August Sander, *A National Socialist Youth*, 1936

THE UNCANNY PORTRAIT: SANDER, ARBUS, SAMARAS

MAX KOZLOFF

In its reception of the human face, photography increases the mystery that always results from its freezing of movement and the receding of the present of its actual images from our present. The snap of a shutter distances a real landscape or parade: these things are still "there" for us, yet cut out from everything they were once in. "Our face," though,

> is where we are. We kiss, eat, breathe and speak through it. It's where we look, listen and smell. It is where we think of ourselves as being finally and most conclusively on show. It's the part we hide when we are ashamed and the bit we think we lose when we are in disgrace (Jonathan Miller, "On The Face Of It," *London Sunday Times*, May 24, 1966).

To look at people's faces in still photography is, then, to look at analogues of our own — with a curiosity that must be lessened when switched to any other subject.

Who can deny that on first meeting another, we often busy ourselves in making from his or her face an imaginative portrait, however it may be contradicted by later knowing? But one's features are ostensibly readable, not as a clock, but as a mask, whether consciously imposed or not. This enigma, with its high, personalized stakes, is impacted by what I have just said about the conditioning of photography. All camera portraits have guaranteed interest on such a level. Yet most of them — and certainly all commercial ones — have been taken in sympathy with the individual's self-projection of status. That is, they are images of pride, enhanced by clothing, attitude, expression, and lighting, all dutifully accentuated by the photographer. Examples can be found in the work of Yousuf Karsh, Cecil Beaton, Arnold Newman, and Berenice Abbott. Doubtless, the last three have exhibited many intriguing aspects of people's style, character, and even thought within a mode designed more to compliment than to reveal. Avedon and Penn, coming out of this tradition, have soured it a little by a certain sarcastic urge. Their art could not help but satisfy by its gentle deflation of celebrities. Still, they would tell us what we already know: that the famous are imperfect.

How much more gripping is the portrait that remains indifferent to, or works against the sitter's pride, striving in this dissonant way to reach his humanity and to touch ours. And how much more incisive when a photographer treats the mask as something objective, a thing by itself, not a pose whose world view the spectator is asked to share subjectively, at least for the moment. For then there is heightened that distancing that makes no pretence at respect nor at clearing up the mystery, yet comes closer to both because more conscious of the hauntedness of photography itself.

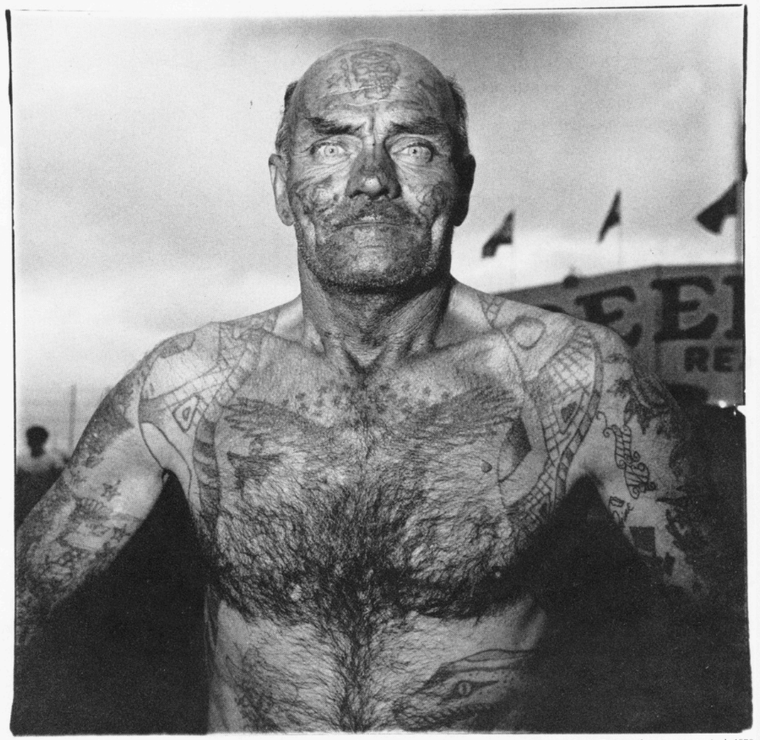
Three photographic campaigns perform this mission with an almost dreadful yet variable accuracy. They are the work of August Sander, Diane Arbus, and Lucas Samaras. They probe in common the psychology that exists behind the playing of roles, and that would, if possible, convert role into true identity. With their every shot, the subject, for our eyes, is on the verge of losing face, or has lost it. "The term *face*," writes the social psychologist Erving Goffman,

> may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes. . . . A person tends to experience an immediate emotional response to the face which a contact with others allows him: he cathects his face; his "feelings" become attached to it (Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*, New York, 1967, pp. 5-6).

