

Inside/Out

In her withering critique of the work of Diane Arbus—itsself part of a larger thesis about the baleful effects of the photographic colonization of the world and its objects—Susan Sontag argued that certain forms of photographic depiction were especially complicit with processes of objectification that precluded either empathy or identification with the subjects in Arbus's photographs. In producing a photographic oeuvre largely featuring subjects who were physically deviant (e.g., freaks) or those deemed socially deviant (e.g., transvestites, nudists) (fig. 20) or even those who through Arbus's singular lens merely *looked* deviant (e.g., crying babies) and by photographing them in ways that defiantly renounced either compassion or sympathetic engagement, Arbus was indicted as a voyeuristic and deeply morbid connoisseur of the horrible:

The camera is a kind of passport that annihilates moral boundaries and social inhibitions, freeing the photographer from any responsibility toward the people photographed. The whole point of photographing people is that you are not intervening in their lives, only visiting them. The photographer is supertourist, an extension of the anthropologist, visiting natives and bringing back news of their exotic doings and strange gear. The photographer is always trying to colonize new experiences or find new ways to look at familiar subjects—to fight against boredom. For boredom is just the reverse side of fascination: both depend on being outside rather than inside a situation, and one leads to the other.¹

Sontag's critique of the touristic and anomic sensibility informing the work of Arbus (a critique that was clearly meant to encompass many other comparable practices) turns, among other things, on the binary couple inside/outside. Sontag in fact closes the paragraph cited above by remarking of Arbus that "her view is always from the outside." This binarism, which is but one of a series that underpins much photography theory and criticism, characterizes—in a manner that appears virtually self-evident—two possible positions for the photographer. The insider position—in this particular context, the "good" position—is thus understood to imply a position of engagement, participation, and privileged knowledge, whereas the second, the outsider's position, is taken to produce an alienated and voyeuristic relationship that heightens the distance between subject and object. Along the lines of this binarism hinges much of the debate concerned with either the ethics or the politics of certain forms of photographic practice. In this respect, Sontag's critique is best characterized as an investigation of the ethics of photographic seeing, whereas Martha Rosler's no less uncompromising critique of traditional documentary practice—I refer here to her 1981 essay "In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)"—was structured around an explicitly politicized analysis of how such photography actually functions. "Imperialism," she wrote, "breeds an imperialist sensibility in all phases of cultural life,"² a comment

Abigail Solomon-Godeau

OPPOSITE:

Nan Goldin

Misty and Jimmy Paulette in a taxi, NYC, 1991
(detail)

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art,
Accessions Committee Fund
(Pl. 68)



FIGURE 20

Diane Arbus

Retired man and his wife at home in a nudist camp one morning, N.J., 1963 (from the portfolio, *Diane Arbus: A Box of Ten Photographs, 1970*)
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Margery Mann

that contrasts interestingly with Sontag's "Like sexual voyeurism, [taking photographs] is a way of at least tacitly, often explicitly, encouraging whatever is going on to keep on happening."⁹ Thus, where Rosler sees the issue of photographic voyeurism and objectification as a synecdoche of a larger political/cultural totality, Sontag tends to locate the problem in photography itself. Nevertheless, and despite the important difference between the nature of an ethical and a political critique, both Sontag and Rosler are equally aware of the problematic nature of the photographic representation of the other, whether that other is incarnated by the deviant, the freak, the wino, the poor, the racial or ethnic other—the list is obviously endless. And although the inside/outside dichotomy for Sontag pivots on the possibility (or lack) of empathy and identification, and where for Rosler it devolves on issues of power and powerlessness, it is nonetheless significant that from either a humanist or a left perspective, the inside/outside couple is a central theme. Among other things, such a distinction operates to differentiate the kind of practice Rosler calls "victim photography" and at least one possible alternative—the putative empowerment of self-representation. In other words, where the inside/outside pairing is mobilized with respect to the representation of the other, the operative assumption is that the vantage point of the photographer who comes from outside—the quintessential documentarian, the ethnographer or anthropologist, the tourist armed with Leica, etc.—is not only itself an act of violence and expropriation but is virtually by definition a partial if not distorted view of the subject to be represented.

