

UBIQUITOUS

BUT SUSPECT,

by BEN CARLSON



AND IMPOLITE

GNARLY



Concrete Waves	3
Skateboarding and Susan Sontag, <i>On Photography</i>	7
People Who Think They Look Like Other People	13
I never want a job at all, ever	19
Even Dwarfs Started Small	23
Doubles	27
Nudists	35
Her Camera Was the Window to a Tortured Soul	39
American Rites, Manners and Customs	41

Concrete Waves



The kind of movements you find in sports and habits are changing. We got by for a long time with an energetic conception of motion, where there's a point of contact, or we are the source of movement. Running, putting the shot, and so on: effort, resistance, with a starting point, a lever. But nowadays we see movement defined less and less in relation to a point of leverage. All the new sports—surfing, windsurfing, hang-gliding—take the form of entering in to an existing wave. There's no longer an origin as starting point, but a sort of putting-into-orbit. The key thing is how to get taken up in the motion of a big wave, a column or rising air, to "get into something" instead of being the origin of an effort.

—Gilles Deleuze¹

Skaters have a way of seeing the city as a series of concrete waves. A curb, a bench, or a fountain becomes a ride, a path through space. Skater vision, like photographic vision, has an eye toward appropriating the world. This is a wholly different rhythm than the impact and speed of vision we associate with painting—Frank Stella's admiration of Ted Williams, for example.

Diane Arbus skateboards. Her ubiquitous images are grinding through the world. Or a few of them—not the commercial work. Iconic images, immediately readable. There is an argument to be made that, in so single-mindedly chasing peculiarity, Diane Arbus overlooked the subtle and the non-obvious. For example, two of photographs most oft repeated clichés: burlesque and the circus. Banal signs of the seedy and the unseen. But, maybe it is the unwavering commitment to such over-determined subject matter that has allowed her images to resonate so widely and to land in so many places. Looking, again, at a Diane Arbus photograph, it becomes less important what she shows us, and more important where we take it.

¹ "Mediators," in *Negotiations* (Columbia University Press, 1997)





Skateboarding
and Susan Sontag,
On Photography





A beautiful photograph is a photograph of something beautiful.

To photograph is to confer importance.

The act of photographing is more than passive observing. Like sexual voyeurism, it is a way of at least tacitly, often explicitly, encouraging whatever is going on to keep happening.

fuck *Vogue*, fuck fashion, fuck what's pretty.

There is something on people's faces when they don't know they are being observed that never appears when they do.

Arbus's work does not invite viewers to identify with the pariahs and miserable-looking people she photographed.

Grotesque or unflattering clothing in dismal or barren surroundings.

A world in which everybody is an alien, hopelessly isolated, immobilized in mechanical, crippled identities and relationships.

Encouraged to be awkward—that is, to pose.





People Who Think They Look Like Other People



Nobody ever discovered ugliness through photographs. But many, through photographs, have discovered beauty.

—Diane Arbus

Andy Warhol liked to drink Coca-Cola because he could watch TV and see the President or Liz Taylor also drinking coke. Everyone's coke was the same. There was something stupidly democratic about it. However, when a young skater wears the same shoes or drinks the same energy drink as his favorite sponsored pro, there is an essential asymmetry in that he is paying to copy a behavior the pro is paid to exhibit. The sponsorship is premised on the assumption that most skaters are posers.

But these identifications can also work from the ground up. Before the introduction of the VCR, vert ramps (quarter pipes, half pipes, etc) dominated skateboarding while street skaters were an underground minority. Through the distribution of low-budget videos, street skating was popularized until, by the 90s, it had become the norm. Dispersing seductively packaged self-portraits, street skaters remade the sport in their own image.





I never want a job at all, ever

Basically



I never want a job at all, ever. Being a skateboarder— it makes me feel different from everybody else out there. That shit almost fucked me up when I was little. I didn't have anyone who really supported my skating—as far as my parents, because they didn't really understand it. Dads are dicks. To be honest, I want to smoke, skate and drink everyday, and in that order. Maybe it isn't always gonna happen, but I like to at least wake and bake. Pleasure lies in evil. Basically, I like to think of it like I'm editing together a video of all the good times, but without a camera.

