but there nonetheless—*evidence*. Suddenly, it seems as though 'normal' society is populated by rather undesirable and freakish individuals.

syndrome and the 'mentally retarded' believed unfit to populate society, they are also deemed unfit to be photographic subjects. Bourdieu's hypothesis makes this clear:

The conventionality of attitudes towards photography appears to refer to the style of social relations favoured by a society which is both stratified and static and in which family and 'home' are more real than particular individuals, who are primarily defined by their family connections; in which the social rules of behaviour and the moral code are more apparent than the feelings, desires or thoughts of individual subjects; in which social exchanges, strictly regulated by consecrated conventions, are carried out under the constant fear of the judgement of others, under the watchful eye of opinion, ready to condemn in the name of norms which are unquestioned, and always dominated by the need to give the best image of oneself, the image most in keeping with the ideal of dignity and honour. How, under these conditions, could the representation of society be anything other than the representation of a *represented* society?⁵⁰

But this is precisely what the *Untitled* photographs accomplish: Arbus first emancipates the women incarcerated in the institutions by photographing them; they are then integrated and unified through the socially acceptable construction of the 'family album.' Finally, the women are returned to society through the socially accessible, and affordable, format of the book.

⁵⁰Bourdieu, 83-84. David Hevey writes: "I visited one of the largest photographic bookshops in London and leafed through the publications. Generally disabled people were absent, but there was a sort of presence. Disabled people are represented but almost exclusively as symbols of 'otherness' placed within equations which have no engagement to them and which take their non-integration as a natural by-product of their impairment." Hevey, 54.

Conclusions: Promiscuity and Photography

It is difficult, perhaps impossible now, to imagine our world without photographs. Indeed, many of us only see and experience worlds beyond our own through photographs, and not, as was previously required, through empirical adventure. Even at the time of its invention back in the 19th century, recording one's travels was one of the earliest applications of photography: a journey to a far away land was not only to be experienced first hand, but was now also to be photographed. The enlightened traveller would then return to whence she came, replete with evidence of having been elsewhere, of having witnessed another place, its monuments, and its people. The antithesis of studio staged portrait productions, photography and tourism ingenuously united, not simply to record such expeditions, outings or pilgrimages for the benefit of their maker, but more significantly, to afford a form of more or less faithful documentation that could be disseminated amongst both the inquisitive well-to-do and curious commoners alike. Whether one had the financial means to travel was no longer at issue: now everyone could 'visit' the ancient ruins of Greece; now everyone could admire the paintings and sculptures which physically belong in Rome and Florence.

Diane Arbus also visited her subjects. But in contrast to ancient sites and statues, she instead photographed the living monuments of post-industrial 20th century America, making portraits of people from the many divisions of a disparate society. Thomas Southall writes:

Unlike the studio photographer . . . [Arbus] did not invite her subjects to come to her: she went to them, to their neighborhoods, front yards, homes, hotel rooms. For the most part, her portraits were not simply about faces and their expressions. They were also about bodies, clothing, furniture, wall-paper—all the details and appurtenances of an individual's identity. The merging of these disparate techniques seemed revolutionary at the time. Many of her

portraits appeared to be simultaneously as artless and innocent as a snapshot and as factual and unequivocal as an X-ray.¹

We might surmise that Arbus's privileged upbringing, combined with her seeming naiveté, and the allure of all things other than she had already encountered are what led to her fascination for photographing society's misfits. But significantly, in the early days, Arbus worked in partnership with her husband Allan Arbus, and they produced photographs of the latest trends for fashion and lifestyle magazines.

Diane Arbus quit the commercial and advertising business altogether in 1956 however, before embarking on a two year period of study with photographer Lisette Model. We might wonder whether some of the visual similarities seen in the work of both Model and Arbus, as well as the work of Sander, Evans and Weegee, question the notion of Arbus's photographic individuality. But Ann Thomas writes:

If Model's photographs exerted a powerful influence over a generation of photographers, Diane Arbus's photographs, which took a major element of Model's vision and pushed it to a logical conclusion, have probably had an even greater influence. Not only is it true that the effect of the work of Arbus on photographers has outweighed our understanding of it, and that her photographs changed the character of the medium, but it is also true that the mere fact of her images being present in the world has adjusted our collective self-image.²

Perhaps of equal significance though, or possibly even more consequential, was the demise of Arbus's marriage around this time: she and Allan Arbus separated, and Diane took their two daughters to live in another apartment, although they did remain in New York City. Arbus's

¹Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, 159.