Without necessarily disagreeing with this characterization I would nevertheless suggest that the terms of this binarism are in fact more complicated, indeed far more ambiguous than they might initially appear. And while there is a perfectly commonsensical way in which we all grasp what is meant by Sontag's description of a photographer being "outside rather than inside a situation," and the implications thereof, there is yet a stubborn resistance in photography, even a logical incompatibility with these terms. On the one hand, we frequently assume authenticity and truth to be located on the inside (the truth of the subject), and, at the same time, we routinely—culturally—locate and define objectivity (as in reportorial, journalistic, or juridical objectivity) in conditions of exteriority, of nonimplication.

It is in this context therefore significant that one of the recurring tropes of photography criticism is an acknowledgment of the medium's brute exteriority, its depthlessness, perceived as a kind of ontological limitation rendering it incapable of registering anything more than the accident of appearances. "Less than ever does a simple reproduction of reality express something about reality," wrote Walter Benjamin (citing Brecht) on a photograph of a Krupp munitions factory.⁴ "Only that which narrates can make us understand," cautions Sontag nearly forty years later. "The knowledge gained through still photographs will always be some kind of sentimentalism, whether cynical or humanist."⁵

But if the medium is itself understood—in this virtually ontological sense—to be limited to the superficiality of surface appearance, how then does one gauge the difference between the photographic image made with an insider's knowledge or investment from the one made from a position of total exteriority? If the inside or outside position is taken to constitute a difference, we need to determine where that difference lies. In other words, is the implication (from the Latin, *implicare*—to be folded within) of the photographer in the world he or she represents visually manifest in the pictures that are taken, and if so, how? Are the terms of reception—or, for that matter, presentation—in any way determined by the position—inside or out—of the photographer making the exposure? Does the personal involvement of the photographer in a milieu, a place, a culture in fact dislodge the subject/object distinction that is thought to foster a flâneur-like sensibility? And what exactly is meant by the notion of "inside" in relation to an activity that is by definition about the capture—with greater or lesser fidelity—of appearance?

This dialectic of inside/outside, considered in relation to the artists exhibited in *Public Information: Desire, Disaster, Document*, has multiple resonances. Insofar as the work of most of the artists represented, including the painter Gerhard Richter, reflects on the various modalities or instrumentalities of photographic representation (by which I also include video and film), it is possible to chart the paradoxes and ambiguities of the inside/outside binarism in much of the featured work. In this respect, Ed Ruscha's photographic book works such as *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966) (pl. 20, fig. 7) or Dan Graham's *Homes for America* (1965–70) (pls. 32–36) might be considered the degree zero of photographic exteriority, for not only are the photographs themselves exterior views, but they model themselves directly on the impersonality, anonymity, and banality of the purely instrumental image. Insofar as the former work is structured as an arbitrary inventory, providing nothing other than the external signs of its own parameters, it can be said to thematize the perfect solipsism of the instrumental photograph. In fact, it is precisely this evacuation of subjectivity, the refusal of personality, style—in short, the rejection of all the hallmarks of photographic authorship, no less than the nature of the subject matter itself—that would seem to situate such work logically at the

"outside" pole of photographic practice. It was, furthermore, these very qualities of vernacular photography—its depthlessness, anonymity, banality, and of course mechanical reproducibility—that fostered its widespread use by artists like Ruscha in the first place, and indeed by so many of the artistic generation that succeeded Abstract Expressionism, including Warhol and Richter.

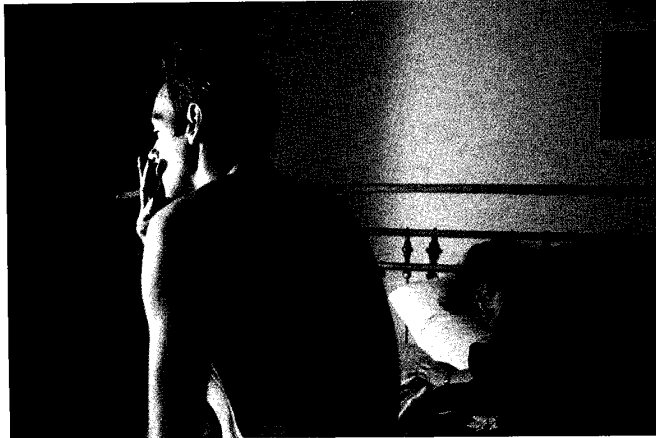


FIGURE 21

Nan Goldin
Nan and Brian in bed, New York City, 1983
 Courtesy of the artist
 (Cat. No. 91)