I had a dream, the other night, that John F. Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe adopted me as their son. We lived in California and I could skate in the house because the floors were concrete. It was pretty old, like from 1980-or something, but modern, I guess. It was cool having Marilyn Monroe for a mom because she is a babe and all my friends wanted to do it with her, but that wasn't weird because she's not my type.

To me, good skating is all about visual presentation and visual appeal— not just who can do the hardest trick. I was totally stoked on this kid we had in from out of town the other day. He does a kickflip indy to fakie and he grabs the wrong side of the board. He just throws it under himself and then, a few walls later, he does a kickflip ollie blunt, then a switch rock and roll, then a switch backside lipslide revert. It was all so flawless, but the exact opposite of flawless, because it was so sketchy. That shit was tight.

These are a few of my FAVORITE words:

Ass Knife

when you fuck up a trick and the board comes up and sticks you in the butt

Dude looked like he was enjoying that ass knife.

Chode

a crusty piece of shit on your ass, also an insult

Why you gotta be such a chode all the time?

Gnarly

bad, horrible or sketchy

Man, that's some gnarly paint on that house.

Sick

awesome, skillful or sweet

Dude, that noselide was sick.

Suspect

picture where a skater looks like he didn't actually land the trick

Dude, that pic looks suspect.

Tangent

when you start ranting about something for a while

Man, we were off on a tangent about BBQ chips.

Tight

awesome, cool, sick

Man, that pussy was tight.

Trippy

something crazy that messes with your head

That necklace is totally trippy.

Yoinker

someone who steals other people's stuff and has no original ideas

Don't be a yoinker.



Even Dwarfs Started Small



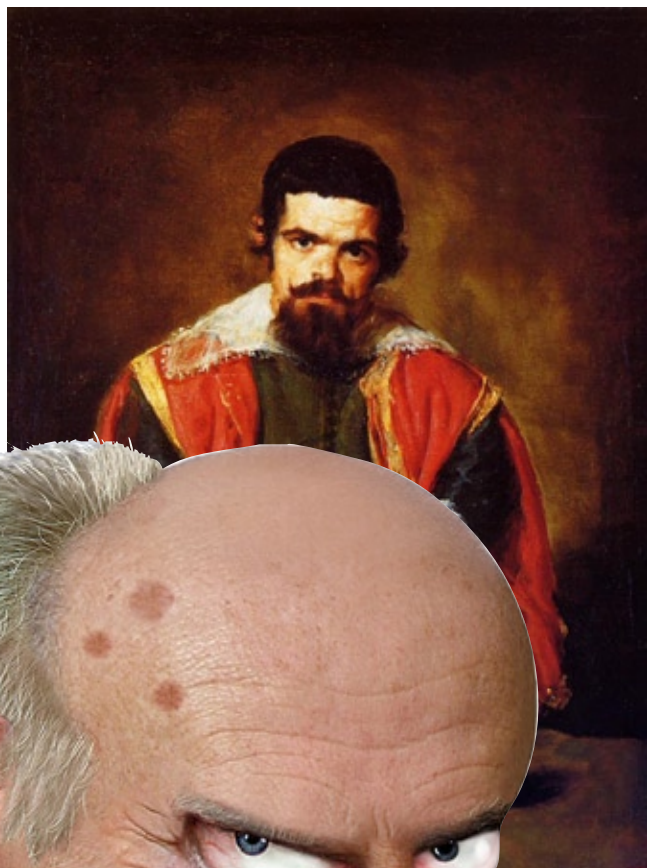
It's not polite to stare. Especially if you are looking through a camera. Diane Arbus said, "I always thought of photography as a naughty thing to do—that was one of my favorite things about it, and when I first did it I felt very perverse." Perverts like to stare. For some people, desirability is enhanced by distance. There is also the perversity of taking pleasure in rudeness. And, when we look at a Diane Arbus photograph, we stare with her at a Jewish giant at home with his parents in the Bronx, a Masked woman in a wheelchair, a Transvestite with torn stockings, or a Puerto Rican woman with a beauty mark.