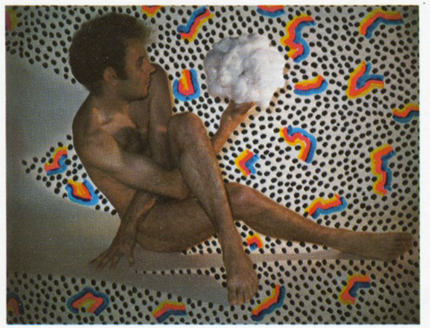
What is involving in this photography may perhaps be a process of exposure, for we run the danger of feeling superior to its subjects who look, or are indeed, compromised. A more specific response, however, may reflect one of two further possibilities. In Sander's work, the individual tends to balloon too much for our taste with a self- or socially awarded status. We wish to lower it. In Arbus' pictures, those who pose frequently possess insufficient face and we seek to restore it to them, though with some uneasiness.

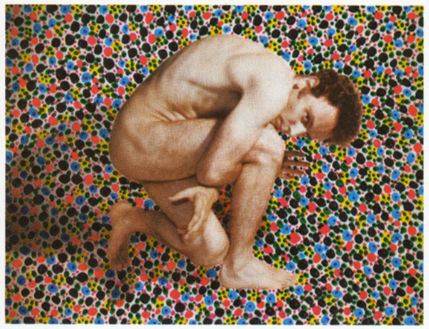
In either instance, active exchange between viewer and subject is prevented even as it is graphically solicited by the simple photo. If we had been dealing with casual snapshots, our reactions would have been more elementary, for then it would have been a question of seeing matters sent "accidentally" askew: those manifold episodes filling up all slack between isolated points of social decorum or composure. On the contrary, these three artists give us people nothing if not highly conscious they are being photographed. And this consciousness feeds content directly into our understanding that something has gone wrong. We look at these prints fully aware of a singular disparity between our consciousness and the sitters'.

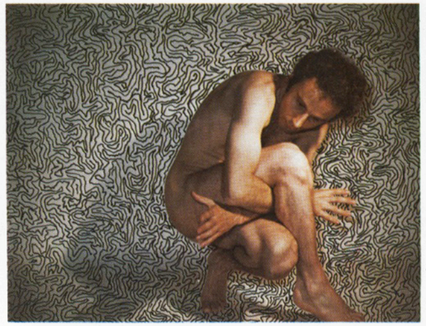
Obviously, that would apply throughout, to anyone who allows his image to be exposed on film. The individual hopes the photographer will collaborate in presenting a certain fantasy of himself, but wonders realistically whether the physical facts of his appearance, no matter how doctored, actu-



Diane Arbus, *Tattooed man at a carnival*, 1970







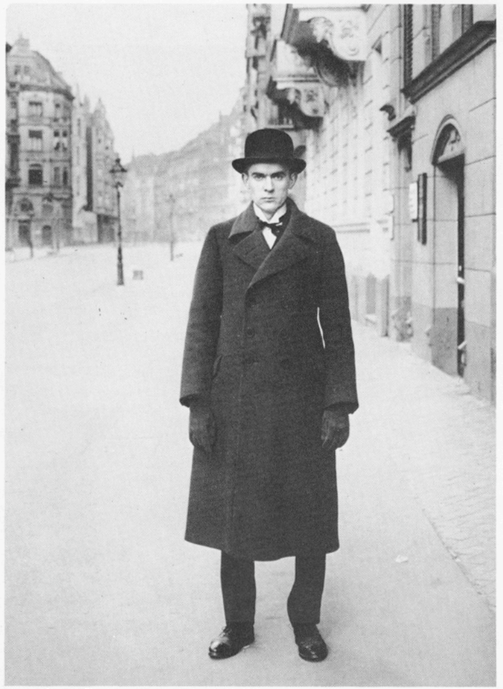
Lucas Samaras, *Samaras Album*, 1971.