²Thomas, 146. Model said: "Two tendencies dominate the world of photography today: one full of artificial subterfuges, glamour fantasies and hysterical drive for what is called shock appeal, the other striving for realism, sincerity and truth. The camera is a means of detection, it shows not only what we already know, but can explore new aspects of a constantly changing world. New images surround us everywhere. They are invisible only because of sterile routine, convention and fear. To find these images is to dare to see, to be aware of what there is and how it is. The photographer not only gets information [but] gives information about life." Model quoted in Thomas, 134.

Catherine Lord relays part of a conversation she had with a young, unnamed photographer who said, "Other people want to know what a white middle-class kid like me is doing ripping off his subjects . . . I photograph them *because* they're weird. They're not like me. And if you think I'm as bad as Diane Arbus, I'm not. She fucked people like that. I don't." Lord, 111.

change in financial circumstances therefore compelled her once again to submit her work to magazines, and she quickly gained publications in *Esquire* and *Harper's Bazaar*. Notably, with the advent of John Szarkowski's curatorship of the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1962, the number of photography publications increased greatly; the books were usually catalogues of exhibitions organised by the museum, such as the monograph that accompanied Arbus's posthumous retrospective, some ten years after Szarkowski's arrival, in 1972.

Unlike the contextualised photographs of her magazine assignments, however, the monograph of Arbus's work was put forth as autonomous, at that time at least. It was only later, with the publication of *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work* in 1984, that a hitherto oblivious public was informed of the breadth and scale of Arbus's magazine achievements. While many of these assignments were previously published in a variety of journals, within *Magazine Work* they seem to form a visual monolith, presenting undeniable evidence of Arbus's ability to use photography for purposes other than her 'personal vision' of the world, as the very same editors of the monograph had previously asserted.

Importantly, the photographs in *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work* are presented chronologically, and in keeping with magazine layouts, captions and titles are retained, and where Arbus had written an accompanying article, this has also been reprinted. While there are generically identified groups of people, there are also named individuals, such as writers, artists and actors, setting up a new identity relation between word and image. Eleven years later, the Estate of Diane Arbus permitted the publication of an extended series of photographs of women

who lived in institutions for the 'mentally retarded'; *Untitled* is the only volume of Arbus's work to deal with a single subject.

The Estate of Diane Arbus holds the copyright to all of Arbus's work, both written and photographic, and continue to author her life by judiciously controlling the contexts of publication of her work. The Estate requires that essays and articles about Arbus's life and work be submitted to them for editorial examination if an author wishes to reproduce any of Arbus's photographs alongside. As a result, many scholars have decided to do without Arbus's photographs in the interests of independent thinking, and have thereby not acceded to the censorial 'whims' of the Estate. It seems apparent that the Estate perspicuously divulged *Magazine Work* to counteract the unsavoury, and unauthorised, biography of Arbus written by Patricia Bosworth and published in the same year. Catherine Lord severely criticises Bosworth for 'infecting' both Arbus's work and the history of photography with her ill informed version of events, whilst acknowledging *Magazine Work* to be an accurate, or as accurate as could be expected, portrayal of Arbus, given that Arbus's own family had produced it. *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work* had also been dispensed by the Estate in order to redress the mythical character of Arbus which had—perhaps inadvertently, perhaps not—been the outcome of the Estate's monograph homage to her less than a year after her death.

Many scholars and historians have attempted to interpret Arbus's photographs, and to draw conclusions between her life and her work. While *Magazine Work* has remained largely untouched, being seen in many ways to be self-explanatory, it is the earlier monograph that remains the principal source of fascination for many. There has been little commentary on the last publication issued by the Estate: *Untitled* continues to be avoided; the commentary that does exist is strictly limited

to the small selection of seven *Untitled* photographs originally included at the end of the monograph.