At the other pole of photographic representation is the "confessional" mode represented by Larry Clark and Nan Goldin, who deploy a photographic rhetoric of lived experience, privileged knowledge, and who declare both rhetorically and visually the photographers' personal stake in the substance of the representations. Such work descends ultimately from art photography to the degree that it affirms the medium's capacity to render subjectivity, whether that of the photographer or that of his or her subjects. Putting aside for the moment discussion of the viability of this claim, it is nevertheless the case that the work of Clark and Goldin raises some of the same issues posed by the work of Diane Arbus, for the subjects of these works are variously outlaws, hustlers, drug addicts, marginals, transvestites, and so forth. However their photographic representations were originally intended or used, they exist now in a nether zone between art and spectacle, on view for the gallery and museum goer, the purchaser of photography books.⁶ In contrast, however, to Arbus's manifestly outsider position vis-à-vis many if not most of her chosen subjects, Nan Goldin's *Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1986) or, more recently, *The Other Side* (1992) are the product of an insider's position:

People in the pictures say my camera is as much a part of being with me as any other aspect of knowing me. It's as if my hand were a camera. If it were possible, I'd want no mechanism between me and the moment of photographing. The camera is as much a part of my everyday life as talking or eating or sex. The instance of photographing, instead of creating distance, is a moment of clarity and emotional connection for me. There is a popular notion that the photographer is by nature a voyeur, the last one to be invited to the party. But I'm not crashing; this is my party. This is my family, my history.⁷

In both of Goldin's photographic projects, we are therefore presented with the residents of her own social and sexual world, and in *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, with several images of Goldin herself. She appears, for example, in the jacket photograph, lying in bed and looking at her boyfriend, smoking and seen from the back (fig. 21). She appears in another picture, with battered face and blackened eye after having been beaten by her boyfriend, and in two other instances, photographed in explicitly sexual situations. Although she is not represented in the photographs that constitute *The Other Side*, in her introductory essay she acknowledges her emotional, and indeed romantic, investment in the drag queens, transsexuals, and transvestites who are the subject of the work. For all these reasons both *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* and *The Other Side* can be considered as exemplary of the insider position, a position further established by what I have termed the confessional mode—*le cœur mis à nu* (the heart laid bare—Baudelaire).

In the case of the latter project, and by way of examining the terms by which insiderness comes into play, the viewer can readily assume from the content of the



images that the photographer is in a position of intimate proximity with her subjects. This is suggested by the depiction of the conventionally private activities of dressing and undressing, bathing, putting on makeup, the apparent physical closeness of the camera itself to its subjects in many of the pictures, and lastly, toward the end of the book, three images of one of the transvestites and a lover in bed together.

But having said this, how does the insider position—in this instance, that of someone who has lived with the subjects (i.e., the pictures from the 1970s, taken in Boston); who loves and admires them; who shares their world—determine the reception of these images or even the nature of the content? The dressing/undressing images, for example, which could be said to signify effectively the intimacy of the relation between photographer and subject, has a specific valency with respect to cross-dressing and transvestism. In other words, whether or not one considers these to be indicative of identities, roles, masquerades, or “third genders,” the very nature of the entity “drag queen” or “transvestite” is predicated on the transforming act of dressing up. To photograph different moments in that transformation from biological male into extravagant fantasy of made-in-Hollywood femininity and glamour is to document a ritual that is itself about exteriority, appearance, performance. For it is, after all, on the level of appearance that drag queens stage their subversive theater of gender.