ally give shape to that fantasy. Sander's Germans of the interregnum are exceptions, which makes their confidence all the more a victim of his detachment. Arbus' freaks and transvestites, on the other hand, have a built-in vulnerability, and have little more to expect from their portraits than a record that they exist — a record she will pitilessly intensify with every means at her disposal. By a curious inversion, she can speak of them as aristocrats, as already having "passed their test in life." But the situation is even more extreme with Samaras, since he is photographing *himself* in a hundred different capering guises, overt fantasies that are not to be taken as substantive masks, while yet raising questions as to why he should want to make such outlandish multiplications of himself at all. It remains for us to see how truly isolated is all this acting out, how wounded are all these subjects because of the absence, not of "self delineated in terms of approved social attributes," but of those who would confirm it. Here again, that special estranging quality of the photograph becomes magnified. The faces that appear to us are left with their "cathected" features separated from their audience as if by a stage.

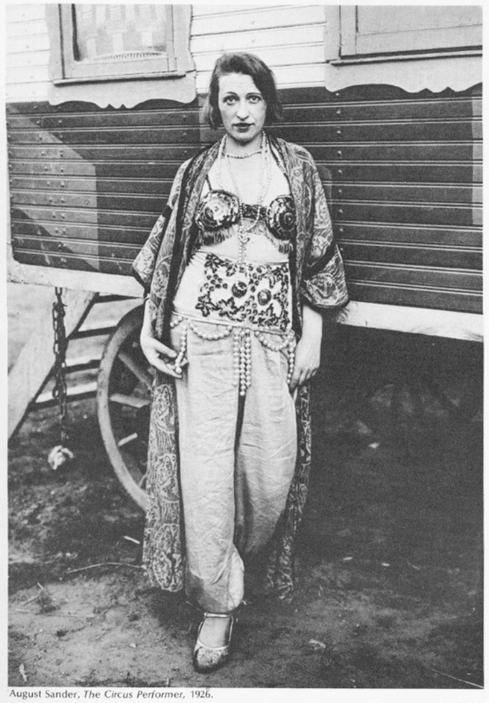
Actors performing, of course, experience real contact with people, even though everyone pretends to ignore it until curtain. In these photographs, however, there is a species of lapsed theater and of mute performance, which elicits a muffled threatening response in those viewers not actually present to the cast. In the act of being photographed, one cannot attempt to minimize one's psychological deficits by behaving and interacting with others. Any last-minute shift or mien merely continues to play poker with the lens. One confronts, after all, only a mechanical eye through which is recorded the visual information one circumstantially presents at a given instant, but far less of the totality and mobility of one's personality.

The particular slant of this photography maximizes what amounts to an ongoing betrayal — emphasizing its offerings as all that can be known. Samaras reacts in questioning himself: "Why are you making art? So that I can forget my separateness from everything else. What are you running away from? From people's evaluations" (*Samaras Album*, p. 6). Here, then, is a subject of photography who can take unusual means toward protection because he is his own photographer, which possibly accounts for the rabid theatricality of his work. Among other things, his autopolaroids are, for him, "a stylized pretension of emotion — acting." Yet it is remarkable how acting, of a kind, with many undiscoverable pretensions, permeates the photos of Arbus and Sander as well. The aggressive mode of address, the bizarre clothing, the exaggerated makeup, the calculated pose: all these expose a form of theatrical consciousness upon which their cameras close in. Arbus makes it momentous; Sander gives it deadpan. But there, at any rate, it is, hanging out yet weirdly aborted.

August Sander, *The Laborer*, 1929.



August Sander, *The Painter, Anton Raderscheid*, 1927.



August Sander, *The Circus Performer*, 1926.

Thomas Mann's son, Golo, when introducing Sander's typical personage in *Menschen Ohne Maske*, (a collection of Sander's photos published by Verlag C. J. Bucher, Lucerne, 1971), says that the subject becomes more than himself when solemnly confronting the camera. If, then, we are asked to be interested in the lesser individual as interpreted by the larger one, this usually implies a caricatural device. The classic theory of caricature entailed the revealing of

> the true man behind the mask of pretense and to show up his "essential" littleness and ugliness. The serious artist, according to academic tenets, creates beauty by liberating the perfect form that Nature sought to express in resistant matter. The caricaturist seeks for the perfect deformity, he shows how the soul of the man would express itself in his body if only matter were sufficiently pliable to nature's intentions (Ernst Kris and E. H. Gombrich, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art*, New York, 1952, p.191).

