

**in, around, and afterthoughts
(on documentary photography)**

1. Jacob Riis, *Hell on Earth*, 1903. "The Peril and Preservation of the Home," in *Jacob Riis, Photographer and Citizen*, ed. by Alexander Alland, Sr., Millerton, N.Y.: Aperture, 1974, p. 89. Riis commented: "One night, when I went through one of the worst dives I ever knew, my camera caught and held this scene When I look upon that unhappy girl's face, I think that the Grace of God can reach that 'lost woman' in her sins; but what about the man who made profit upon the slum that gave her up to the street?"



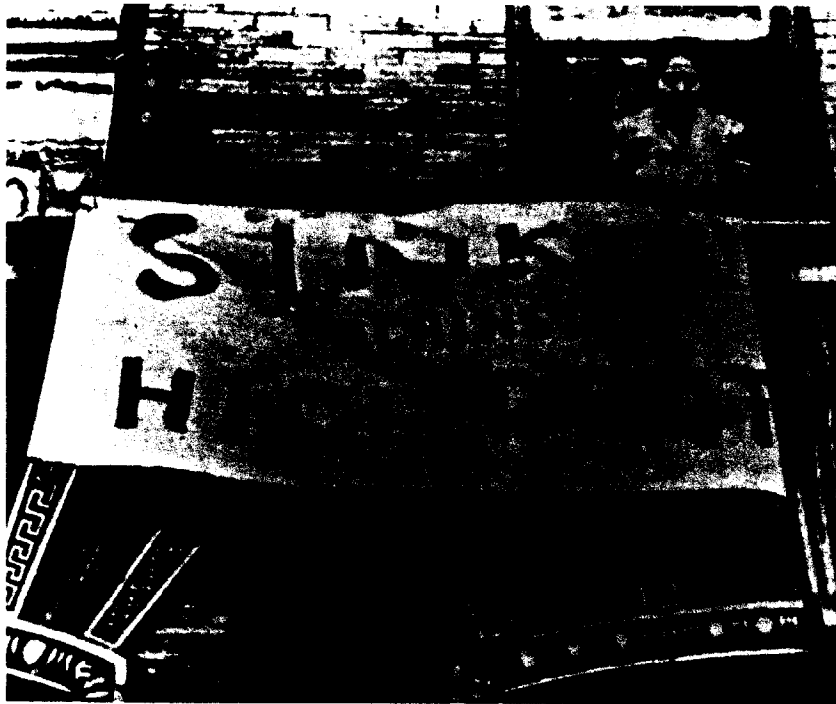
see p. 74

2. Lewis Hine, *Cannery Workers Preparing Beans*, c. 1910 (from Hine's activist, muckraking period). See *America and Lewis Hine, Photographs 1904-1940*, Millerton, N.Y.: Aperture, 1977.



see p. 78

3. Leo Seltzer, *Rent Strike, Upper East Side, New York City*, 1933. Seltzer was a member of the New York (Workers') Film and Photo League. His work seems more consistently militant than that of many other members.



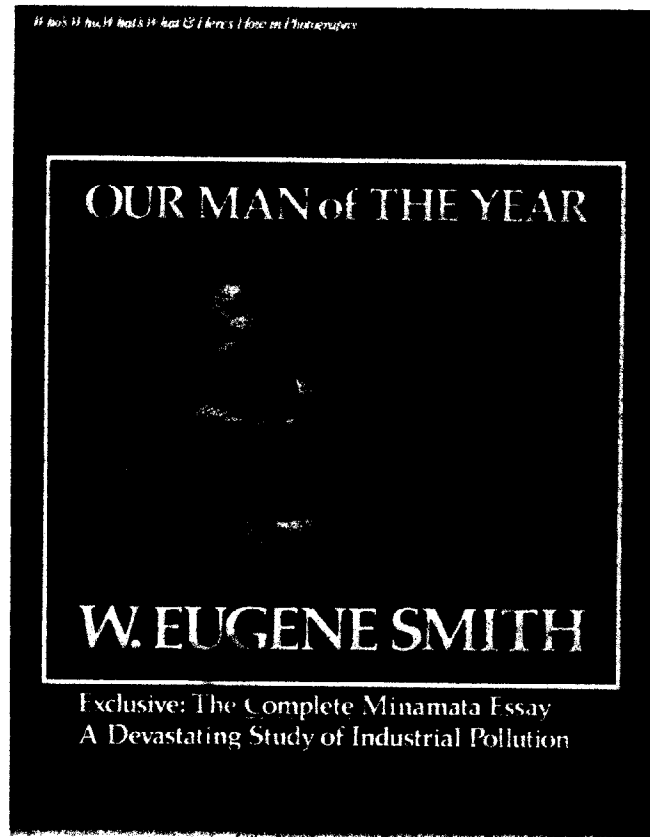
see p. 74

4. Ellen Grounds, age 22, a "pit broo wench" (pit-brow worker) at Pearson and Knowles's Pits, Wigan, with Munby beside her "to show how nearly she approached me in size." *Carte-de-visite* by Robert Little (or Mrs. Little), Wigan, September 11, 1873. See Michael Hiley, *Victorian Working Women: Portraits from Life* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1979), p. 82.



see p. 76

5. Cover of *Camera 35*, April, 1974. Photograph of Smith by Dick Swift.



see p. 77

6. Canadian Club whiskey advertisement, 1971. (Gathered from March 9 issue of *Newsweek*.)

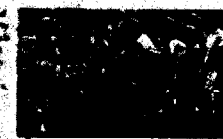


"We thought we were in a peaceful village until we realized we were being stalked by the primitive Mudmen of New Guinea."

1 Anna and I always wanted to visit a tribe of Mudmen to see one of their Sing-Sing ceremonies. George Marjuzuk tells us "Our guide, Peter Barker, refused to tell us exactly what the ceremony entailed, just to lull us into the suspense a little. But we got more than we bargained for. We followed the Anna Barker into

the New Guinea interior to a village where it was rumored there might be a Sing-Sing. Sure enough, there were only women and children in the huts. Peter said the men had been the night preparing for the ceremony, and went to look for them. Anna and I waited near the village.

2 Suddenly a tiny warrior appeared out of the brush and moved slowly toward us. My first reaction was to grab Anna and run. But then I realized that we were being stalked by at least thirty warriors from all sides. They approached in silence, carrying spears in a kind of menacing slow-motion dance. When I was certain we were alone, I spotted Peter taking pictures of the whole incredible thing. The Mudmen are highly superstitious, and even Peter became concerned.



3 Peter showed us the Mudmen to stop walking and poured us some tea with them in perfect English. We found out that the walking Sing-Sing dance was a re-enactment of a legendary tribal battle which these ancestors won by engineering all their enemies. Looking at the Mudmen we could understand how.

4 Back in our hotel room, we were a welcome sight and we had a sleep. Looking about our adventure with the Mudmen, Peter was waiting in the night of Canadian Club. Smooth as the wind, Myka (auntie), Friendly as laughter, Exotic, sexy, that night enough for a conversation held enough for men. The whiskey was "The Best In The House." "The Best In The House."



Canadian Club
Imported in bottles from Canada

see p. 77

7. Edward S. Curtis, *Hopi Girls*, c. 1900. Original is gold-toned.



see p. 78

8. Robert Flaherty, c. 1914. Woman identified as "Allegoo (Shining Water), Sikoslingmuit Eskimo Woman, Southern Baffin Lands," but she may be a woman named Kanaju Aeojiealia. Published in March, 1915, in a Toronto newspaper, the photo is captioned "*Our little lady of the snows ... makes a most engaging picture.*" See Robert Flaherty, *Photographer/Filmmaker, The Inuit 1910-1922*, Exhibition Catalogue, Vancouver Art Gallery.



see p. 78

9. From, *How to Make Good Movies* (Rochester, N.Y.: Eastman Kodak Company, n.d.)



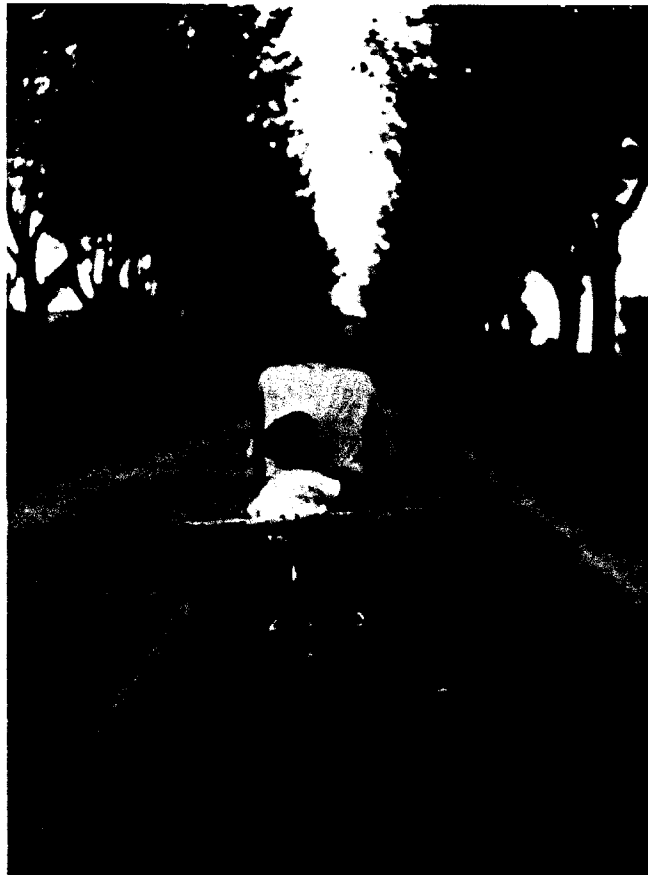
see p. 78

10. Adam Clark Vroman, *Hopi Towns: The Man with a Hoe*, 1902. See *Photographer of the Southwest, Adam Clark Vroman, 1856-1916*, ed. by Ruth Mahood (New York: Bonanza Books, n.d.) (See also Footnote 13.)