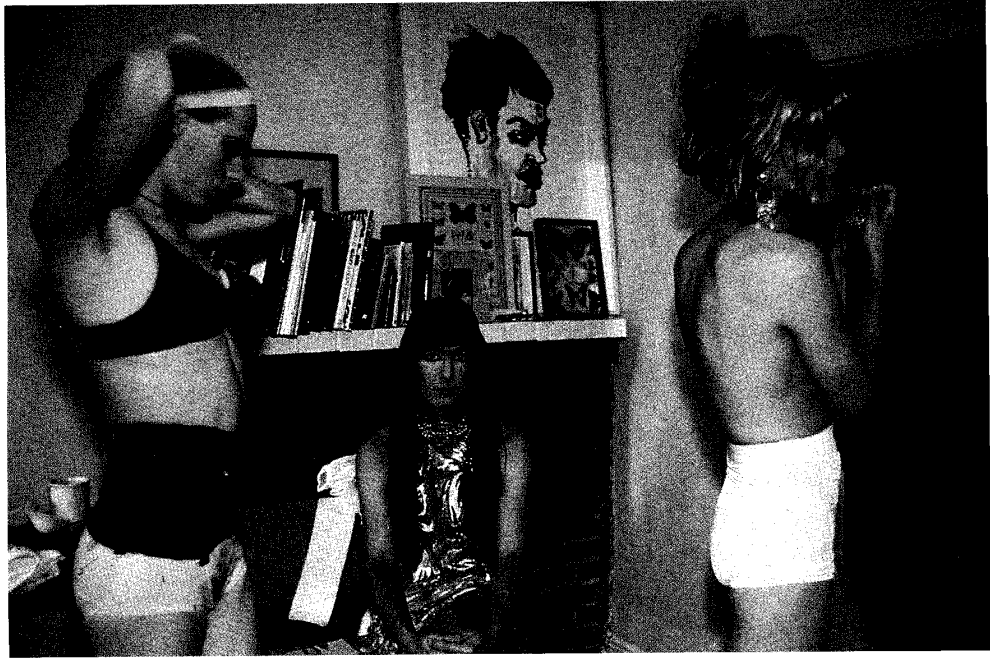
In the first grouping of photographs that opens *The Other Side* (those pictures shot in Boston in the 1970s), the intention seems to be to produce—actually to re-produce—the desired personae of the subjects. In this sense, Goldin’s insider relationship facilitates her ability to produce the image of the *subject’s* desire—but this is not structurally different from any other photographic collaboration between photographer and model. In fact, certain of the Boston pictures (which are black and white) resemble nothing so much as arty fashion photographs, very much in the style of the period (fig. 22). One would not necessarily think that certain of the portraits—particularly those of the person called “roommate”—represented anything other than a fragile looking, fine-boned woman (fig. 23). But this too subverts

FIGURES 22 AND 23

Nan Goldin

Ivy in the Boston Garden, Boston, 1973
Courtesy of the artist

Roommate in her chair, Boston, 1972
Courtesy of the artist



the privilege and authority of the inside position insofar as one confronts what is itself a perfection of simulation. Later in the book (and later chronologically) the style changes—the photographs are now in color, more informal, more spontaneous looking. It is as though the stylistic referent shifts from art photography to cinema vérité, and, analogously, the images of the subjects become more revealing, pictured often in various in-between states of physical transformation (fig. 24). Still later in the book, after New York, Paris, and Berlin, the action, as it were, moves to Manila and Bangkok, where the drag queens, transvestites, and transsexuals are portrayed in the bars they work at, the revues they perform in (fig. 25), or, in a few instances, *en famille*. Insiderhood here, as elsewhere, can thus be seen to be about access and proximity, but whether one can argue a nonvoyeuristic relationship in consequence of the photographer's position is another matter entirely.

As with Arbus's photographs of freaks and deviants, the risk is that the subject—irrespective of the photographer's intent—becomes object and spectacle. Where the subjects are in reality so often victimized, marginalized, discriminated against, or even physically attacked—as is the case with drag queens—the political and ethical terms of their representation are inseparable. Goldin may well claim her devotion to and investment in her subjects, but does this mitigate the prurience, or indeed the phobic distaste, so often manifested toward her subjects by the straight world? Does a photographic representation, however sympathetic, of drag queens and transsexuals constitute an effective intervention against the political and ethical problem of homophobia? In any event, it would be naive to disclaim the nature of most people's interest in photographs of drag queens, and surely part of the fascination of these photographs lies in the uncanniness of gender masquerade itself. Thus, on the one hand, the drag queens who so astonishingly simulate female beauty as to destabilize the very nature of the divide; on the other hand, those who retain—disturbingly—the signs of both sexes, both genders. To the degree, therefore, that the photographer produces a seamless illusion of the subject's successful "femininity" we are not so far from the photo studio; to the degree that the masquerade is revealed as such, we are in the province of the *exposé*. In neither case does the camera transcend the exteriority of appearance, nor, for that matter, does it provide an interiorized truth of the subject.