How much more subtle a phenomenon must be this mode of caricature (derived from the Italian verb *caricare*, to overload or overcharge) than in painting or sculpture. The image of the human face is not nearly as malleable on film as it is when materialized by the brush, pen, or modeling tool. And the photographer does not ordinarily desire the licence to disturb physiognomy for the purpose of making its more characteristically aberrant features or expressions lord over its nondescript ones.

A wonder of Sander's photography consists in his perhaps unconscious ability to evoke caricature without anyone so much as grimacing, cracking a smile, or rolling an eye. Somewhere, deep in his work, there is a comic affinity with Keaton, an imperturbable, chaste ridiculousness, which might almost have disarmed us were we not so aware that the society of which people were such vivid fixtures came to a bad end. Sander teaches us, without the need for overt editorializing, that George Grosz did not lie in his picture of the Weimar Republic. As for Diane Arbus, her world, though much closer to ours in time than Sander's, is even more exotic. For the stylizing which often possesses her sitters identifies them through and through as pariahs, functioning outcasts whose fetishes impel them to exhibitionistic behavior. Gravitating toward people who have no economic status, she shows them as peacocks of subcultures or minority groups, brandishing their emblems and signaling their kind, no less when naked than clothed. Arbus suggests that American society is not to be analyzed in such outdated terms as class structure, but as a field populated by discards whose protective coloring, whether voluntary or not, is grotesque in her eyes. With Samaras, finally, all the narcissism, sexual neurosis, and "warm embarrassment" that distinguishes the American zoo for Arbus, is charaded by the shameless mugging of his face and the contortions of his own body. His cockeyed posturings recall such 18th-century students of facial tics and emotional states as Lavater, Franz-Xavier Messerschmidt, and Fuseli. He even invokes some of their thrill at the human being *in extremis*. These programmed autopolaroids belong to a species of gag photos so hyped up as to be infused with a Dionysiac frenzy.

If the privilege of rearranging human anatomy is not granted these photographers as flagrantly as in drawing, they yet confront us with real people regardless of the filter through which pathos is felt. The larger individual constantly harks back to the lesser one. Visual art may bring this about by appealing to our memory or conjecture. Photography, though, encourages direct, simultaneous comparison of two aspects of a person captured on film.

August Sander, *The Attorney and Representative of the Democratic Party*, 1928.

The vital ingredient added to this equation is a social schematism. Their representation of definite types is no more haphazard than the postures of these subjects is casual. It does not surprise that artists concerned with the self-dramatizations of human beings, injecting them with a caricatural element, should view the resulting spectacle as one of fixed, interpersonal relationships. That the parts these people play seem very finite and static owes as much to a framework deliberately imposed by the photographers as to the stillness of their medium. Most every subject comes across as a distinct somebody: a sibling or a parent, lover or spouse, an official, a patriot, an entertainer, say, or a professional or retired person. They are often seen in their work environments and/or at home. Conversely, they can be shown as without evident family, lovers, work, or home. They incarnate the specific kinds of wisdom, prejudices, limitations, and skills of their background — and, for practical purposes, no others. Each sitter is encapsulated by a blatant social mood or destiny, marked by the niche that is given him for life. Sander's farm kids appear to have a future almost identical with their parents'. And even Arbus' children, wailing, crazed, or in some fashion looking like stunted adults, seem to have an utterly foreclosed maturity.

The comic geniuses of our tradition flourish on the hilarities of stereotypes which encourage much greater harshness of treatment than a naturalistic psychology that must explain unique cause and effect in human behavior. These photographs, with their cruel over-determinisms, have as frequent a mechanistic outlook as comedy's, but do not partake of the comic viewpoint because they don't consider social stereotypes of character and circumstance in any active, surprising, and happy collision. On the contrary, suffused throughout these prints is the method of the anthropologist, the stranger who documents traits, habits, and above all, tribal markings as they are stratified in what is, for him, an alien society. Like the anthropologist, these portraitists want to fill in and classify the gaps of their picture. They would offer as comprehensive a structural description of a culture as possible.