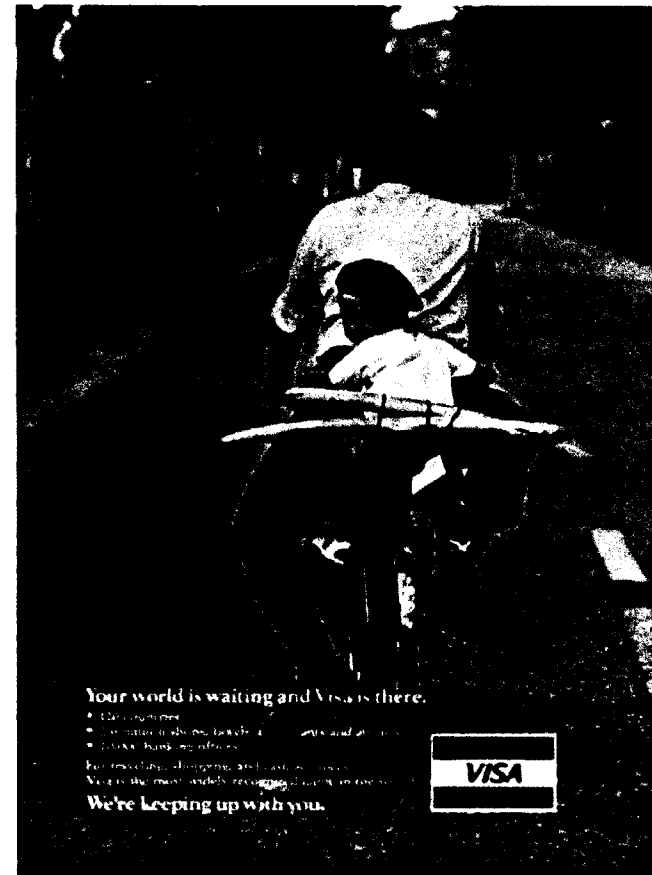
see p. 78

11. Elliott Erwitt, *Boy with Grandfather returning from bakers, Provence*, on an assignment for the French office of tourism in the 1950s. (Agency: Doyle Dane Bernbach.) Original in color.



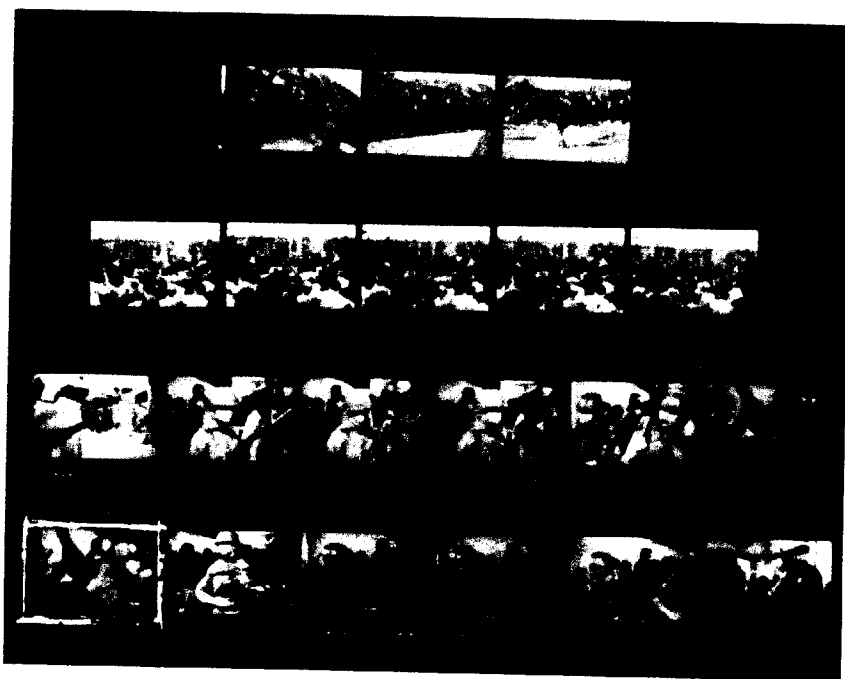
see p. 79

12. Credit-card advertisement, 1979. Photo by Elliott Erwitt. Original is in color. (Gathered from May 7 issue of *The New Yorker*.) For the ad campaign, this scene was also restaged, twenty years after Erwitt made these stills, by the producer of a (moving) television commercial.



see p. 79

13. David Burnett, contact sheet showing prisoners detained at the stadium, Santiago, Chile, September, 1973. Reproduced in *American Photographer*, December, 1979, p. 56-57.



see p. 80

14. David Burnett, *Detained prisoners*, September, 1973, From *American Photographer*.



see p. 80

15. Associated Press (photographer unknown), Florence Thompson in her trailer home with a framed copy of her photo and the book *In This Proud Land*. Reproduced from the *Los Angeles Times*, Saturday, November 18, 1978, Part 11, p. 1. (Original photograph cannot be located.)



see p. 80

16. Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother* series, March, 1936. As reproduced in a promotional sheet for *American Photographer*, late 1970s. The famous photo, usually captioned *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California, 1936*, is on the right.



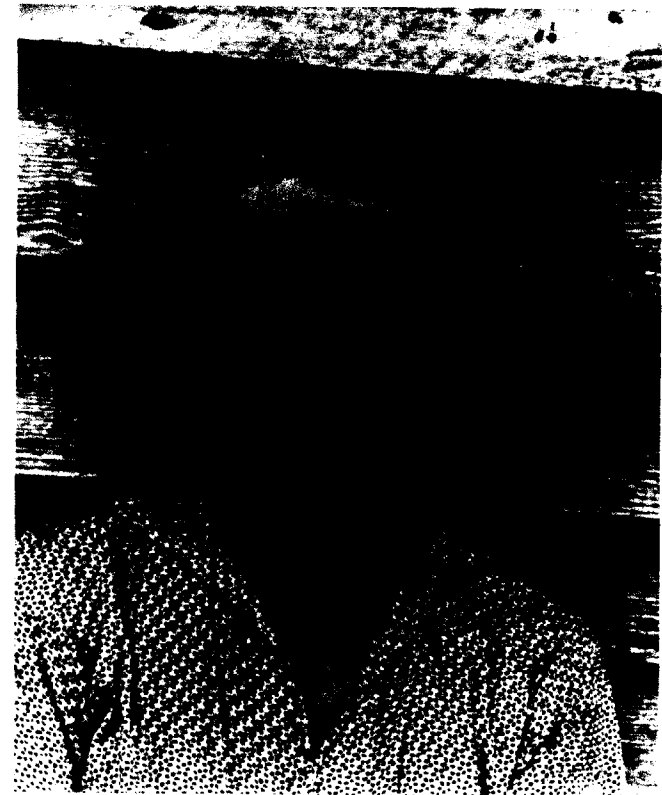
see p. 80

17. Walker Evans's photograph of Allie Mae Fields Burroughs (left) appears, captionless, in Agee and Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1941); in that work she is pseudonymously called Annie Mae Woods Gudger. The second photo (right) was published in Evans's *American Photographs* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938), captioned *Alabama Tenant Farmer's Wife, 1936*. The photograph also appears in *Documentary Photography* (New York: Time-Life, 1972), captioned *Tenant Farmer's Wife, Hale County, Alabama, 1936*; in *Walker Evans: Photographs for the Farm Security Administration* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), captioned *Annie Mae Burroughs, Wife of a Cotton Sharecropper, Hale County, Alabama, Summer 1936* (LC-UCSF342-8139A); and in *Walker Evans, First and Last* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), captioned *Annie Mae*



see p. 82

Burroughs, Hale County, Alabama, 1936. These photos are two of four of Annie Mae Burroughs clearly taken at the same time. They appear together in *Walker Evans at Work* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), where all are said to be from 8 x 10 negatives, which require some time to change the piece of film in the camera. I know of no references to the existence of more than one *Annie Mae* with different expressions (the second photo is the most neutral of the four). Many writers depend on their being just one, the preceding photo. For example, Scott Osborne, in "A Walker Evans Heroine Remembers," *American Photographer* (September 1979), quotes Agee as calling the image "a fraction of a second's exposure to the integrity of truth." But working photographers regularly make several exposures and choose just one; the grounds for choice may have little to do with a version of the "decisive moment" doctrine.



18. Scott Osbourne, *Allie Mae (Burroughs) Moore*, 1979. Annie Mae Moore in her trailer home. From *American Photographer*, September 1979, p. 72.



see p. 82

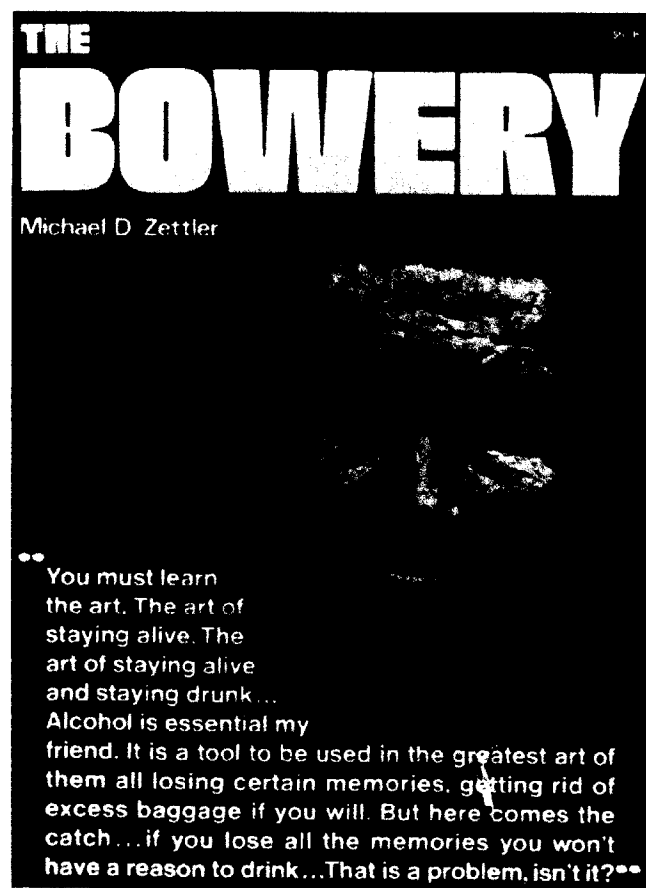
19. Layout from *Modern Photography*, July, 1980. The top photo is the cover of the Diane Arbus monograph published by Aperture in 1972. (Photo captioned *Identical Twins, Rosell, N.J., 1967.*) The bottom photo is *Arbus Twins Revisited*, by Don Lokuta, 1979.