Moreover, to the extent that the very concept of voyeurism entails a sexual stake—in its original, clinical meaning it refers to sexual pleasure derived from looking—the privileged "look" at subjects who are in fact defined by their sexuality is doubly charged. Although Goldin's lived relationships with her subjects are based on emotional intimacy and personal knowledge, the very presence of a camera as they dress or undress, make love or bathe—instantiates a third term, even as the photographer wishes to disavow it. ("If it were possible, I'd want no mechanism between me and the moment of photographing. The camera is as much a part of my everyday life as talking or eating or sex.") The desire for transparency, immediacy, the wish that the viewer might see the other with the photographer's own eyes, is inevitably frustrated by the very mechanisms of the camera, which, despite the best intentions of the photographer, cannot penetrate beyond that which is simply, stupidly *there*.

Larry Clark's photographs, which at least in respect to certain projects can be equally considered the product of an inside position, raise many of these same issues. However, in an almost stereotypical gender division, where Goldin's works are framed as tender and loving homages, the rhetoric with which Clark frames his is aggressively macho, a combination of hipster-speak and juvenile delinquent.

FIGURES 24 AND 25

Nan Goldin

Misty, Tabboo!, and Jimmy Paulette dressing, NYC, 1991

Courtesy of the artist

C in the dressing room, Bangkok, 1992

Courtesy of the artist



FIGURE 26

Larry Clark
Untitled, 1971
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Gift of
Gary Roubos

Clark's first book, *Tulsa* (1971), which almost immediately established his reputation, consists of fifty deceptively artless black-and-white photographs, depicting his own milieu at that period of his life. These white, apparently working-class young men and women are represented variously shooting speed, shooting (or brandishing) guns, getting shot ("accidental gunshot wound"), having sex, having babies, burying babies, beating up informers, and generally incarnating low-life, middle-American style. Like Goldin's confessional prefaces, Clark's *Tulsa* opens with a kind of certificate of authenticity: "i was born in Tulsa Oklahoma in 1943. when i was sixteen i started shooting amphetamine. i shot with my friends every day for three years and then left town but i've gone back through the years. once the needle goes in it never comes out."⁸

From the outset, much was made of Clark's having been in all senses "on the inside." Only from such a position, it was assumed, could one generate such gritty, not to say brutal close-ups of shooting up and getting high. There is, undeniably, an outlaw funky glamour in such pictures—a lower-depths appeal that is very much a part of American culture. My own favorite of the series is a radiantly sunlit photo of a hugely pregnant young woman, seated, in profile, and shooting up (fig. 26). Such imagery, it must be said, functions as a tonic antidote to the gaseous sentimentalism of mainstream representations of pregnancy. Although not narrativized in the strict sense of the term, *Tulsa* is structured in such a way that various of his (named) subjects take on the role of leading characters; notably David Roper and Billy Mann (under one of whose portraits Clark curtly appended the legend "dead"). As with Goldin's work, however, the manifest insiderness of Clark's position begs the question of the nature of such works' reception and the nature of the viewing relationship between observer and subject.

Following the success of *Tulsa*, came *Teenage Lust*, a book of photographs Clark introduced in the following terms:

since i became a photographer i always wanted to turn back the years. always wished i had a camera when i was a boy. fucking in the back seat. gangbangs with the pretty girl all the girls in the neighborhood hated. the fat girl next door who gave me blow jobs after school and i treated her mean and told all my pals, we kept count up to about three hundred times we fucked her in the eighth grade. i got the crabs from Babs. Albert who said "no i'm first, she's my sister." once when i fucked after bobby hood (ol' horse dick) i was fucking hair and air. a little rape. in 1972 and 1973 the kid brothers in the neighborhood took me with them in their teen lust scene. it took me back.⁹