That it is their own culture, or their own psyche understood as culture, becomes the main issue and causes a certain shiver. Their cultural closeness to their themes would make their psychological remoteness look inappropriate were it not that remoteness is such an evident stance in their esthetic. Something like this must explain the peculiar, almost negative identification we have with their sitters. To be caught unaware by some eavesdropping or voyeuristic journalist with a camera is one thing. No one can guard against it. But it is much more serious to have one's privacy invaded when attentive to exposure. In these photos, the futility of human pretense becomes, by transference, our own. Yet, who amongst us would feel this way if the subjects were of North Borneo or Tanzania? Perhaps despite themselves, Sander, Arbus, and Samaras startle us politically because they photograph people of our own heritage or who look very familiar in a mundane way, as if they belonged to such ritualized societies. The "opacity" of a third-world tribe yields to the greater transparency with which we are accustomed to view ours. If we are relentlessly trained to seek out the individual within the type, these photographers uphold types to enable a clearer sighting of the individual. The variable tensions maintained by this dialectic in their work crystallize into an artistic principle. It rapidly distinguishes itself from those potluck poets of human foibles or miseries who have largely monopolized contemporary photography.

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How often is the reader struck by head-on stares in *Menschen Ohne Maske*, the many frontal poses, and finally, the surfeit of closed mouths with their thin, clamped, and pinched lips! It is as if practically everyone in Germany for 25 years had forgotten how to smile or knew only how to imitate pleasure but weakly. Could there have been something about Sander and the professional atmosphere he created that inhibited their spontaneity, or was there, as we suspect, a long-lived starch in the race? Yet on those few occasions when someone wanted to look agreeable or just felt nice, the photographer's magic dissipates. Typically frumpish, they are more natural, then, in their bodily stiffness, and they have about them a heavy and angular formality, a reluctance to use any muscle that does not contribute to an imposing facade. The weightier virtues of looking dignified appeal to them more than the lighter charms of appearing civilized. Of course, Sander is quite conventional in this, having company in the 19th century (he was born in 1876), and the early part of this one, with thousands of photographers for whom relaxing their subjects was not part of the trade. Still, we see him even in the '30s carrying on in this old-fashioned way. A reflex for presenting themselves solemnly passes through the Germans during this long period. From Sander, however, one would never guess at the mob chaos of the Weimar era as *history* nor of the vast industrial energies mobilized under Hitler.

The absence nags, nevertheless, because we do observe a historical ambition that accumulates in his work. With this album, the largest and most recent of three, is published a changing record of German 20th-century consciousness seen through

the appearances of hundreds of its citizens rather than in larger event or situation. It is a roll call of stock figures that moves horizontally through the professions or trades, and vertically, up or down, through the progress of generations and the division of classes. Here are peasants and small town bourgeoisie, almost untouched by the world of larger affairs outside in Wilhelmine Germany. Here, too, one finds artisans, workers, cooks, postmen, bailiffs, students, Hindenburgian druggists, accountants. Then there are soldiers, doctors, judges, municipal councilors, Emil Janning professors, industrialists, actors, musicians, artists — even scruffy revolutionaries and a grand duke. In this book, though with many apparent omissions, the tally is built up, part by part, patiently, face by face, affording a rough cross section of how this highly specialized society is put together, and what kinds of mentality make it function. Using another metaphor, Alfred Doeblin wrote: "As there is a comparative anatomy, so this photographer did comparative photography."

To American eyes of the present, it's remarkable how each individual holds his place, high or low, with a mulish aplomb. Yet these slow, graceless, bald, pompous, and morose faces are by no means empty. Stamped firmly on their features is the concentrated ability to give or take orders, and the overall effect they impart is not solely one of circumstantial smugness or servility, but of an implacable, deep-grained social order. It is a Christian world, at least in its older rural roots, but not a humanist one. Sander graphs a will to stability all the more ruthless the more there swirled about it, as we know, the pent-up hungers, pressures, and manias of an epoch being torn to shreds.

In that sense, his sociology would seem to be at war with history, except that no picture of interregnum Germany would be complete without the presence in it of a persistently conservative cast of mind, one that would and did revolt only to establish a tighter hierarchy, and a more holistic, fixed set of values. Numerous propaganda photos from the '30s show the youth camps, the jolly mountaineers in *lederhosen*, the strength through joy movements, local choral societies. Sander gives us the propaganda of individuals as against that of nationalized groups, or more properly, the state. Only once do the two come seamlessly together: in the 1940 portrait of a young *Wehrmacht* soldier whose role and identity are exactly the same, and whose face, with the die-cut regularity of its features, is really the sweetest of them all.