If caught staring, one should smile before breaking eye contact. Looking at Arbus's photographs, however, we have an opportunity to stare without the fear of being caught, and very few of the pictures leave a smile on our face. Her subjects present themselves to the camera, pose and invite our gaze, but do we see what they want us to see? When Arbus asks us to share her privileged view, her privileged position behind the camera, are we embarrassed by the offer?

Showing a Hermaphrodite and a dog in a carnival trailer, an intellectually disabled woman in a Halloween mask or a Topless dancer in her dressing room, Arbus may not be humiliating her subjects but rather, as Wayne Koestenbaum suggests,¹ humiliating us, the viewers of her photographs. And, if taking these pictures seemed a naughty but thrilling thing to do, it may be that, as Charles Baudelaire wrote, "What is exhilarating in bad taste is the aristocratic pleasure of giving offense."²

¹ Koestenbaum, Wayne. "Diane Arbus and Humiliation." *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 8 (November 2007): 345–347.

² Quoted in *The Anthology of Black Humor*, edited by Andre Breton, City Lights Books (1997).





All grown up.

We're not little girls anymore. But, that doesn't mean we've stopped drinking our milk. We know about 15% of your height is added during your teen years and the calcium in milk can help. Who knows, you might be the next big thing.

got milk?

MARY-KATE & ASHLEY ©2004 AMERICA'S DAIRY FARMERS® AND MILK PROCESSORS

Doubles



On daytime television, there is a talk show segment called Mother/Daughter, Sisters, or Twins. The women pose on stage in matching outfits. A studio audience tries to guess their relationship, but age-inappropriate attire often leads to surprising results.

On another trash television program, anorexic twins are possessed by the desire to maintain the exact same body-weight. The twins refuse to leave each other's side, mimicking every gesture, even counting the steps they take to ensure one doesn't burn more calories than the other. Meals are weighed on a scale, peas counted, liquids measured. Being filmed by a television crew doesn't help their shared neurosis.

Films and television generally teach us that twins are evil or at least amoral. In both police procedurals and science fiction, if a twin shows up it is often with the intention of becoming a replacement. But the malice of twins is not only directed toward each other. Unconsciously, we consider the possibility of identical individuals to be against nature. To the most primitive part of our mind, twins are evidence of the supernatural forces it has always suspected to be at work in the world.

The uneasy feelings we associate with twins, doubles and doppelgangers, however, are only partially due to the magical thinking they inspire in us. For Freud the uncanny effect twins have on us is due to the return of the repressed primary narcissism of early childhood. For the psychoanalyst, twins are a reminder of the split between the disciplinary super-ego and the asocial, desirous ego. Here, the double fascination with twins, their creepiness and their role in sexual fantasy (from the clichés of gay erotica to Hugh Hefner's private life), becomes intertwined.





Nudists



You think you're going to feel a little silly walking around with nothing on but your camera. But that part is really sort of fun, it just takes a minute, you learn how to do it, and then you're a nudist. You may think you're not but you are.

—Diane Arbus

As a participant-observer among nudists, there are, according to Diane Arbus, only two rules to follow if you don't want to be booted out. No staring and no erections. To critics of a certain feminist persuasion, Arbus's camera may be guilty of both. But, if Arbus has a way of violating her subjects, the expressions on their faces—the smile of a Nudist lady with Swan Sunglasses, for example—would seem to suggest that they either don't know or don't care that they are being screwed.

The titles are quick to clarify that these are not nudes but only photographs of nudists. And these nudists seem hell bent on proving that the human body isn't as beautiful as certain Modernist photographers would lead us to believe. In Arbus's vision, the body is almost always grotesque. Here, there is no naturalism, only nakedness as social deviance. After all, nudists don't sequester themselves in the woods out of shyness. Like a reality star or a celeb, Arbus's nudists are eager to be seen, even at the expense of their own dignity. In this sense, her photographs, while seemingly dated, have an odd relevance to the current moment.