But let us now return to basics. First we must consider the medium of photography itself, and look at how its peculiarities function in contrast to the media of its predecessors: those of drawing and painting. It is amusing to think that the impetus for Talbot's version of photography was that artistic draughtsmanship eluded him; here was a man—a country gentleman, educated at Harrow and Cambridge no less—and more important, a scientist, whose 'faithless pencil' neglected to capture the image of nature as he saw it before him.³ It was quite simply Talbot's frustration with his own creative inadequacy that led to his invention of the Calotype: not only could he record the scene of his choosing, he could also, importantly, make many copies from that initial, single negative.

Photographic reproduction is one of the main elements discussed by Carol Armstrong in her essay which focuses on Arbus's images from the monograph publication; this is, however, along with the other issues under discussion—those of biology, destiny, photography, and difference—considered from the basis of formalism. Armstrong quite clearly states she has no wish to enter into the 'mythological' arena of Diane Arbus's life, or any other methodological mire for that matter, which might detract from the visual, evidential nature of photography, which in turn forms the foundation upon which Armstrong's debate on biological sameness and difference depends.

Let us focus for the moment on this evidential, truth-telling aspect of photography. In painting, where formal qualities alone were taken to be the criteria required of the Art object, photography, in contrast, adheres to no such formal or representational rules. Clive Bell believed that Art

³Talbot quoted in *Printed Light*, eds., John Ward & Sara Stevenson, (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1986), 9.

was strictly autonomous: Art should not perform any function other than its existence for the purposes of aesthetic, that is to say, formal, apprehension and appreciation. Bell claimed:

The emotion that the artist felt in his moment of inspiration he did not feel for objects seen as means, but for objects seen as pure forms—that is as ends in themselves [. . .] Those who find the chief importance of art . . . in its relation to conduct or in practical utility—those who cannot value things as ends in themselves or, at any rate, as direct means to emotion—will never get from anything the best that it can give.⁴

As a result, Bell demerits less sensitive people, claiming that they, "when confronted by a picture, instinctively . . . refer back its forms to the world from which they came. They treat created form as though it were imitated form, a picture as though it were a photograph."⁵ Thus, according to Bell, photography is imitated form, and not expressed form, and therefore cannot be Art.

In contrast to Bell's rigid adherence to the supreme value of form in and for itself, Roger Fry comes up with an altogether more complex version of events. Fry no longer sees his 'emotional elements of design'—in other words, the form of the art work—to be a separable entity distinct from the representational elements in such a work, noting, "The moment representation is introduced forms have an entirely new set of values."⁶ Fry goes on to separate 'real life' from the 'imaginative life,' the latter giving the possibility of observation of actions or events, but without the necessity for the appropriate resultant action, as would be the case in a real life situation. Fry considers the cinematograph to be the prime example of this 'imaginative life,' and therefore cites the mirror as performing the same function. Since his theory can so readily be applied to photography, might we consider that photography, according to Fry, is Art after all? Some photographers did experiment with form, and

⁴Hospers, 97-99.

⁵Ibid., 93.

⁶Frascina & Harrison, 85.

Diane Arbus did too, but she then rejected this method of working on the grounds that form and texture in photography did not interest her at all—in fact, it bored her. She admitted:

In the beginning of photographing I used to make very grainy things. I'd be fascinated by what the grain did because it would make a kind of tapestry of all these little dots and everything would be translated into this medium of dots. Skin would be the same as water would be the same as sky and you were dealing mostly in dark and light, not so much in flesh and blood. But when I'd been working for a while with all these dots, I suddenly wanted terribly to get through there. I wanted to see the real differences between things. I'm not talking about textures. I really hate that, the idea that a picture can be interesting simply because it shows texture. I mean that just kills me. I don't see what's interesting about texture. It really bores the hell out of me.⁷

Certainly, it does not appear fruitful to conceive of visual works, be they Art or other wise, in respect of form alone, and Erwin Panofsky ardently opposed formalism with his iconographical method of analysis. Panofsky instead focused his attention on the content and meaning of a work, drawing on his vast knowledge of literary sources. As we noted in chapter three, as indeed, in the first instance, Panofsky himself did, it is not always possible to apply his second stratum of iconographical reasoning to every visual object, that is, not every visual object is clearly illustrating a written composition. But this sets up an interesting relation when we consider Panofsky's methodology with regard to photography, presenting the question: Is photography not the perfect medium to illustrate literary assertions? Is photography not the ultimate representational agency through which content and meaning can be indisputably conveyed?