Still, he does provide a key for interpreting the others. As with him, though often times more refreshingly distrustful and peevish, they are screwed up for inspection. Most likely the careworn peasants, whom Sander befriended from his youth, knew or desired no other way by which to be remembered. But this antagonist of the ephemeral tended to overlay their hardbitten, primitive mold upon all social levels, even the cosmopolitan. In 1954, he spoke of his program vaguely as a kind of genealogical chart where ". . . the types discovered were classified under the archetype with all

Diane Arbus, *Seated man in a bra and stockings*, 1967.

the characteristic common human qualities noted." How much this appears the reverse of the malign, yet similarly far-fetched categories by which the Nazis tried to determine anatomical standards for racial purity. One of Sander's books was banned by the party, naturally as it seems, because of its divergences from Aryan norms, and its inclusion of "enemies of the state" (e.g., a liberal politician, Paul Hindemith, etc.).

Heinrich Lützeler spoke of Sander's ability to lure from people their myth. But this myth is precisely what can be misleading about them. When considering this work early on, I could not decide which group, the older bourgeoisie he shows, with their Bismarckian jowls, and their hair cut *en brosse*, or the younger men, sensing a newer power to be garnered in the *Jugend* or SS units, was the more antipathetic. Still, it did not follow that those who were mature or middle-aged during the '20s lent themselves to such type-casting. A caped, moldy owl of a man, who for all the world appears to be an escapee from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, turns out to be an official of the Democratic party. A glowering gentleman with cutaway collar and gloves, standing in a Cologne street — by the look of him an affluent undertaker or even (memories of Hollywood), a Gestapo member — is identified as an artist. (But then, isn't it true that for Hollywood, the Nazi agent or officer is always an esthete?) Those individuals who lived in borrowed clothes, whether involuntarily and in some confusion, or as distinct masquerade, take their positions more subtly than the better established play-actors. A bemonocled Dadaist, Raoul Hausmann, does his enemies one better in the guise of gross authority. Certain women assume the appearance of young fathers or husbands. And everywhere, Sander, with his ascetic, meticulous style, never shooting above the eye level of his subjects, transcribes the gothic spectacle with nerveless clarity. His hallmark is an even, natural, limpid light.

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Diane Arbus was after a similar though less petrified truth than Sander, whose work she knew very

well. It's useful to juggle this fact with those of her background in setting up the ideas and scenarios of fashion photography, and her research for The Museum of Modern Art exhibition "From The Picture Press," its "Losers" section most specifically. Sander started in the 19th century as a miner; Arbus came from a rich New York Jewish family whose father owned a department store. As the German compiled a rogue's gallery of the pillars of society, she studied its rejects and dropouts. Always emotive where he was circumspect (compare their portraits of circus artists), she apparently could not "ennoble" her subjects without feeling she was condescending to them. They are worldly people whom she approaches, for the most part, but the goods of their world are reduced to the rock tunes on transistors, the TV in rest homes or squalid hotels, and the stale tastes of the flesh. She is the Nathaneal West of photography, equipped, when she wants, with a flashgun. Of flash itself, John Szarkowski writes that it is

> a great simplifier. Its brilliant light falls off rapidly as it leaves the camera, and imposes on the structure of the picture a tight planarity, drawing a brilliantly lighted main subject against a dark background. The character of flashlight from the camera is profoundly artificial, intrusive, and minutely descriptive (*From the Picture Press*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1972).

Arbus presents glittering tinsel and social anomie with corrosive exhilaration, and the very sweat and pores of several models are textured as if they are news. At the same time, we realize that fashion can be like news photography, in quest of the novel or sensational, a turn of fortune that separates individuals, if only for an instant, from average experience. That most people might want to emulate the aristocratic artifices of high fashion, and would want to avoid being exposed as a news event, are feelings jarringly projected by a gamut of anonymous portraits, neither newsworthy nor fashionable — in fact quite the contrary. Sander, no doubt, would have been paid for his commissioned photos; a few of Arbus' sitters give the impression they would have taken pay for being filmed. In the older artist, hierarchical themes that tie people together are work, family, and money; for the American, it is sex. Yet, with what sad, disabused glamor she proposes it, and how pitiable it is in the inspiringly mangled contexts of the art she achieved before her suicide in 1971.

> The slightest loss of composure would ruin everything. Her subjects must not seem to feel too much, lest they destroy the delicate superiority we gain from knowing more of their vulnerability than they do. Nor can they be heroic; we must admire ourselves for respecting them.