Like the lowercase usage and lack of punctuation, the substance of the text is as much a warranty of style as of content. As one might expect from such a prefatory note, much of *Teenage Lust* depicts adolescents having sex, although, as in *Tulsa*, there are other sorts of images—portraits, collages, pictures of hanging out, and also random texts. Consistent with much of Clark's work, the emphasis is on masculinity, specifically adolescent masculine sexuality; women and girls for the most part play supporting roles. Although male arousal is visual—available to the camera—in a way female arousal is not, the relative ubiquity of hard-ons and fellatio in Clark's photographs, as well as the sheer numbers of portraits of more or less seductive youths in various postures of display, in and of itself suggests an intense identification with and investment in the male adolescent. In the case of *Tulsa*, the nature of Clark's participation is fairly obvious. There, being "inside" operates on the level of the performative. But what is the meaning of being "inside" in *Teenage Lust* ("in 1972 and 1973 the kid brothers in the neighborhood took me with them in their teenage lust scene. it took me back"), where the photographer is not a teenager and is, moreover, being *taken* somewhere? What is the "inside" position in relation to the boy hustlers of 42nd Street who both pose and expose themselves for Clark's camera? Yet if the nature of this investment seems oblique to the viewer—if it does not unambiguously announce itself as either erotic, sociological, or personal in nature—how are we to understand the dynamics of inside/outside? Like the invisible and unacknowledged camera that accompanies intrepid explorers in National Geographic specials as they comb ocean floors and climb impossible mountains, so too does Clark provide the heady illusion of "the world appearing to speak itself."¹⁰ Thus, for example, an extended sequence in *The Perfect Childhood*¹¹ recording the course of a blow job, performed on a naked adolescent boy by a fully clothed and older woman (a prostitute? a friend?), obviously, inescapably occludes both Clark and his camera. But the presence of Clark and his camera is by no means a supplemental detail; it is, in every sense, a part of the action, acknowledged or not. But does this privileged vantage point—this quite literally voyeuristic position—in fact provide the analogously privileged knowledge to which the insider is supposed to have access?

In retrospect, *Teenage Lust*, even more than *Tulsa*, seems to have established Clark's terrain; namely, the equivocal status of (male) adolescent sexuality in contemporary America. Thus, his portraits of boy hustlers in midtown Manhattan or, more recently, the book *The Perfect Childhood* or the collage installations in *Public Information* are variously concerned with the commodification of adolescent

sexuality in its current context, that is to say, situated between the terms of a moral panic that disavows sexuality altogether and an obsessive, relentless purveying of sexuality, including adolescent sexuality, by advertising and the mass media. These are themselves paralleled on the one hand by the culture's fascination with adolescent pathology (e.g., the teenage rapist or murderer) and an equal fascination with adolescent vulnerability (e.g., the adolescent as victim).

In considering the ambiguities and contradictions attendant on the insider position as exemplified in the work of Goldin and Clark, we need reckon with the fact that to the extent that such work is "about" sexual lives or sexual activities it necessarily intersects with the sexuality of the viewer. Indeed, it may well be the case that all photography that deals with sexuality, of whatever stripe, can be located within the workings of the inside, insofar as there is, in fact, no outside of sexuality, no Archimedean point from which either photographer, subject, or viewer is disinterestedly positioned. Alternatively, one could as well argue that it is inevitably the case with photography, especially photography that attempts to make visible the operations of subjectivity and sexuality, that it remains fixated on the outside, that it cannot tell what the photographer knows, it cannot reveal a truth of the subject.

Inside or out, one remains confronted with the ethical and political issues posed by Sontag and Rosler, where it is a question of the representation of the other, where the analysis depends on notions of voyeurism and objectification, tourism or imperialism. Certain alternative strategies have in fact emerged within photographic practice, albeit those are found for the most part in galleries and art spaces. One strategy might be described as a form of radical iconoclasm that Rosler herself pioneered (in her photo-text work *The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems*, pls. 37-41). There, the crucial intervention consisted in precisely *not* representing the men of the Bowery, substituting instead the textual—the verbal lexicon of drunkenness—and photographing the storefronts and doorways of the Bowery strip pointedly evacuated of their resident winos. In refusing to spectacularize the more-than-familiar image of the wino, the Bowery bum, Rosler could be said to have displaced this particular "social problem" from the register of the visual—the register of appearance—which is mindlessly consumed, to that of the politics of representation. Jeff Wall's use of illuminated Cibachrome light-box installations constitutes another explicitly political practice that takes serious cognizance of the inside/outside problematic. For all their deceptive visual realism, Wall's tableaux are entirely theatrical: calculated mise-en-scènes that use actors, locations, and directorial strategies.