Roger Scruton observes: "It is sometimes thought that since a photograph more effectively shares the appearance of its subject than a typical painting, photography is a better mode of representation."⁸ He

⁷Arbus quoted in Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*, 8-9.

⁸Scruton, 102.

goes on, convincingly, to argue that actually, photography is not a representational art at all. Painting is a representational art because painting is an intentional act: it is the expression of the painter's thoughts about her chosen subject/object, and her intention is to represent that subject/object by means of that medium. Photography can also be said to be an intentional act, but it is not the expression of the photographer's thoughts about her chosen subject/object, it is instead the combination of subject/object and scientific process of photography that together cause the reflected image to be recorded. So, photography is not a representational act, hence photography is not a representational art. Scruton also asserts that, "Aesthetic interest in something is an interest in it for its own sake: the object is not to be treated as a surrogate for another."⁹ A painting, for example, is admired for being a painting, and not just for the subject it depicts. Scruton clarifies thus: "It could not be said that a painting is being treated as a surrogate for its subject: it is itself the object of interest and irreplaceable by the thing depicted [. . .] such an interest is not, and cannot be, an interest in the literal truth of the picture."¹⁰

Since photography is not a representational art, it cannot arouse aesthetic interest in the viewer; the viewer's interest in the photograph is not an interest in the photograph itself, but instead with what the photograph shows. Scruton summarises the difference between the viewer's apprehension of the photograph and painting:

The photograph addresses itself to our desire for knowledge of the world, knowledge of how things look or seem. The photograph is a means to the end of seeing its subject; in painting . . . the subject is the means to the end of its own representation.¹¹

⁹Ibid., 109.

¹⁰Ibid., 110.

¹¹Ibid., 114.

But given that photography has a causal relation to the world, and therefore subverts the notion of the photograph as an object in its own right because it is part of something greater than itself, why try to enforce its classification as Art? Bell states his uncompromising allegiance to Art's autonomy:

Provided that there be some fraction of pure aesthetic emotion, even a mixed and minor appreciation of art is, I am sure, one of the most valuable things in the world—so valuable, indeed, that in my giddier moments I have been tempted to believe that art might prove the world's salvation [. . .] The ideas of men go buzz and die like gnats; men change the institutions and their customs as they change their coats; the intellectual triumphs of one age are the follies of another; only great art remains stable and unobscure. Great art remains stable and unobscure because the feelings that it awakens are independent of time and place, because its kingdom is not of this world.¹²

In respect of aesthetic response, Scruton claims that a photograph, of a martyrdom for example, would not illicit any emotion other than horror, stating: "It would be as difficult (and perhaps also as corrupt) to have an aesthetic interest in the photograph [of a martyrdom] as it would be in the real situation."¹³ In contrast to Bell's 'great kingdom of art' from another world, photography shows what is of the world, and this is what interests the viewer of the image, however weak, according to Bell, that shows her aesthetic sensibilities to be. Scruton writes:

The history of the art of photography is the history of successive attempts to break the causal chain by which the photographer is imprisoned, to impose a human intention between subject and appearance, so that the subject can be both defined by that intention and seen in terms of it. It is the history of an attempt to turn a mere simulacrum into the expression of a representational thought.¹⁴

¹²Hospers, 95. Scruton concurs, stating: "An interest in an object for its own sake, in the object as a whole, must encompass an interest in detail. For if there is nothing for which one contemplates an object, as has frequently been argued, there is no way of determining in advance of looking at which features are, and which are not, relevant to one's interest. It is for this reason that we cannot rest satisfied with nature but must have works of art as the objects of aesthetic judgement. Art provides a medium for which the question, Why? can be asked of every observable feature, even if it may sometimes prove impossible to answer. Art is an expression of precisely the same rational impulses that find an outlet in aesthetic interest; it is therefore the only object which satisfies that interest completely." Scruton, 116-117.