Her Camera Was the Window to a Tortured Soul¹



Something is ironic in the world and it has to do with the fact that what you intend never comes out like you intend it.

—Diane Arbus

¹The tagline to Patricia Bosworth's biography of Diane Arbus

HOW TO EMO HAIRCUT

Scene vs. Pose: The rules on emo hair are pretty clear nowadays. Everyone's heard of emo hair and all urban hairdressers know how to achieve the look. If you just like the hair, wear bright colours—do what you like. If you're actually an emo, you may feel other people are stealing your scene, so consider being less obvious—go for naturalistic colours, not bright ones, to show you don't need to overplay the emo card—you live it, not just dress it.

The emo fringe: An emo fringe should cover half your face, even if you sometimes hold it back with plastic hair clips. Fringes are important in an emo hair cut—they shield you from the world, masking your identity.

Keep it asymmetric: What you're looking for is a jagged style with different layers and cuts. An emo hairstyle has real shape and unusual proportions. You can get your hair (long or short) to be asymmetric through a styled cut or through spiking it with product. Emo hair should be expressive and change frequently—emotion expressed in hair. It's proper art, when you think about it.

Layering and texture: You want lots of layers in your hair to make it freeform, with plenty of movement. You want to look like a lost young child that has cut their own hair with scissors but still looks attractive, even if they feel a little bit ugly.

Emo hair should be straight: There are no rules, but even so, if you've got curly hair, use straighteners. Or lots of mousse and gel.

Emo hair should be individual: Yes, of course you can copy someone else's haircut. Just google emo hairstyle and take the pic to a hairdresser and say "I want this". But with future haircuts, think about getting creative, and maybe experimenting with minimal applications of bright dye to express yourself. Has an emo thought about Andy Warhol-style grey or silver hair? Or cosplaying their hair? Maybe not yet . . . not until some brave person gives it a go and posts the result on Myspace.

What to say to the hairdresser #1: "I want a really choppy asymmetric look, about shoulder-length—or maybe to my chin if you think it would suit me—with an accentuated heavy fringe and plenty of texture and razor shearing. And can you dye the tips?"

What to say to the hairdresser #2: "I want an emo haircut." (Then show them the photo you found on google.)



American Rites, Manners and Customs

I used to have this notion when I was a kid that the minute you said anything, it was no longer true.
—Diane Arbus

Decisive or not, the moment a photograph captures is always already one that has passed. But, without the context of what was happening before the shutter opened or what happened after it closed, that moment can become strangely opaque. Likewise, the moment a subculture is documented or recognized by the mainstream usually marks its passing. The style becomes identifiable, thus formulaic and easily copied. With reference materials in hand, any kid can pose as or pass for a skater, a punk, a goth, a casual, a skinhead, a mod, a rocker, or a freak. But, divorced from context, what does it even mean to pass? Swedish rockabilly, a goth in Ohio, working class-Brits playing sunny California folk-rock— the displaced cultural convention becomes strangely opaque.

Freakishness and boringness. A typology of freaks. The typical freak. How boring. A circus in Germany photographed by August Sander in the early 20th Century. A circus in New Jersey photographed by Diane Arbus circa 1960. If the vérité composition of Arbus's shots suggests her seduction by the freakish, can we read in Sander's carefully posed presentations an abstract boredom regarding the social mask? And, if Diane Arbus has a tendency towards pointing out the obvious, can we find in August Sander's straightforward approach the hallucinatory quality of the medium itself.



Concrete Waves

Skateboarding and Susan Sontag,
On Photography

People Who Think They Look Like
Other People

I never want a job at all, ever

Even Dwarfs Started Small

Doubles

Nudists

Her Camera Was the Window to a
Tortured Soul

American Rites, Manners and Customs



UBIQUITOUS

BUT SUSPECT,



by BEN CARLSON

AND IMPOLITE

GNARLY