But where faux realism, simulation, or iconoclasm function more or less to effectively counter or obviate the problematics of inside/outside, it is perhaps more to the point to question the validity of the binarism itself. For what is really at issue is the fundamentally unanswerable question of how reality is in fact to be known, and in this respect, the truth claims of photography—always disputed—are now for the most part rejected. In any case, the nature of the debate that turns on the capacity of photography to represent truth or reality obviously depends on the notion that truth or reality are in fact representable. While photographic representation retains its evidentiary or juridical status for purposes of individual identification, police procedure, the courtroom, and the racetrack, the truth status of photography has not fared well in the epoch of postmodernity. Thus, if pace Althusser, no less than Baudrillard, we are given to understand that reality is always mediated through



representational systems, is always in the final instance a question of representation itself, on what basis is photography found less capable of rendering, however imperfectly, the real?

The debate that turns on the adequacy of photographic representation to the demands of the real therefore has several modalities, depending on whether the discursive object is “photography”—itself an abstraction—or a particular subset—practice—within it. But the binarism of inside/outside only has meaning within the context of particular practices, not as an ontological given. If we are then to consider the possibility that a photographic practice ostensibly premised on insidership ultimately reveals the very impossibility of such a position in the realm of the visual, might it conversely be the case that a photographic practice that affirms its own implacable exteriority yields a certain truth of its own?

By way of example, consider the now-legendary photographs taken in 1955–56 and assembled in Robert Frank’s *The Americans*, first published in 1958. At least since Romanticism, there has existed a tradition of considering the artist, virtually by definition, to be an outsider within his culture (I use the masculine pronoun intentionally). Estrangement, alienation, if not outright rebellion are in this tradition considered to be *sine qua non* by which the artist is empowered to apprehend his own culture or even to imagine a different one. Thus, whether the stakes are the representation of one’s own culture (the painter of modern life), the critical reflection on reality, or the imagining of utopian alternatives, the outsider status of the artist is taken as the warranty for both the integrity and the acuity of artistic vision. Exteriority is accordingly the necessary condition of comprehension as well as critical reflection. In the case of Frank, an outsider by birth and language (Swiss émigré) as well as by temperament, it was precisely his vantage point as outsider that produced what many consider to be one of the definitive, evocative, and, indeed, authentic portraits of fifties America. For me, Frank’s America is as much a fiction as the America purveyed by *Life* magazine, Frank’s brooding vision being predicated

FIGURE 27

Robert Frank

Canal Street, New Orleans, 1955

Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; The Target Collection of American Photography, museum purchase with funds provided by Target Stores (Cat. No. 30)

on different referents and codes: film noir and the various romantic identifications of white male hipster culture. Still, to say that *The Americans* is not *the* truth of America in the 1950s is not to say that it doesn't possess a truth; certainly there is truth in its evocation of the lonely crowd (fig. 27), the anomie and nightmare that lay behind the official representations of America purveyed by the media or by corporate advertising.

Similarly, and most recently, Chantal Akerman's *D'Est* (From the East, pls. 47–52) is a filmic journey that makes of outsidership its very structuring principle. Traveling through Eastern Europe in 1991, without linguistic access or, for that matter, any specialized knowledge, Akerman made a film constructed as a series of long looks—pans—at people (mostly women) in their interior spaces; of peasants in the fields; of people in a railroad waiting room; but mostly, seemingly endless tracking shots of people on the street, in queues, in the midst of a snowy Moscow winter. The camera observes, mutely; there is no text, no narration, no explanation, no commentary. There is no sound other than ambient sound, merely this seemingly nonselective and passive outsider's look, scanning landscapes, faces, bodies, postures, gestures. Like Ed Ruscha's laconic photo books, *D'Est* seems to occupy the degree zero of exteriority, but there is produced, nonetheless, a kind of knowledge, a certain kind of truth. It is a truth that is perhaps best characterized as a truth of appearance, which with a sort of principled modesty and discretion refuses "interpretation" altogether. Akerman's notes, written before and during the making of the film, evidence the same combination of obliqueness and transparency as does the film itself:

The film would begin in the flowering of summer, in East Germany, then in Poland. Just the look of someone who passes by, someone who does not have total access to this reality.

Little by little, as one presses forward into the country, the summer fades to give way to autumn. An autumn muffled and white, overcast by fog.

In the countryside, men and women nearly lying on the black earth of Ukraine, merging with it, picking the beets.

Not far from them, the road rutted by the continuous passage of ramshackle trucks from which escape black fumes.

It is winter and in Moscow, where the film constricts its focus. It will hopefully allow one to perceive something of this directionless world with its postwar atmosphere, where each day gotten through resembles a victory.