¹³Ibid., 115.

¹⁴Ibid., 118.

We have established then, through Scruton's argument, that photography has a causal relation to the world, and that it is not, and can never be, a representational art because of this; and since the viewer's interest in the photograph lies not in form and aesthetic response, but rather in subject matter and content, it not only seems unnecessary to pursue the notion of 'photography as art'—it is perverse to do so.

Michael Ann Holly writes, "As Panofsky persists in telling us, the allure of finding the link between thought and image clearly encourages peregrinations across disciplinary boundaries."¹⁵ Let us reconsider: why might Arbus's photographs of the so-called mentally retarded women be viewed with such aversion? Scruton's charge—that the viewer's interest in a photograph of a martyrdom would be as corrupt as having interest in the event itself—is one that may be related to the criticism levelled at Diane Arbus: what could her interest be in the 'mentally retarded' women and the women with Down's syndrome? For it is not only the fact that Arbus made photographs of these women, it is also the fact that in order to do so, she visited them on numerous occasions, spent time with them, and generally communicated with them; one could venture that she even befriended some of them.

Susan Sontag claims, that in "the unidentified mental hospital . . . [Arbus] took some of her last, and most disturbing photographs."¹⁶ Heather McPherson thinks that the "spectacular series depicting the inmates from a mental institution . . . [is] a less grotesque universe in which the human comedy is played out in a more melodious key."¹⁷ And Carol Armstrong declares, "The *Untitled* series gets the . . . *roman à clef* pride of place . . . as proof-of-disturbance, premonition-of-suicide 'last work'."¹⁸ All three comments seem to lay claim that there is undoubtedly something sinister

¹⁵Holly, 15.

¹⁶Sontag, 34.

¹⁷McPherson, 119.

¹⁸Armstrong, note 12, 35-36.

about the images of the so-called 'retarded' women, not to mention Arbus herself in that she chose to make them the subject of her photographs. But Sontag never explains just what exactly she finds unsettling about them, and McPherson seems to make merely a passing gesture to the series. Finally, the connection Armstrong makes between Arbus making photographs of the 'mentally retarded,' her 'disturbed mind,' and her subsequent suicide is controversial to say the least.¹⁹ These writers, however, were commenting on only the seven images included at the end of the monograph, and it is only since 1995 that the extended collection of photographs Arbus made of the women residents of a number of institutions has been made available by the Estate. But how might we go about comprehending these photographs? Are they so very different from Arbus's earlier work? Or are they simply the wretched, but logical, conclusion to Arbus's practice—by default, an abject magnum opus?

It is a logical claim then, that within the context of her earlier images of 'freaks,' (Arbus herself labelled her subjects as such) the photographs of the 'mentally retarded' women and women with Down's syndrome are considered, shall we say, uncongenial, due to the analogy one can draw between them and society's misfits, that is, with regard to their visible 'flaws' at least. But this analogy only stands in respect of the women born with Down's syndrome, who show the physiognomic signs of the disorder. Those women who do not display signs of the condition, that is, those labelled only 'mentally retarded,' might be considered disanalogous to Arbus's photographs of 'freaks.' Conversely, though, they are considered alike, even though 'mental retardation' is the *invisible* 'flaw.' Robert Bogdon and Steven Taylor declare: "We cannot see mental

¹⁹Along with Sontag and McPherson's use of the terms 'mental institution' and 'mental hospital,' Armstrong's opinion of Arbus's disturbed state of mind suggests that the women, and Arbus of course, were mentally ill. This is an erroneous conception, of the women at least; the women were not ill, that is, they had not gone from *compos mentis* to some degree of insanity. Rather, the women had been diagnosed as mentally deficient from a very early stage of cognitive development.

retardation. Nor can we hear, smell or touch it. We infer it."²⁰ Arbus herself said of an elderly 'retarded' man she met at a dance: "Visually he was not interesting to me at all because there was nothing about him that looked strange. He just looked like any sixty year old man. He just looked sort of ordinary."²¹