Twins then, twins now: top, 1967 by Arbus; below, 1979 by Lokuta.

see p. 83

20. Cover of Michael D. Zettler's *The Bowery* (New York and London: Drake Publishers, 1975).



see note no. 23, p. 86

3. In quoting Jacob Riis, I am not intending to elevate him above other documentarians—particularly not above Lewis Hine, whose straightforward involvement with the struggles for decent working hours, pay, and protections, as well as for decent housing, schooling, and social dignity, for the people whom he photographed and the social service agencies intending to represent them, and whose dedication to photography as the medium with which he could best serve those interests, was incomparably greater than Riis's, to whom photography, and probably those whom he photographed, were at best an adjunct to, and a moment in, a journalistic career.

Margaret Sanger, a nurse in turn-of-the-century New York, became a crusader for women's control over reproduction. She founded the American Birth Control League in the 1920s (and much later became the first president of the International Planned Parenthood Federation) and similar leagues in China and Japan. Like many women reformers, she was arrested and prosecuted for her efforts, which ranged from disseminating birth-control literature to maintaining a clinic. Many other people, including Jane Addams, founder of Hull House in Chicago, and Lillian Wald, founder of New York's Visiting Nurse Association, might be cited as dedicated reformers in this tradition of middle-class championship of the oppressed, with varying relations to the several strategies of self-help, charity, and the publication of wrongs to awaken a healing empathic response.

4. The buried tradition of "socialist photography," a defined, though no doubt restricted, practice in some parts of Europe and North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is being excavated by Terry Dennett (of Photography Workshop) in England. His research so far suggests that the showing of lantern slides depicting living and working conditions and militant actions were a regular part of the working-class political organizing, and references to "socialist photography" or photographers appeared in the leftist press in that period. Furthermore, the world's first news-photo agency, *World's Graphic Press*, seems to have had a leftish orientation. In the collection *Photography/Politics: One* (London: Photography Workshop, 1979), a start was made toward a worldwide history of the photo leagues. In relation to left photography, one must mention the illustrated magazines, the most popular of which was the German *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung*, or *AIZ* (Worker-Illustrated Newspaper, 1924-1938).

In contrast to the pure sensationalism of much of the journalistic attention to working class, immigrant, and slum life, the meliorism of Riis, Lewis Hine, and others involved in social-work propagandizing argued, through the presentation of images combined with other forms of discourse, for the rectification of wrongs. It did not perceive those wrongs as fundamental to the social system that tolerated them—the assumption that they were tolerated rather than *bred* marks a basic fallacy of social work. Reformers like Jacob Riis and Margaret Sanger³ strongly appealed to the worry that the ravages of poverty—crime, immorality, prostitution, disease, radicalism—would threaten the health and security of polite society as well as to sympathy for the poor, and their appeals were often meant to awaken the self-interest of the privileged. The notion of *charity* fiercely argued for far outweighs any call for self-help. Charity is an argument for the preservation of wealth, and reformist documentary (like the appeal for free and compulsory public education) represented an argument within a class about the need to give a little in order to mollify the dangerous classes below, an argument embedded in a matrix of Christian ethics.

Documentary photography has been much more comfortable in the company of moralism than wedded to a rhetoric or program of revolutionary politics. Even the bulk of work of the U.S. version of the (Workers') Film and Photo League⁴ of the Depression era shared in the muted rhetoric of the popular front. Yet the force of documentary surely derives in part from the fact that the images might be more decisively unsettling than the arguments enveloping them. Arguments for reform—threatening to the social order as they might seem to the unconvinced—must have come as a relief from the *potential* arguments embedded in the images: With the manifold possibilities for radical demands that photos of poverty and degradation suggest, any coherent argument for reform is ultimately both polite and negotiable. Odious, perhaps, but manageable; it is, after all, social *discourse*. As such, these arguments were surrounded and institutionalized into the very structures of government; the newly created institutions, however, began to prove their inadequacy—even to their own limited purpose—almost as soon as they were erected.

II.

Let us consider the Bowery again, the site of victim photography in which the victims, insofar as they are now victims of the camera—that is, of the photographer—are often docile, whether through mental confusion or because they are just lying there, unconscious. (But if you should show up before they are

sufficiently distracted by drink, you are likely to be met with hostility, for the men on the Bowery are not particularly interested in immortality and stardom, and they've had plenty of experience with the Nikon set.) Especially now, the meaning of all such work, past and present, has changed: the liberal New Deal State has been dismantled piece by piece. The War on Poverty has been called off. Utopia has been abandoned, and liberalism itself has been deserted. Its vision of moral idealism spurring general social concern has been replaced with a mean-minded Spencerian sociobiology that suggests, among other things, that the poor may be poor through lack of merit (read Harvard's Richard Herrnstein as well as, of course, between Milton Friedman's lines).⁵ There is as yet no organized national Left, only a Right. There is not even drunkenness, only "substance abuse"—a problem of bureaucratic management. The exposé, the compassion and outrage, of documentary fueled by the dedication to reform have shaded over into combinations of exoticism, tourism, voyeurism, psychologism and metaphysics, trophy hunting—and careerism.

Yet documentary still exists, still functions socially in one way or another. Liberalism may have been routed, but its cultural expressions still survive. This mainstream documentary has achieved legitimacy and has a decidedly ritualistic character. It begins in glossy magazines and books, occasionally in newspapers, and becomes more expensive as it moves into art galleries and museums. The liberal documentary assuages any stirrings of conscience in its viewers the way scratching relieves an itch and simultaneously reassures them about their relative wealth and social position; especially the latter, now that even the veneer of social concern has dropped away from the upwardly mobile and comfortable social sectors. Yet this reminder carries the germ of an inescapable anxiety about the future. It is both flattery and warning (as it always has been). Documentary is a little like horror movies, putting a face on fear and transforming threat into fantasy, into imagery. One can handle imagery by leaving it behind. (*It is them, not us.*) One may even, as a private person, support causes.

Documentary, as we know it, carries (old) information about a group of powerless people to another group addressed as socially powerful. In the set piece of liberal television documentary, Edward R. Murrow's *Harvest of Shame*, broadcast the day after Thanksgiving in 1960, Murrow closes with an appeal to the viewers (then a more restricted part of the population than at present) to *write their congressmen* to help the migrant farm workers, whose pathetic,

5. For a discussion of the work of Richard Herrnstein, chairman of the psychology department at Harvard University, see Karl W. Deutsch and Thomas B. Edsall, "The Meritocracy Scare," *Society* (September/October 1972), and Richard Herrnstein, Karl W. Deutsch, and Thomas B. Edsall, "I.Q.: Measurement of Race and Class" (in which Herrnstein debates Deutsch and Edsall on some of their objections to his work), *Society* (May/June 1973); both are reprinted in Bertram Silverman and Murray Yanowitz, eds., *The Worker in "Post-Industrial" Capitalism: Liberal and Radical Responses* (New York: Free Press, 1974). See also Richard Herrnstein's original article, "I.Q.," in *Atlantic Monthly* (September 1971): 43-64, and Arthur Jensen, "How Much Can We Boost IQ and Scholastic Achievement?," *Harvard Educational Review*, reprint series no. 2 (1969): 126-34. See, e.g., Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, "IQ in the U.S. Class Structure," *Social Policy* (November/December 1972 and January/February 1973), also reprinted in Silverman and Yanowitz, *The Worker*, for a critique of the theorizing behind intelligence testing. There have been many critiques of I.Q.—very readable one is Jeffrey Blum's *Pseudoscience and Mental Ability* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977)—and of sociobiology, exposing their ideological foundations and poor scientific grounding—critiques that haven't inhibited either enterprise.

Milton Friedman, best known of the extremely conservative "Chicago school" (University of Chicago) anti-Keynesian, "monetarist" economists, has strongly influenced the policies of the Conservative Thatcher government in England and the rightist Begin government in Israel and has advised many reactionary politicians around the world (and "los Chicago boys" laid the foundations for the brutally Spartan policies of the Pinochet military regime toward all but the richest Chileans). Implicit in the pivotal conception of economic "freedom" (competition) is that the best will surely rise and the worst will sink to their proper level. That is the only standard of justice. In remarks made while accepting an award from the Heritage Foundation, Friedman, referring to the success of his public (i.e. government- and corporate-sponsored) television series *Free to Choose*, commented that conservatives had managed to alter the climate of opinion such that the series could succeed and proclaimed the next task to be the promulgation of "our point of view" in philosophy, music, poetry, drama, and so on. He has also recommended the dismantling of the National Endowments for the arts and the humanities (government funding agencies). We can expect the currency of such policies and their ideological corollaries to grow as they increasingly inform the policies and practices of rightist U.S. governments.

6. A remarkable instance of one form that such fascination may take, in this case one that presented itself as militantly chaste (and whose relation to identification I won't take on now), is provided by the lifelong obsession of an English Victorian barrister, Arthur J. Munby, which was the observation of women manual laborers and servants. (The souvenir *cartes de visite* of young women mine workers, at the pit head and in studio poses, suggest that some version of Munby's interest was widely shared by members of his class.) Simply seeing them dressed for work rather than watching them work generally sufficed for him, though he often "interviewed" them. Munby was no reformer or ally of feminists, but in opposing protective legislation he considered himself a champion of working-class women, particularly the "robust" ones whose company he much preferred to that of the genteel women of his class, sufferers from the cult of enforced feebleness. After a secret liaison of nineteen years with a maid-of-all-work (a low servant rank), Hannah Cullwick, Munby married her but kept the marriage secret, and although he dressed her as a lady for their journeys, they lived separately and she remained a servant—often waiting on him. He also insisted she keep a diary. Munby's great interest in the new field of photography was frustrated by the fact that as in painting most aspirants had no interest in images of labor; he bought whatever images of working women he could find and arranged for others, often escorting women in work dress to the photo studio and sometimes using Hannah as a stand-in. He would dress her in various work costumes for photo sessions, and his diary describes how, pretending no relationship, he savored the sight of the photographer bodily arranging her poses and the degradation it imposed on her. In 1867 he took her to be photographed by O. J. Rejlander, the famous painter-turned-photographer of (simulated) "genre" scenes.

The huge Munby collection at Cambridge, consisting of six hundred surviving photos as well as his sketches and private papers running to millions of words, provided the material for Derek Hudson's *A. J. Munby, Man of Two Worlds: The Life and Diaries of Arthur J. Munby, 1828-1910* (London: J. Murray, 1972), and Michael Hiley's lavishly illustrated *Victorian Working Women: Portraits from Life* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1979). (I am deeply grateful to Stephen Heath not only for calling Munby and his preoccupations to my attention but also for generously sharing his own research with me.)