This may seem terrible and insubstantial, but in the middle of all this, I will show faces, which when they are isolated from the mass, express something yet untouched and often the opposite of this uniformity which sometimes strikes us in the movement of crowds, the opposite of our own uniformity.

Without being too sentimental, I would say that these are unspoiled faces which offer themselves; they present themselves as they are, and sometimes erase the sentiment of loss, the world at the edge of the abyss which sometimes seizes us when we cross the East, as I have just done.¹²

This cinematic looking cannot logically be distinguished from the more negative concept of cinematic tourism, and yet, for all that, one does not particularly have the sensation of intrusion and expropriation, the imperialism of representation. What

Akerman's film suggests, as do the photographs of Robert Frank, the soul-chilling suburban-scapes of Dan Graham, the neutral inventories of Ed Ruscha, is a way to think about a truth of appearance that without prodding reveals itself to the camera and totally escapes the binary of inside/outside. This runs counter to a cultural bias that maintains a truth *behind* appearance, a truth always veiled that reflects the philosophical divide between seeming and being. But as Walter Benjamin observed, "it is a different nature that speaks to the camera than speaks to the eye."¹³ It may well be that the nature that speaks to our eyes can be plotted neither on the side of inside nor outside but in some liminal and as yet unplotted space between perception and cognition, projection and identification.

Notes

1. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), pp. 41–42.
2. Martha Rosler, "In, Around and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)," in *Rosler 3 Works* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design Press, 1981), p. 78.
3. Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 12.
4. Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven, Conn.: Leete's Island Books, 1980), p. 206.
5. Sontag, *On Photography*, pp. 23, 24.
6. It is, however, important to signal that the original format of *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*—the form in which it will be seen at SFMOMA—is a slide/audio work involving more than seven hundred images. The specific nature of this format, the sound track that organizes, accompanies, and counterpoints the images, the darkness in which the work is viewed by the spectator, the speed with which the images flash by, its temporal, evanescent structure, and lastly, its intentionally "spectacularizing" form, all decisively distinguish it from the book version of the same project. Nevertheless, in exploring the modalities of inside/outside, and given my emphasis on the medium of still photography, I have based my discussion of Goldin on the book versions of her projects.
7. Nan Goldin, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (New York: Aperture, 1986), p. 6.
8. Larry Clark, *Tulsa* (New York: Lustrum Press, 1971), n.p.
9. Larry Clark, *Teenage Lust* (New York: Larry Clark, 1983), n.p.
10. The expression is used by the film theorist Jean-Louis Baudry to describe the illusionism of the cinematic apparatus (and by implication, all camera-generated imagery) by which the presumed image of reality appears to have neither source nor mediation. See Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," in *Apparatus*, ed. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (New York: Tanam Press, 1980).
11. Larry Clark, *The Perfect Childhood* (Zurich: Scalp, 1993).
12. My translation of unpublished film notes by Chantal Akerman.

Le film commencerait dans l'éblouissement de l'été, en Allemagne de l'Est, puis en Pologne. Juste le regard de quelqu'un qui passe, quelqu'un qui n'a pas totalement accès à cette réalité.

Peu à peu, alors qu'on pénètre plus avant dans le pays, l'été s'éteint pour faire place à l'automne. Un automne sourd et blanc, recouvert par une masse de brouillard.

Dans la campagne, des hommes et des femmes presque couchés sur la terre noire d'Ukraine, se confondant avec elle, ramassent des bettraves.

Non loin d'eux, la route défoncée par le passage continu des camions déginglés dont s'échappe une fumée noire.

Et c'est l'hiver en Moscou où le film se resserrera. Laissera sans doute percevoir quelque chose de ce monde déboussolé avec cette impression d'après-guerre où chaque jour passé semble être une victoire.

Cela peut sembler terrible et sans poids, mais au milieu de tout cela, je monterai des visages, qui dès qu'ils sont isolés de la masse, expriment quelque chose d'encre intouché et souvent le contraire de cette uniformité qui parfois nous frappe dans le mouvement des foules, le contraire de notre uniformité à nous aussi.

Sans faire trop de sentiment, je dirais que ce sont des visages pas gâchés et qui s'offrent, se donnent comme ils sont, et effacent par moment le sentiment de perte, de monde au bord du gouffre qui parfois vous étreint lorsque vous traversez "l'Est" comme je viens de le faire.
13. Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," p. 213.