While the photograph shows the appearance of things, such as the facial irregularities specific to Down's syndrome, the photograph cannot show 'mental retardation.' The women with Down's syndrome exhibit the concrete, visible evidence required by the viewer; they are known to have, not only physical abnormalities, but also cognitive ones as well. Thus, if other women are shown in the same arena, then all the women are collectively labelled as 'retarded,' simply by association. But it is the combination of both these categories of woman that define each other by being shown side by side in Arbus's photographs. Bogdon and Taylor state:

To name something is, in a sense, to create it. Because the objective existence of the condition it is supposed to describe has never been questioned, the phrase 'mental retardation' has become an obstruction to understanding . . . Mental retardation is a misnomer, a myth.²²

As we have already established, the classification of individuals as 'mentally retarded' is based on a socio-political necessity—alongside increased industrialisation and capitalism, humanity must also become more efficient, hence the removal of unworthy individuals to institutions. It is precisely the intangible nature of 'mental retardation' (we cannot *see* it) that promotes fear in those persons regarded as having the requisite, normal intelligence levels and normal cognitive behaviour patterns:

The associated concepts of intelligence and mental retardation are abstract and imprecise notions . . . One cannot directly observe or otherwise experience either intelligence or mental retardation.

²⁰Bogdon & Taylor, 7-8.

²¹Arbus quoted in Arbus & Israel, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*, 7.

²²Bogdon & Taylor, 7.

Thus, while mental retardation is assumed to be a pathological condition, there is no specific, identified physiological or genetic impairment among the vast majority of persons classified as mentally retarded.²³

Susan Sontag describes photographs as "an ethics of seeing."²⁴ Thus, was it appropriate for Arbus to photograph the women in the institutions? Is her *Untitled* series of images a morally defensible record of their existence? But rather than judging the seemingly 'ethical misadventure' of Arbus, we should instead consider the social and economic conditions of post-industrial America that led to the incarceration of these women in the first place. Arbus photographed what was an already given subject: the women confined to institutions were the casualties of a supposedly progressive social and economic infrastructure. The women were considered to be no better than criminals, but their reason for conviction was instead their condition of 'feeble-mindedness,' known in Arbus's day as 'mental retardation.' Although such women were viewed, to some extent for their presumed criminal tendencies, as a menace to society, of greater concern was their presumed sexual promiscuity: not only was it feared that these women would bear offspring of the same afflicted repute, their promiscuity was seen as a reversion back to an earlier stage of not only biological, but more significant, cultural, evolution.

These women were seen as social and sexual degenerates: they did not have the mental faculties necessary to be valid citizens making adequate economic contribution to capitalist society (they were neither automatons nor proletarians) and became a further social encumbrance through their lack of sexual discrimination. More important though was the economic liability these women were to society: the institutions set up to contain their menace cost money. Paradoxically though, the

²³*ibid.*, 11.

²⁴Sontag, 3.

institutions were seen as visible monuments of civilisation—likewise the prison system, the asylum, the law courts and the schools.

The relation between these institutions and photography is one well argued and maintained by John Tagg:

Understanding the role of photography in the documentary practices of these institutions means retracing the history of a far from self-evident set of beliefs and assertions about the nature and status of the photograph, and of signification generally, which were articulated into a wider range of techniques and procedures for extracting and evaluating 'truth' in discourse. Such techniques were themselves evolved and embodied in institutional practices central to the governmental strategy of capitalist states whose consolidation demanded the establishment of a new 'regime of truth' and a new 'regime of sense.' What gave photography its power to evoke a truth was not only the privilege attached to mechanical means in industrial societies, but also its mobilisation within the emerging apparatuses of a new and more penetrating form of the state.²⁵

But while photography was employed by the prison system to make mug-shots of its inmates as the means to collate their appearances for the sake of re-identification should a delinquent escape, or indeed, re-offend having already been granted her freedom, contrary to this, Arbus's photographs of the 'mentally retarded' women function in the opposite way.