Not in relation to photographic imagery but to the sexualization of class itself that lies behind Munby's scopophilic obsession, we note that in Victorian England, where only working-class women were supposed to have retained any interest in sexuality, gentlemen would cruise working-class neighborhoods to accost and rape young women.

helpless, dispirited victimhood had been amply demonstrated for an hour—not least by the documentary's aggressively probing style of interview, its "higher purpose" notwithstanding—because these people can do nothing for themselves. But which political battles have been fought and won by someone for someone else? Luckily, César Chávez was not watching television but rather, throughout that era, was patiently organizing farm workers to fight for themselves. This difference is reflected in the documentaries made by and for the Farm Workers' Organizing Committee (later the United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO), such works as *Sí, Se Puede* (*Yes, We Can*) and *Decision at Delano*; not radical works, perhaps, but *militant* works.

In the liberal documentary, poverty and oppression are almost invariably equated with misfortunes caused by natural disasters: Causality is vague, blame is not assigned, fate cannot be overcome. Liberal Documentary blames neither the victims nor their willful oppressors—unless they happen to be under the influence of our own global enemy, World Communism. Like photos of children in pleas for donations to international charity organizations, liberal documentary implores us to look in the face of deprivation and to weep (and maybe to send money, if it is to some faraway place where the innocence of childhood poverty does not set off in us the train of thought that begins with denial and ends with "welfare cheat").

Even in the fading of liberal sentiments one recognizes that it is impolite or dangerous to stare in person, as Diane Arbus knew when she arranged her satisfyingly immobilized imagery as a surrogate for *the real thing*, the real freak show. With the appropriate object to view, one no longer feels obligated to suffer empathy. As sixties' radical chic has given way to eighties' pugnacious self-interest, one displays one's toughness in enduring a visual assault without a flinch, in jeering, or in cheering. Beyond the spectacle of families in poverty (where starveling infants and despairing adults give the lie to any imagined hint of freedom and become merely the currently tedious poor), the way seems open for a subtle imputation of pathetic-heroic choice to victims-turned-freaks, of the seizing of fate in straitened circumstances. The boringly sociological becomes the excitingly mythological/psychological. On this territory a more or less overt sexualization of the photographic image is accomplished, pointing, perhaps, to the wellspring of identification that may be the source of this particular fascination.⁶

III.

It is easy to understand why what has ceased to be news becomes testimonial to the bearer of the news. Documentary testifies, finally, to the bravery or (dare we name it?) the manipulateness and savvy of the photographer, who entered a situation of physical danger, social restrictedness, human decay, or combinations of these and saved us the trouble. Or who, like the astronauts, entertained us by showing us the places we never hope to go. War photography, slum photography, "subculture" or cult photography, photography of the foreign poor, photography of "deviance," photography from the past—W. Eugene Smith, David Douglas Duncan, Larry Burrows, Diane Arbus, Larry Clark, Danny Lyon, Bruce Davidson, Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee, Walker Evans, Robert Capa, Don McCullin, ... these are merely the most currently luminous of documentarian stars.

W. Eugene Smith and his wife, Aileen Mioko Smith, spent the early 1970s on a photo-and-text exposé of the human devastation in Minamata, a small Japanese fishing and farming town, caused by the heedless prosperity of the Chisso chemical firm, which dumped its mercury-laden effluent into their waters. The Smiths included an account of the ultimately successful but violence-ridden attempt of victims to gain redress. When the major court fight was won, the Smiths published a text and many photos in the American magazine *Camera* 35.⁷ Smith had sent in a cover photo with a carefully done layout. The editor, Jim Hughes, knowing what sells and what doesn't, ran a *picture of Smith* on the cover and named him "*Our Man of the Year*" ("*Camera* 35's first and probably only" one). Inside, Hughes wrote: "The nice thing about Gene Smith is that you know he will keep chasing the truth and trying to nail it down for us in words and pictures; and you know that even if the truth doesn't get better, Gene will. Imagine it!"⁸ The Smiths' unequivocal text argues for strong-minded activism. The magazine's framing articles *handle* that directness; they convert the *Smiths* into *Smith*; and they congratulate him warmly, smothering his message with appreciation.

Help preserve the "cultural heritage" of the mudmen in New Guinea, urges the travel editor of the *Vancouver Province*. Why should you care, he asks?; and he answers, to safeguard the value received for your tourist dollar (Canadians also love Disneyland and Disney World). He is asking for donations to a cultural center. The "mudmen" formerly made large, grimacing pull-on masks to frighten their opponents in war and now wear them in "adventure" ads for Canadian Club ("We thought we were in a peaceful village until ..."). The

7. April 1974. (I thank Allan Sekula for calling this issue to my attention.) The Smiths subsequently published a book whose title page reads *Minamata, Words and Photographs by Eugene Smith and Aileen M. Smith* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975). I am not arguing for or against Smith's art-history-quoting, bravura photographic style. Nevertheless, and in spite of the ideological uses to which Smith's (and in this case the Smiths') work has been put in the photo world, the Smiths' work at Minamata evidently was important in rallying support for the struggle throughout Japan.

8. *Camera* 35 (April 1974): p. 3.

9. Irving Penn, *Worlds in a Small Room*, by Irving Penn as an Ambulant Studio Photographer (New York: Grossman, 1974).

10. The work of Edward S. Curtis, incorporating photographs from his monumental work *The North American Indian*, is now widely available in recent editions, including Ralph Andrews, *Curtis' Western Indians* (Sparks, Nev.: Bonanza Books, 1962), and the far more elevated editions of the 1970s: the very-large-format Portraits from *North American Indian Life* (New York: Outerbridge & Lazard, 1972; small-format paperback edition, New York: A & W Publishers, 1975); an exhibition catalogue for the Philadelphia Museum, *The North American Indians* (Millerton, N.Y.: Aperture, 1972); and *In a Sacred Manner We Live* (Barre, Mass.: Barr Publishing, 1972; New York: Weathervane, 1972). One can speculate that it was the interest of the "counterculture" in tribalism in the late 1960s and early 1970s coupled with Native American militancy of the same period that ultimately called forth these classy new editions; posters of some of Curtis's (and others') portraits served as emblems of resistance for radicals, office workers, college students, and dope smokers.

Curtis, who lived in Seattle, photographed Native Americans for several years before J. Pierpont Morgan—to whom Curtis was sent by Teddy Roosevelt—agreed to back his enterprise. (Curtis's "first contact with men of letters and millionaires," in his phrase, had come accidentally: on a mountaineering expedition Curtis aided a stranded party of rich and important men, including the chiefs of the U. S. Biological Survey and the Forestry Department and the editor of *Forest and Stream* magazine, and the encounter led to a series of involvements in governmental and private projects of exploration and the shaping of attitudes about the West.) The Morgan Foundation advanced him fifteen thousand dollars per year for the next five years and then published (between 1907 and 1930) Curtis's resulting texts and photographs in a limited edition of 500 twenty-volume sets, selling for *three thousand dollars* (now worth over eighty thousand dollars and rising). The title page read:

The North American Indian, Being a Series of Volumes Picturing and Describing the Indians of the United States and Alaska, written, illustrated and published by Edward S. Curtis, edited by Frederick Webb Hodge [of the United States Bureau of American Ethnology], foreword by Theodore Roosevelt, field research under the patronage of J. Pierpont Morgan, in twenty volumes.

Fabulously wealthy society people, including Andrew Carnegie, Solomon R. Guggenheim, Alexander Graham Bell, Mrs. Frederick W. Vanderbilt, and the kings of England and Belgium, were among the sets' early subscribers. But according to Curtis, over half the cost of a million and a half dollars was borne by Morgan and his estate.

Curtis dedicated himself completely to his task, and in addition to his photography and notes (and the writing of popular books, two of which became best sellers), he recorded thousands of songs on wax rolls, many of which, along with oral histories, were

mudmen also appear in the "small room" of Irving Penn's *Worlds in a Small Room*,⁹ an effete mimicry of anthropological documentary, not to mention in photos with the Queen. Edward S. Curtis was also interested in preserving someone's cultural heritage and, like other itinerant photographers operating among native North American peoples, he carried a stock of more or less authentic, more or less appropriate (often less, on both counts) clothing and accoutrements with which to deck out his sitters.¹⁰ Here, as with Robert Flaherty a bit later,¹¹ the heritage was considered sufficiently preserved when captured within the edges of the photographic record and in the ethnographic costume shops then being established in museums of "natural" history. In Curtis's case, the photographic record was often retouched, gold-toned, and bound in gold-decorated volumes selling for astonishing sums and financed by J. P. Morgan. We needn't quibble over the status of such historical romances, for the degree of truth in them may (again) be more or less equivalent to that in any well-made ethnographic or travel photo or film. (An early—1940s, perhaps—Kodak movie book¹² tells North American travelers, such as the Rodman C. Pells of San Francisco, pictured in the act of photographing a Tahitian, how to film natives so that they seem unconscious of the camera.) Making such photos heightened patriotic sentiments in the States but precluded any understanding of contemporary native peoples as *experiencing subjects* in impoverished or at least modern circumstances; it even assisted the collective projection of Caucasian guilt and its rationalizations onto the "Indians" for having sunk so and having *betrayed their own heritage*. To be fair, some respect was surely also gained for these people who had formerly been allowed few images other than those of abject defeat; no imagination, no transcendence, no history, no morals, no social institutions, only vice. Yet, on balance, the sentimental pictorialism of Curtis seems repulsively contorted, like the cariogenic creations of Julia Margaret Cameron or the saccharine poems of Longfellow. Personally, I prefer the cooler, more "anthropological" work of Adam Clark Vroman.¹³ We can, nevertheless, freely exempt all the photographers, all the filmmakers, as well as all the ethnographers, ancillas to imperialism, from charges of willful complicity with the dispossession of the American native peoples. We can even thank them, as many of the present-day descendants of the photographed people do, for considering their ancestors worthy of photographic attention and thus creating a historical record (the only visual one). We can thank them further for not picturing the destitution of the native peoples, for it is difficult to imagine what good it would have done. If this reminds you of Riis and Hine, who first pictured the North American immigrant and native-born poor, the connection is appropriate as far

as it goes but diverges just where it is revealed that the romanticism of Curtis furthered the required sentimental mythification of the Indian peoples, by then physically absent from most of the towns and cities of white America. Tradition (traditional racism), which decreed that the Indian was the genius of the continent, had nothing of the kind to say about the immigrant poor, who were fodder for the industrial Moloch and a hotbed of infection and corruption.