Many of the women incarcerated in institutions, on the grounds of their alleged 'mental retardation,' were abandoned by their families and all but forgotten. In collusion with the bigoted state apparatus that ratified mandatory sterilisation laws, the medical profession enforced this legislation to ensure that these women could never reproduce. Not only were the women branded mentally retarded, they were made

²⁵Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 60-61. Tagg writes: "In the context of generally changing patterns of production and consumption, photography was poised for a new phase of expansion into advertising, journalism, and the domestic market. It was also open to a whole range of scientific and technical applications and supplied a ready instrumentation to a number of reformed or emerging medical, legal and municipal apparatuses in which photographs functioned as a means of record and a source of evidence." *Ibid.*, 60. But at the time of his invention, Talbot immediately recognised the use of photography as a means to record, and as indisputable evidence of the existence of objects, which could function as such in specific contexts. Since making the image, *Articles of China*, he observed: "Should a thief afterwards purloin the treasures—if the mute testimony of the picture were to be produced against him in court—it would certainly be evidence of a novel kind." Talbot quoted in Ward & Stevenson, 82.

invisible, removed from society, and rendered sexually, reproductively invalid. Tagg asserts:

The relation of particular cultural products, particular meanings, and particular conditions of existence remains a problem which has to be studied, but particular objects can neither be seen as the expression of their conditions of existence nor be separated from the subtle webs of discourse of which they are a part. Without denying the specificity of material practices of representation, we have to see the objects art history studies as one relation in a field of social processes made up of interchanging and mutually inflecting discourses and practices. Within this field, we must also see that the production and circulation of meanings is itself a modality of power, subject to but also generating multiple relations of domination and subordination. The question to ask is not, 'What does it express?' but, 'What does it do?'²⁶

While state apparatuses utilised photography as a means of surveillance, and therefore, a means of control, Arbus instead used photography to survey her subjects: she scrutinised people's faces and people's bodies, usually in their own surroundings, and on their own territories. But as Tagg rightly asserts, it is not a question of determining what these images express, but rather what they do. Arbus's *Untitled* series of photographs achieves a number of things: her images of the collectively labelled 'mentally retarded' women do not control or confine them to their institution, but rather, they liberate them from it, and since the women were sterilised and unable to reproduce themselves, photography culturally reproduces them instead. Their photographs, as second nature, act as visual surrogates, not only for the women's individual, natural, biological expiry, but also replaces their visible disappearance from a visually discriminating society.

Henceforth, Arbus issues a licence to stare—through photographs, the viewer is given unlimited time to examine 'other' human beings without fear of being caught. Furthermore, our understanding of mental retardation is challenged, since photography cannot show invisible,

²⁶Tagg, *Grounds of Dispute*, 43.

intangible concepts. The concepts of home and family are also redefined by Arbus's images, whilst simultaneously redrawing the limits of what constitutes the 'photographable' subject.

The women's natural tendency and biological predisposition to procreate was perceived as promiscuity and as a result, provided the impetus for their removal from society. Paradoxically though, its cultural counterpart 'normalises' the women by returning them, granting them even greater visibility and social circulation: photography also, by its very nature, lacks discernment. While photography continues to be presented as Art, its promiscuous tendencies ensure it will never be tied to one purpose alone—indeed, the very fact that it has purpose is what undermines this privileged classification.²⁷ Arbus first emancipates the women incarcerated in the institutions by photographing them; they are then integrated and unified through the socially acceptable construction of the 'family album.' Finally, the women are returned to society through the socially accessible, and affordable, format of the book. But in another context, the photographs would accomplish something other than this. Photographs naturally proliferate, flitting from one context to another—like cultural butterflies—without ever propagating any meaningful allegiances beyond meeting their immediate, but transient, obligations.

²⁷Tagg outlines something similar to this notion of photographic promiscuity, but of course, in his own terms: "What alone unites the diversity of sites in which photography operates is the social formation itself: the specific historical spaces for representation and practice which it constitutes. Photography as such has no identity. Its status as a technology varies with the power relations which invest it. Its nature as a practice depends on the institutions and agents which define it and set it to work. Its function as a mode of cultural production is tied to definite conditions of existence, and its products are meaningful and legible only within the particular currencies they have. Its history has no unity. It is a flickering across a field of institutional spaces. It is this field we must study, not photography as such." *The Burden of Representation*, 61.

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