Or consider a photo book on the teeming masses of India—how different is looking through it from going to an Indian restaurant or wearing an Indian shirt or sari? We consume the world through images, through shopping, through eating

Your world is waiting and Visa is there.

- 120 countries
- 2.6 million shops, hotels, restaurants and airlines
- 70,000 banking offices

For traveling, shopping and cash advances ...

Visa is the most widely recognized name in the world.

We're keeping up with you.

This current ad campaign includes photographs taken here and there in the world, some "authentic," some staged. One photo shows a man and a boy in dark berets on a bicycle on a tree-lined road, with long baguettes of bread tied across the rear of the bike: rural France. But wait—I've seen this photo before, years ago. It turns out that it was done by Elliott Erwitt for the Doyle Dane Bernbach ad agency on a job for the French office of tourism in the fifties. Erwitt received fifteen hundred dollars for the photo, which he staged using his driver and the man's nephew: "The man pedaled back and forth nearly 30 times till Erwitt achieved the ideal composition Even in such a carefully produced image, Erwitt's gift for documentary photography is evident," startlingly avers Erla Zwingle¹⁴ in the column "Inside Advertising" in the December 1979 issue of *American Photographer*—which also has articles, among others, on Bill Owens's at best ambivalent photos of mid-American suburbs, leisure activities, and work ("sympathetic and honest, revealing the contentment of the American middle class," according to Amy M. Schiffman), on a show of the Magnum news-photo agency photos in a Tokyo department store ("soon after the opening [Magnum president Burk] Uzzle flew off to hunt down refugees in Thailand while Glinn remained in Japan, garnering

(note 10 continued) transcribed and published in his *magnum opus*. Curtis's fictionalized film about the Kwakiutl of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, was originally titled *In the Land of the Head Hunters* (1914) but has recently been released under the title *In the Land of the War Canoes*.

On the subject of costuming, see, for example, Joanna Cohan Scherer, "You Can't Believe Your Eyes: Inaccuracies in Photographs of North American Indians," *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication* 2:2 (Fall 1975), reprinted in *Exposure* (Journal of the Society for Photographic Education) 16:4 (Winter 1978).

Curtis's brother, Asahel Curtis, was a commercial photographer and city booster in Seattle and an enthusiast of development. A book of the distinctly nonpictorialist photographs of life and especially commerce in the Puget Sound area has been assembled and published by David Sucher as *An Asahel Curtis Sampler* (Seattle: Puget Sound Access, 1973). The one brother was integrated into the system of big capital and national government, the other into that of small business and regionalism.

11. Robert Flaherty is well known for his fictionalized ethnographic films, especially the first, *Nanook of the North* (made in 1919-20, released in 1922). A catalogue of his photographs (formerly ignored) of the Inuit, with several essays and many reproductions, has recently been published by the Vancouver Art Gallery: *Robert Flaherty, Photographer-Filmmaker: The Inuit 1910-1922*, edited by Joanne Birnie Danzker (Vancouver: The Vancouver Art Gallery, 1980).

12. Eastman Kodak Company, *How to Make Good Movies* (Rochester, N.Y.: Kodak, n.d.).

13. Cameron's work can be found in *Victorian Album: Julia Margaret Cameron and Her Circle*, edited by Graham Ovenden (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975), and elsewhere. For Vroman's work, see *Photographer of the Southwest: Adam Clark Vroman, 1856-1916*, edited by Ruth Mahood (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie Press, 1961; reprinted, Sparks, Nev.: Bonanza Books, n.d.), or *Dwellers at the Source, Southwestern Indian Photographs of Adam Clark Vroman, 1895-1904*, edited by William Webb and Robert A. Weinstein (New York: Grossman, n.d.). It might be noted that Vroman was occasionally quite capable (as were Hine and Smith) of thrusting his work into the mold of the "traditional" Western sentimental iconographic coding of piety, humbleness, simplicity, and the dignity of labor: a photo of a mother and child is titled *Hopi Madonna*; one of a man working is called *Man with a Hoe*.

14. Zwingle's story seems to derive almost verbatim from the book *Private Experience, Elliott Erwitt: Personal Insights of a Professional Photographer*, with text by Sean Callahan and the editors of Alskog, Inc. (Los Angeles: Alskog/Petersen, 1974).

(note 14 continued) The strange assertion about Erwit's gift for documentary follows an interestingly candid quotation from ad agency president Bill Bernbach (as does most of the anecdote): "Elliott was able to grasp the idea quickly and turn it into a documentary photograph. This was tremendously important to us because the whole success of the campaign rested on the believability of the photographs. We were telling people that there was a France outside of Paris, and Elliott made it look authentic" (p. 60, emphasis added). In repeating the book's remark that Erwit had achieved "the ideal composition"—called in the book "the precise composition"—the focus point marked with a stone, Zwingle has ignored the fact that the two photos—the one shown in *Private Experience* and the one used by Visa—are not quite identical (and the one in the ad is flopped). Questions one might well ask are what does "documentary" mean? (A question that, for example, lay at the heart of an often-cited political furor precipitated when photographer Arthur Rothstein placed a locally obtained cow skull in various spots in drought-stricken South Dakota to obtain "the best" documentary photograph. When FDR was traveling through the area months later, the anti-New Deal editor of the *N. D. Fargo & Forum* featured one of the resulting photos [as sent out by the Associated Press, with its own caption] as "an obvious fake," implying that trickery lay at the heart of the New Deal.) And how precise is a "precise" or "ideal" composition? As to the relationship between documentary and truth: the bulk of Zwingle's article is about another photo used by Visa, this one of two (Bolivian) Indian women that the photographer (not Erwit) describes as having been taken during a one-day sojourn in Bolivia, without the women's knowledge, and in which "some graffiti ... a gun and the initials ELN, were retouched out to emphasize the picture's clean graphic style" (p. 94, emphasis added). The same photographer shot a Polynesia ad for Visa in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park using "a Filipino model from San Jose" who "looks more colorful in the picture than she did in real life. She was freezing" (pp. 94-95). The question of documentary in the wholly fabricated universe of advertising is a question that can have no answer.

much yen from assignments for the likes of IBM, Seagram, and Goldman Sachs," says E.F.), on Geoff Winningham's photos of Texas high-school football ("Inevitably one can compare him with the legendary Robert Frank, but the difference ... is that ... Winningham clearly loves the craziness [more on craziness later] he dwells upon," writes Schiffman), on Larry Clark's photos of Tulsa speed freaks ("A beautiful, secret world, much of it sordid" and "although there is plenty of sex, death, violence, anxiety, boredom ... there is no polemic apparent ... so it doesn't really matter whether or not we can trust these photos as documents; to see them as photographs, no more and no less, is enough," remarks Owen Edwards). There is a Washington column by James Cassell complaining that "the administration frowns upon inspired photojournalism" and a page on Gamma photographer David Burnett, who arrived in Santiago de Chile a few days after the brutal putsch in 1973. On a government tour of the infamous stadium where people were detained and shot, he and other photographers "noticed a fresh batch of prisoners." Burnett says, "The Chileans had heard many stories about people being shot or disappearing [in a war does one learn of death from hearing stories?] and they were terribly frightened. The haunting gaze of one man in particular, whose figure was framed by two armed soldiers ... caught my eye. The picture has always stayed with me." We see a contact sheet and that image enlarged. The article, by Yvette E. Benedek, continues: "Like most agency photographers, Burnett must shoot both color and black and white to satisfy many publications in different countries, so he often works with three Nikons and a Leica. His coverage of the coup ... won the Overseas Press Club's Robert Capa Award ... 'for exceptional courage and enterprise.'"

What happened to the man (actually men) in the photo? The question is inappropriate when the subject is photographs. And photographers. The subject of the article is the photographer. The name of the magazine is *American Photographer*. In 1978 there was a small news story on a historical curiosity: the real-live person who was photographed by Dorothea Lange in 1936 in what became *the world's most reproduced photograph*. Florence Thompson, seventy-five in 1978, a Cherokee living in a trailer in Modesto, California, was quoted by the Associated Press as saying, "That's my picture hanging all over the world, and I can't get a penny out of it." She said that she is proud to be its subject but asked, "What good's it doing me?" She has tried unsuccessfully to get the photo suppressed. About it, Roy Stryker, genius of the photo section of the Farm Security Administration, for which Lange was working, said in 1972: "When Dorothea took that picture, that was the ultimate. She

never surpassed it. To me, it was *the* picture of Farm Security So many times I've asked myself what is she thinking? She has all of the suffering of mankind in her but all of the perseverance too You can see anything you want to in her. She is immortal."¹⁵ In 1979, a United Press International story about Mrs. Thompson said she gets \$331.60 a month from Social Security and \$44.40 for medical expenses. She is of interest solely because she is an incongruity, a photograph that has aged; of interest solely because she is a postscript to an acknowledged work of art. Mr. Burnett's Chilean photograph will probably not reach such prominence (I've never seen it before, myself), and we will not discover what happened to the people in it, not even forty-two years later.¹⁶

A good, principled photographer I know, who works for an occupational-health-and-safety group and cares about how his images are understood, was annoyed by the articles about Florence Thompson. He thought they were cheap, that the photo *Migrant Mother*, with its obvious symbolic dimension, stands over and apart from her, is not-her, has an independent life history. (Are photographic images, then, like civilization, made on the backs of the exploited?) I mentioned to him that in the book *In This Proud Land*,¹⁷ Lange's field notes are quoted as saying, "She thought that my pictures might help her, and so she helped me." My friend the labor photographer responded that the photo's publication caused local officials to fix up the migrant camp, so that although Mrs. Thompson didn't benefit directly, others like her did. I think she had a different idea of their bargain.

I think I recognize in his response the well-entrenched paradigm in which a documentary image has two moments: (1) the "immediate," instrumental one, in which an image is caught or created out of the stream of the present and held up as testimony, as evidence in the most legalistic of senses, arguing for or against a social practice and its ideological-theoretical supports, and (2) the conventional "aesthetic-historical" moment, less definable in its boundaries, in which the viewer's argumentativeness cedes to the organismic pleasure afforded by the aesthetic "rightness" or well-formedness (not necessarily formal) of the image. This second moment is *ahistorical* in its refusal of *specific* historical meaning yet "history minded" in its very awareness of the pastness of the time in which the image was made. This covert *appreciation* of images is dangerous insofar as it accepts *not* a dialectical relation between political and formal meaning, not their interpenetration, but a hazier, more reified relation, one in which topicality drops away as epochs fade, and the aesthetic

15. Roy Emerson Stryker and Nancy Wood, *In This Proud Land: America, 1935-1943, as Seen in the FSA Photographs* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1973; New York: Galahad Books, 1973), p. 19.

16. *Ibid.*

17. I am not speculating about the "meaning" of photography to Lange but rather speaking quite generally here.

18. Agee and Evans went to Hale County to do an article or a series on a white sharecropper family for Henry Luce's *Fortune* magazine; because Evans was employed by the Historical Section of the Farm Security Administration, it was agreed that his negatives would belong to it. When Agee and Evans completed their work (dealing with three families), *Fortune* declined to publish it; it finally achieved publication in book form in 1941. Its many editions have included, with the text, anywhere from sixteen to sixty-two of the many photographs that Evans made. A new, larger, and more expensive paperback edition has recently been published; during Agee's lifetime the book sold about six hundred copies.

It hardly needs to be said that in the game of waiting out the moment of critique of some cultural work it is the capitalist system itself (and its financial investors) that is the victor, for in cultural matters the pickings of the historical garbage heap are worth far more than the critical moves of the present, and by being chosen and commodified, by being *affirmed*, even the most directly critical works in turn affirm the system they had formerly indicted, which in its most liberal epochs parades them through the streets as proof of its open-mindedness. In this case, of course, the work did not even see publication until its moment had ended.

19. Howell Raines, "Let Us Now Praise Famous Folk," *New York Times Magazine*, May 25, 1980, p. 31-46. (I thank Jim Pomeroy for calling this article to my attention and giving me a copy of this issue.) Raines is the chief of the *Times*'s Atlanta bureau. The article seems to take for granted the uselessness of Agee's and Evans's efforts and in effect convicts them of the ultimately tactless sin of prying. To appreciate the shaping effects of one's anticipated audience, compare the simple "human interest" treatment of Allie Mae Fields ("Woods") Burroughs ("Gudger") Moore in Scott Osborne, "A Walker Evans Heroine Remembers," *American Photographer* (September 1979), p. 70-73, which stands between the two negative treatments: the *Times*'s and the sensationalist news-wire stories about Florence Thompson, including ones with such headlines as "'Migrant Mother' doubtful, she doesn't think today's women match her" (*Toronto Star*, November 12, 1979). Mrs. Moore (she married a man named Moore after Floyd Burroughs's death), too, lived in a trailer, on Social Security (the article says \$131 a month—surely it is \$331.60, as Mrs. Thompson received), plus Medicare. But unlike Thompson and Mrs. Moore's relatives as described by Raines, she "is not bitter." Osborne ends his article thus: "Allie Mae Burroughs Moore has endured. ... She has survived Evans [she died, however, before the article appeared], whose perception produced a portrait of Allie Mae Burroughs Moore that now hangs on permanent display in the Museum of Modern Art. Now the eyes that had revealed so much in that picture stare fixedly at the violet rim along the horizon. 'No, I wouldn't change my life none,' she says." According to Raines, *that picture* is the most sought-after of all Evans's Alabama photos, and one printed by Evans would sell for about four thousand dollars. Predictably, in Osborne's story, Mrs. Moore, contemplating the

aspect is, if anything, enhanced by the loss of specific reference (although there remains, perhaps, a cushioning backdrop of vague social sentiments limiting the "mysteriousness" of the image). I would argue against the possibility of a nonideological aesthetic; any response to an image is inevitably rooted in social knowledge—specifically, in social understanding of cultural products. (And from her published remarks one must suppose that when Lange took her pictures she was after just such an understanding of them, although by now the cultural appropriation of the work has long since removed it from this perspective.)

A problem with trying to make such a notion workable within actual photographic practice is that it seems to ignore the mutability of ideas of aesthetic rightness. That is, it seems to ignore the fact that historical interests, not transcendental verities, govern whether any particular form is seen as adequately revealing its meaning—and that you cannot second-guess history. This mutability accounts for the incorporation into legitimate photo history of the work of Jacob Riis alongside that of the incomparably more classical Lewis Hine, of Weegee (Arthur Fellig) alongside Danny Lyon. It seems clear that those who, like Lange and the labor photographer, identify a powerfully conveyed meaning with a primary sensuousness are pushing against the gigantic ideological weight of classical beauty, which presses on us the understanding that in the search for transcendental form, the world is merely the stepping-off point into aesthetic eternity.

The present cultural reflex of wrenching all art works out of their contexts makes it difficult to come to terms with this issue, especially without seeming to devalue such people as Lange and the labor photographer, and their work. I think I understand, from the inside, photographers' involvement with *the work itself*, with its supposed autonomy, which really signifies its belongingness to their own body of work and to the world of photographs.¹⁸ But I also become impatient with this perhaps-enforced protectiveness, which draws even the best intentioned of us nearer and nearer to exploitiveness.

The Sunday *New York Times Magazine*, bellwether of fashionable ideological conceits, in 1980 excoriated the American documentary milestone *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (written by James Agee and photographed by Walker Evans in July and August of 1936, in Hale County, Alabama, on assignment from *Fortune* magazine, but not published until 1941).¹⁹ The critique is the same as that suggested in germ by the Florence Thompson news item. We

should savor the irony of arguing before the ascendant class fractions represented by the readership of the Sunday *New York Times* for the protection of the sensibilities of those marginalized sharecroppers and children of sharecroppers of forty years ago. The irony is greatly heightened by the fact that (as with the Thompson story) the "protection" takes the form of a *new* documentary, a "rephotographic project," a reconsignment of the marginal and pathetic to marginality and pathos, accompanied by a stripping away of the false names given them by Agee and Evans—Gudger, Woods, Ricketts—to reveal their real names and "life stories." This new work manages to institute a new genre of victimhood—the victimization by *someone else's* camera of helpless persons, who then hold still long enough for the indignation of the new writer to capture them, in words and images both, in their current state of decrepitude. The new photos appear alongside the old, which provide a historical dimension, representing the moment in past time in which these people were first dragged into history. As readers of the Sunday *Times*, what do we discover? That the poor are ashamed of having been *exposed* as poor, that the photos have been the source of festering shame. That the poor remain poorer than we are, for although *they* see their own rise in fortunes, their escape from desperate poverty, we *Times* readers understand that our relative distance has not been abridged; we are still doing much better than they. Is it then difficult to imagine these vicarious protectors of the privacy of the "Gudgers" and "Ricketts" and "Woods" turning comfortably to the photographic work of Diane Arbus? ²⁰

The credibility of the image as the explicit trace of the comprehensible in the living world has been whittled away for both "left" and "right" reasons. An analysis which reveals social institutions as serving one class by legitimating and enforcing its domination while hiding behind the false mantle of evenhanded universality necessitates an attack on the monolithic cultural myth of objectivity (transparency, unmediatedness), which implicates not only photography but all journalistic and reportorial objectivity used by mainstream media to claim ownership of all truth. But the Right, in contradistinction, has found the attack on credibility or "truth value" useful to its own ends. Seeing people as fundamentally unequal and regarding elites as natural occurrences, composed of those best fitted to understand truth and to experience pleasure and beauty in "elevated" rather than "debased" objects (and regarding it as social suicide to monkey with this natural order), the Right wishes to seize a segment of photographic practice, securing the primacy of authorship, and isolate it within the gallery-museum-art-market nexus, effectively differentiating

(note 19 continued) photo, accepts its justice, while Raines has Mrs. Moore's daughter, after her mother's death, bitterly saying how much her mother had hated it and how much unlike her it looked.

20. In the same vein, but in miniature, and without the ramified outrage but with the same joke on the photographed persons—that they allowed themselves to be twice burned—*Modern Photography* (July 1980) ran a small item on its "What's What" pages entitled "Arbus Twins Revisited." A New Jersey photographer found the twins, New Jersey residents, and convinced the now-reluctant young women to pose for him, thirteen years after Arbus's photo of 1967. There is a mild craze for "rephotographing" sites and people previously seen in widely published photos; photographers have, I suppose, discovered as a profession that time indeed flows rather than just vanishing. *Mod Photo* probably had to take unusual steps to show us Arbus's photo. It is very difficult to obtain permission to reproduce her work—articles must, for example, ordinarily be *read* before permission is granted—her estate is very tightly controlled by her family (and perhaps Szarkowski) and Harry Lunn, a photo dealer with notorious policy of "enforced scarcity" with respect to the work of "his" photographers (including Arbus and Evans). *Mod Photo's* staff photographed the cover of the Arbus monograph (published by Aperture in 1972), thus quoting a book cover, complete with the words "diane arbus," rather than the original Arbus print. Putting dotted lines around the book-cover image, they set it athwart rather than *in* a black border, while they did put such a border around the twin's photo of 1979. The story itself seems to "rescue" Arbus at the expense of the twins, who, supposedly without direction, "assumed poses ... remarkably like those in the earlier picture." (I thank Fred Lonidier for sending me a copy of this item.)

21. Although both Frank's and Winogrand's work is "anarchic" in tendency, their anarchism diverges considerably; whereas Frank's work seems to suggest a left anarchism, Winogrand is certainly a right anarchist. Frank's 1950s photo book *The Americans* (initially published in Paris in 1958, by Robert Delpire, but republished by Grove Press in New York in 1959 with an introduction by Jack Kerouac) seems to imply that one might travel through America and simply *see* its social-psychological meaning, which is apparent everywhere to those alive to looking; Winogrand's work suggests only the apparent inaccessibility of meaning, for the viewer cannot help seeing himself, point of view shifts from person to person within and outside the image, and even the *thought* of social understanding, as opposed to the leering face of the spectacle, is dissipated.

22. John Szarkowski, introduction (wall text) to the *New Documents* exhibition, February 28-May 7, 1967. In other words, the photographer as either *faux naïf* or natural man, with the power to point but not to name.

elite understanding and its objects from common understanding. The result (which stands on the bedrock of financial gain) has been a general movement of legitimated photography discourse to the right—a trajectory that involves the aestheticization (consequently, formalization) of meaning and the denial of content, the denial of the existence of the political dimension. Thus, instead of the dialectical understanding of the relation between images and the living world that I referred to earlier—in particular, of the relation between images and ideology—the relation has simply been severed in thought.

The line that documentary has taken under the tutelage of John Szarkowski at New York's Museum of Modern Art—a powerful man in a powerful position—is exemplified by the career of Garry Winogrand, who aggressively rejects any responsibility (or shall we say culpability?) for his images and denies any relation between them and shared or public human meaning. Just as Walker Evans is the appropriate person within the history of street photography to compare with Lee Friedlander, the appropriate comparison for Winogrand is Robert Frank (who is compared with almost everyone), whose purloined images of American life in the 1950s suggest, however, all the passionate judgments that Winogrand disclaims.²¹ Images can yield any narrative, Winogrand says, and all meaning in photography applies only to what resides within the "four walls" of the framing edges. What can, in Frank's work, be identified as a personally mediated presentation has become, in Szarkowski's three "new documentarians," Winogrand, Arbus, and Friedlander, a privatized will o' the wisp:

Most of those who were called documentary photographers a generation ago ... made their pictures in the service of a social cause ... to show what was wrong with the world, and to persuade their fellows to take action and make it right [A] new generation of photographers has directed the documentary approach toward more personal ends. Their aim has not been to reform life, but to know it. Their work betrays a sympathy—almost an affection—for the imperfections and the frailties of society. They like the real world, in spite of its terrors, as the source of all wonder and fascination and value—no less precious for being irrational What they hold in common is the belief that the commonplace is really worth looking at, and the courage to look at it with a minimum of theorizing.²²

Szarkowski wrote that introduction to the *New Documents* show in 1967, in an America already several years into the "terrors" and disruptions of the

Vietnam War. He makes a poor argument for the value of disengagement from a "social cause" and in favor of a connoisseurship of the tawdry. How, for example, do we define the boundaries and extent of "the world" from looking at these photographer's images, and how we can be said to "know it"? The global claim he makes for their work serves to point out the limits of its actual scope. At what elevated vantage point must we stand to regard society as having "frailties" and "imperfections"? High enough to see it as a circus before our eyes, a commodity to be "experienced" the way a recent vodka ad entices us to "experience the nineteenth century" by having a drink. In comparison with nightmarish photos from Vietnam and the United States' Dominican adventure, the work of Friedlander, Winogrand, and Arbus might be taken as evidencing a "sympathy" for the "real world." Arbus had not yet killed herself, though even that act proved to be recuperable by Szarkowski's ideological position. In fact, the forebears of Szarkowski are not those "who made their pictures in the service of a social cause" but bohemian photographers like Brassai and the early Kertész and Cartier-Bresson. But rather than the sympathy and almost-affection that Szarkowski claimed to find in the work, I see impotent rage masquerading as varyingly invested snoop sociology—fascination and affection are far from identical. A dozen years later, aloofness has given way to a more generalized nihilism.

In the San Francisco Sunday paper for November 11, 1979, one finds Jerry Nachman, news director of the local headline-and-ad station, saying:

In the sixties and seventies all-news radio had its place in people's lives: What was happening in Vietnam? Did the world blow up last night? Who's demonstrating where? ... Now we're on the cusp of the eighties and things are different. To meet these changes KCBS must deliver what's critical in life in a way that's packaged even perversely There's a certain craziness that goes on in the world and we want people to understand that we can chronicle it for them.

Nachman also remarks, "Our broadcasters tell people what they saw out there in the wilderness today." The wilderness is the world, and it inspires in us, according to this view, both anxiety and perverse fascination, two varieties of response to a spectacle.

23. Among the many works that have offered images of drunks and bums and down-and-outers, I will cite only Michael Zettler's *The Bowery* (New York: Drake Publishers, 1975), which I first saw only after I completed *The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems* but which, with its photographs and blocks of text, supposed quotations from the pictured bums and from observers, can nevertheless be seen as its perfect foil.

24. Such as the photographs of Chilean detainees taken by David Burnett, which I referred to earlier. See page 80.

IV.

Imperialism breeds an imperialist sensibility in all phases of cultural life. A safari of images. Drunken bums²³ retain a look of threat to the person. (Not, perhaps, as well as foreign prisoners²⁴) They are a drastic instance of a male society, the lumberjacks or prospectors of the cities, the men who (seem to) choose not to stay within the polite bourgeois world of (does "of" mean "made up of" or "run by" or "shaped by" or "fit for"?) *women and children*. They are each and every one an unmistakably identifiable instance of a physically coded social reality. The cynicism they may provoke in observers is far different from the cynicism evoked by images of the glitter world, which may end in a politically directed anger. *Directed toward change*. Bums are an "end game" in a "personal tragedy" sort of chance. They may be a surreptitious metaphor for the "lower class" but they are not to be confused with a social understanding of the "working class." Bums are, perhaps, to be finally judged as *vile*, people who deserve a kick for their miserable *choice*. The buried text of photographs of drunks is not a treatise on political economy, on the manipulation of the unemployment rate to control inflation and keep profits up and labor's demands down, on the contradictory pressures on the institution of the family under capitalism, on the appeal of consciousness-eradicating drugs for people who have little reason to believe in themselves.

V.

The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems is a work of refusal. It is not defiant antihumanism. It is meant as an act of criticism; the text you are reading now runs on the parallel track of another descriptive system. There are no stolen images in this book; what could you learn from them that you didn't already know? If impoverishment is a subject here, it is more centrally the impoverishment of representational strategies tottering about alone than that of a mode of surviving. The photographs are powerless to *deal with* the reality that is yet totally comprehended-in-advance by ideology, and they are as diversionary as the word formations—which at least are closer to being located within the culture of drunkenness rather than being framed on it from without.

There is a poetics of drunkenness here, a poetry-out-of-prison. Adjectives and nouns built into metaphoric systems—food imagery, nautical imagery, the imagery of industrial processes, of militarism, derivative comparisons with animal life, foreignisms, archaisms, and references to still other universes of discourse—applied to a particular state of being, a subculture of sorts, and to the people in it.

The words begin outside the world of skid row and slide into it, as people are thought to slide into alcoholism and skid to the bottom of the row. The text ends twice, comprising two series. First the adjectives, beginning with playful metaphor to describe the early, widely acceptable stages of intoxication and moving toward the baldness of stupor and death. A second series begins, of nouns belonging firmly to the Bowery and not shared with the world outside. Occasionally the texts address the photographs directly; more often, if there is a connection, it is the simultaneous darkening of mood as the two systems run along concurrently.

The photos represent a walk down the Bowery seen as arena and living space, as a commercial district in which, after business hours, the derelict residents inhabit the small portal spaces between shop and street. The shops range from decrepitude to splendor, from the shabbiest of ancient restaurant-supply houses or even mere storage spaces to astonishing crystal grottoes whose rapt cherubim entwined in incandescent fixtures and whose translucent swans in fountains of fiber-optic tubes relentlessly dripping oil blobs into dishes radiate into the street. Above the street, the now-infrequent flop houses and their successors the occasional, unseen living lofts, vary from mean raw space to constructed tropical paradises, indoor boweries whose residents must still step over the sleeping bums in the doorway and so are not usually the type who think of having kids. None of this matters to the street, none of it changes the quality of the pavement, the shelter or lack of it offered by the doorways, many of which are spanned by inhospitable but visually discreet rows of iron teeth—meant to discourage sleep but generally serving only as peas under the mattress of a rolled-up jacket. While the new professional-managerial urban gentry devour discarded manufactories and vomit up architectural suburbiana in their place, the Bowery is (so far) still what it has been for a hundred years and more. Bottles, and occasionally shoes, never flowers, are strewn on the Bowery, despite a name that still describes its country past.

The photos here are radical metonymy, with a setting implying the condition itself. I will not yield the material setting, though certainly it explains nothing. The photographs confront the shops squarely, and they supply familiar urban reports. *They are not reality newly viewed.* They are not reports from a frontier, messages from a voyage of discovery or self-discovery. There is nothing new attempted in a photographic style that was constructed in the 1930s when the message itself was newly understood, differently embedded. I am quoting words and images both.

VI.

Sure, images that are meant to make an argument about social relations can "work." But the documentary that has so far been granted cultural legitimacy has no such argument to make. Its arguments have been twisted into generalizations about the condition of "man," which is by definition not susceptible to change through struggle. And the higher the price that photography can command as a commodity in dealerships, the higher the status accorded to it in museums and galleries, the greater will be the gap between that kind of documentary and another kind, a documentary incorporated into an explicit analysis of society and at least the beginning of a program for changing it. The liberal documentary, in which members of the ascendant classes are implored to have pity on and to rescue members of the oppressed, now belongs to the past. The documentary of the present, a shiver-provoking appreciation of alien vitality or a fragmented vision of psychological alienation in city and town, coexists with the germ of another documentary—a financially unloved but growing body of documentary works committed to the exposure of specific abuses caused by people's jobs, by the financier's growing hegemony over the cities, by racism, sexism and class oppression; works about militancy, about self-organization, or works meant to support them. Perhaps a radical documentary can be brought into existence. But the common acceptance of the idea that documentary precedes, supplants, transcends, or cures full, substantive social activism is an indicator that we do not yet have a real documentary.

"I cannot say, I can only repeat" (a note on quotes and quoting)

These photos, you think, might as well be quotations. They aren't, but let's let that go for now; they are purposely situated within a certain photographic tradition and so can be said loosely to quote that tradition, if not specific images, a specific photographer. Quotation, often as collage, threads through twentieth-century art (and literature) fugally entwined with the countertheme of "originality." In quotation the relation of quoter to quote, and to its source, is not open-and-shut. Quoting allows for a separation between quoter and quotation that calls attention to expression as garment and invites judgment of its cut Or, conversely, it holds out a seamless cloak of univocal authoritativeness for citers to hide behind. Although there is nothing unprejudiced about any representation, in the modern era, attempts at a necessarily false objectivity in relation to meaning have periodically been made, whether in art, as in the German *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), or in journalism, United States style.

Photography, dressed as science, has eased the path of this feigned innocence, for only photography might be taken as directly impressed by, literally formed by, its source.

Quotation has mediation as its essence, if not its primary concern, and any claims for objectivity are made in relation to representations of representations, not representations of truth. But beyond the all-too-possible reductive-formalist or academic closure, in its straining of the relation between meaning and utterance, quotation can be understood as confessional, betraying an anxiety about meaning in the face of the living world, a faltered confidence in straightforward expression. At its least noble it is the skewering of the romantic consciousness on the reflexive realization of the impossibility of interpretational adequacy and its consequent withdrawal into a paranoid pout. Pointing to the existence of a received system of meaning, a defining practice, quotation can reveal the thoroughly social nature of our lives. (Whether it is seen to be conspiratorial or otherwise systemic turns out not to be only characterological in origin; it is also the knot of the problem of ideological mediation.) In a society simultaneously undergoing fragmentation and reorganization into a new, oppressive totality in which ideological controls may play a decisive role, quotation's immanent self-consciousness about the avenues of ideological legitimation—those of the State and its dominating class and culture—or, more weakly, about routes of commercial utterance, can accomplish the simple but incessantly necessary act of making the normal strange, the invisible an object of scrutiny, the trivial a measure of social life. In its seeming parasitism, quotation refuses the role of the socially integrated, therefore complicit, *creativity*.

In this aspect, quotation is alienated sensibility. At certain historical junctures, quotation allows a *defeat* of psychological alienation, as asserted reconnection with obscured traditions. Yet the revelation of an unknown or disused past emphasizes a rupture with the immediate past, a revolutionary break in the supposed stream of history, intended to destroy the credibility of the reigning historical accounts in favor of the point of view of history's designated losers. The homage of quotation is capable of signaling not self-effacement but rather a strengthening or consolidating resolve. Thus, for feminists in the past decade the resuscitation of a great body of works in all fields accompanied energetic new production.

But, in general, it is through irony that quotation gains its critical force. One

speaks with two voices, establishing a kind of triangulation—(the source of the quotation is placed *here*, the quoter over *there*, and the hearer/spectator *there*—and, by inflection, one saps the authority of the quote. Irony, however, is not universally accessible, for the audience must *know* enough to recognize it.

In the Pop era, quotation represented a two-faced literalism: a re-tying of connections to a social life beyond artistic expression that nevertheless offered a final refuge in formalism with a newly assimilated imagery (we might note that, with very different justifications, some feminist quotation, of styles extricated from their historically extinguished moment, has ended up precisely there as well). In the United States (though not, I suppose, in England), the direction of Pop's quotational irony was so faintly inscribed (and so often denied) as to offer to the public at large the sense of monumentalized approbation of the banal commercial commodity, that is of its form, without *critique*—except possibly a critique of *execrable taste* or, inversely, its exultant acceptance (a version of the romantic pout). With quotation, as with photography, meaning comes largely from the frame. Simply introducing something where it has been excluded—mass-culture imagery in an elite-culture setting or photos of the unphotographed poor such as those I considered earlier—can be a radical opener, until familiarity dissipates the shock. Quotes, like photos, float loose from their framing discourses, are absorbed into the embracing matrix of affirmative culture (see Marcuse on this and on repressive tolerance). The irony of Pop quotation, which hardly allowed for even the sustained moral indignation that photos of the poor conceivably might, lasted a mere instant, for not only was no coherent critical framework provided for Pop, even partial attempts were consistently refused by its critics and artists. And it is even easier to admire designs from the graphic commercial lexicon than a photo of some poor victim somewhere, no matter how familiar it has become and no matter how rich the narrative or symbolic import you have managed to invest it with—though in time the human content of the former photo of protest likely will raise it above high-art quotation of mass-cultural detritus.

The cachet of brand worship legitimized by Pop has percolated upward so that the beautifuls may now wear designers' signatures (at least for the moment) and then percolated back down as the massification industries merchandise a reachable version of high-class culture (as clothing: surface-as-self) to those below. The irony of Pop's quotational gambits certainly has evaporated. Yet

quotation is still used by artists to give form to irony. "So hard to do anything original any more" betrays the dilemma of avant-garde sentiment at a time when a true avant-garde is absent and may be structurally impossible. In another of a long string of ironic (?) refusals of virtuosity and "sensitivity," painters have recently adopted a reduced brutish figuration (seemingly chosen from the lexicon of those drastically damaged mentally) whose nihilism strikes not at any society in particular but at "civilization"—a familiar desperate move. A *situational* irony, external to the work, now exists for photography, whose practitioners search for new looks as the omnivorous commodification of photography leads to the conversion of photographs into art-historical material. Photographs quote painting, drawing, conceptual-art diagrams, advertisements, other photographs, generally as a tactic of upward mobility, to embrace the authority of the source and let any notion of *socially* critical practice be damned (the easy apparent choice of Art over Society). There is little irony meant in most of such work (or should I say little received?): This is quotation from (or for) the (aesthetically minded) Right.

In photography, Pop was belated, a move not of the sixties but of the seventies, when Pop Art already seemed indistinguishable from advertising. Photographic Pop was a predictable trend of detached documentary (in the weak sense of the term), blending literalism with varying proportions of coziness, cynicism, detachment, and despair. Where, finally, *could* depoliticized documentary have moved? Photography is dumb—it can only re-present the visible (a headache for activists). It cannot show, but can only refer to, social forces and processes; that is obvious. Furthermore, in the United States, poverty and oppression are not the visible sores they once were, during the Depression, for example—except in various, generally nonwhite, communities and neighborhoods, rural and urban. (Still, what Reaganism, like Thatcherism, may bring in terms of impoverishment of the white working class may render this argument somewhat obsolete.) For documentarians then to pursue a "third worldist" politics, looking to impoverished nonwhites to provide the spark of social revolution or bring about other radical change (to be distinguished from merely making images of the nonwhite poor) would make it all the more difficult for the overwhelmingly white middle classes, now convinced that in essence nonwhites are their economic rivals, to have more than a contemplative—perhaps a voyeuristic, perhaps an empathic—response to images of a poverty to whose image they have already become quite inured and the remediation of which no longer seems necessary (and may even seem "counterproductive") whether on moral or patriotic

grounds Images which they would, in any case, be unlikely to see, since the English-language mass-press picture magazines have succumbed to the conqueror, television, which caters to the subterranean appetite for gore with color, sound, movement, and drama. No surprise, then, that social documentary has become enervated.

Treating *The Bowery* as a (dual) set of quotations was a strategy of critical framing of a social failure: A failure in that a plausible form of political expression using photographs was finally accorded the veneration of artistic and financial success while the conditions of impoverishment it depicted were allowed to remain essentially the same, changing, if at all, in step with the economics of wartime production, not through any singular power of the photographs. Any materialist could have predicted the failure of a cultural practice that necessitated an Idealist philosophical basis for its theory of social change. If change, however, was not the aim, if knowledge in a movement toward change is not the aim, then the logic of the documentary practice slips inward, into the psyche of the photographer, which I have been at pains to remind you has been the actual historical trajectory of social documentary. *The Bowery* points to what turned out to be an inadequate address to the material even when it was new. Its inadequacy stemmed from a segmented vision that wrenches documentary from the currents of social life and slaps it into books and frames, up on the wall and into artistic and financial portfolios and blots out the partisan nature of a struggle waged with images. The construction of the quoted language in *The Bowery* is a structure knitted into a whole out of single words and metaphoric sets; unlike the photos it does not quote an authored shape, a particular art address. So it is on the photos that my argument about commitment finally rests. Photos of an empty street, a melancholic blend of blurred memories of ancient dreams with imaginings of cities after the neutron bomb, will not do as a final resting place. If photos are to be populated, though, they ought to be made with a clarity that neither sells short the lives of the people shown nor pretends not to notice the built-in meanings of photographic discourses. Eventually the photography of the real has to give up the fear of engagement in favor of the clearest analysis that can be brought.

Photo Credits

- Image 1: Photo-Library of the Museum of the City of New York.
- Image 2: George Eastman House, Rochester, New York.
- Image 3: *Photography/Politics: One*, Photography Workshop, London.
- Image 4: The Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge, England.
- Image 6: Hiram Walker Incorporated, Detroit, Michigan.
- Image 8: Robert and Frances Flaherty Study Center, The School of Theology at Claremont, Claremont, California.
- Image 9: Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, New York.
- Image 10: Ritchie Ward Press, Orinda, California.
- Image 11: Magnum Photography Inc., New York, New York.
- Image 13: *American Photographer*, New York, New York.
- Image 14: *American Photographer*, New York, New York.
- Image 15: Associated Press, New York, New York.
- Image 16: *American Photographer*, New York, New York.
- Image 17: Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
- Image 18: *American Photographer*, New York, New York.
- Image 19: Don Lokuta, Union, New Jersey.
- Image 20: Drake Publishers, New York-London.

Permission to reproduce Irving Penn's photograph *Asaro Mudmen*, *New Guinea*, 1970 was refused by Condé Nast Publications, Inc. in a one-sentence rejection stating: "Unfortunately, the material requested by you is unavailable for republication." By phone their representative suggested that it was Penn who had refused the request.

Permission to reproduce a photograph of Ida Ruth Tingle Tidmore, one of Walker Evans's Hale County subjects, taken in 1980 by Susan Woodley Raines and reproduced in conjunction with Howell Raines's article "Let Us Now Revisit Famous Folk" in the Sunday *New York Times Magazine* of May 25, 1980, was refused by Ms. Raines because Ms. Tidmore was suing Mr. Raines over the content of the article (see note 19). The photo requested was captioned "Ida Ruth Tingle Tidmore and her husband, Alvin, outside their mobile home, which is adjacent to Alvin's collection of junked automobiles." A small corner inset showed one of Evans's photos from *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* and was captioned "Young Ida Ruth struck this pensive pose for Walker Evans' camera." However, the inset photo is identified in *Walker Evans: Photographs for the Farm Security Administration 1935-1938* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973) as being of Ida Ruth's younger sister Laura Minnie Lee Tingle (sic) (LC-USZ62-17931).

A colonial variant in the Sunday *New York Times* travel section for November 22, 1981, captioned "Riding home with a French loaf at Capesterre on Basse-Terre." Basse-Terre is part of Guadeloupe in the French West Indies. Frank J. Priol's accompanying article, "A Francophile's Guadeloupe," avers that despite U.S. tourism, "thank heaven, everything has remained absolutely French, or at least French-Caribbean."



see p. 79