To bring off this composure, well observed here by Amy Goldin, required the most tactful brutality. A new situation was, for Arbus, "a blind date," but at the same time, having her camera, "everyone knows you've got some edge." The result of her contacts shows itself as the accidental pose or expression becoming hyper-formalized, the decisive catching of annoyance, wariness, laughter, or curiosity before it might go soft into embarrassment and spoil her aim. A *Seated man in a bra and stockings*, just ceasing to be as bemused as his counterpart, the topless dancer in San Francisco, reveals how fine are her photographic tolerances.

So, her characters cooperate in the portrait enterprise, may even look straight out at us, but, once again, are caught off guard and found out. How do they relate to the artist herself, or she to them? Is she a nominal member of the scene? Yes, in the nudist camp. Is she a confidante? Yes, with the queens and transvestites. Could she be an outside observer who is given casual sanction? Yes, in the park episodes. And can we say, finally, that she is a presence of no particular account to the subjects? Yes, once more, on the playgrounds of a madhouse. All this enriches and variegates the expressive moods of her work, induces the nuances of tension and relaxation we feel before it. (Not incidentally because we equate our own eye with that of the camera.) The same, of course, goes for the reflexes caused by her forbidding subjects in themselves. For some of them get defined by their class or social situation, others by their compulsions, and several by their abnormal physical condition. Thirty-three years after he played in Tod Browning's *Freaks*, a Russian midget poses among friends for Diane Arbus. Yet, despite the spectrum of social contacts invoked by her work, it seems, by and large, a witness of great loneliness.

For if human features as matter are not that pliable to the lens, the space that encloses or opens around them can tell of their plight — and with Arbus, that space is frightening and oppressive. Sometimes, then, the face is brought excruciatingly close up, giving us no relief from nose-rubbing confrontation. At other moments, people are seen in just the reverse, as if through the wrong end of a low power telescope, so that they look diminished and surrounded by an emptiness of barren room or smoky field. *Four people at a gallery opening*, an example, is neatly handled as a combined news and fashion item, but with what a difference! In either case, the normal canons of distance in portraiture are violated, and men and women appear to live in a world visited by some glandular disturbance. The fascination of twins or look-alikes, the plethora of masks these subjects wear, the tattooed man and the carnival sword swallower, the mongoloids and the malignant children, what are these if not some weird inflection of that disturbance?

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One of the amazements of Lucas Samaras' autopolaroids lies in the fact that he rarely if ever peered through the viewfinder when the shutter clicked. How he would look to himself, or how best to compose his visage and gesture, he never saw at the second it mattered. Amazing, because nothing in his uncropped output, shot through with complex and quirky compositions, looks like guesswork. One imagines him racing to assume his pose against the timer and triumphing always with flair

Lucas Samaras, *Samaras Album*, 1971.

and virtuosity in slightly panicky situations. This Greek-born sculptor, in his mid-thirties, long practicing a kind of horrific narcissism in his primary media, recently found in polaroid, the just mirror of his fancy.

> Artists' self-portraits always fascinated me. I wanted to see the face that was responsible for the deed. Anyway, I was always inside-out rather than outside-in . . . My body is one of the materials I work with. I use myself and therefore I don't have to go through all the extraneous kinds of relationships like finding models and pretending artistic distance (*Samaras Album*).

Yet, "It isn't only me that I'm looking at, it's a work. It is a positive withdrawal." What a feat to be a Peeping Tom upon yourself, an erotic object to your own subjectivity. No categories can be distinguished anymore in this program — neither home nor work-place, subject from object, body or spirit, latent nor manifest content, least of all, visual art from photography. I would go further and say that the chasm between the one and the many doesn't exist in this work overall. He would eke out from images of his flesh a hundred different psyches, hew from them the macrocosm of a race. These modest little home photos show a one-man republic. Still, he blinks away all esthetic distance but wants a "positive withdrawal." Despite his indelible presence, the truth is that there is no historicity in it. The charades of this imposter break open the connection between sign and signified in the portrait, inconclusive as that may already have been. To be sure, we know quite well what he means, but we are handed every weapon with which to disbelieve it. And so, a kind of megalomaniac articulateness recedes back into silence.

Samaras amplifies the bad taste needed by Arbus to carry out her most chilling effects. On the other hand, he outdoes the systematic inventory that made Sander's ambition impressive. Every garish and cheap manipulative trick, forgotten or stigmatized in the lexicon of photography, he puts to work: double or multiple exposure, fade-outs, cellophane colored filters, movie premiere illumination, halo lighting, running, many of them, up and down the f-stops. He will not hesitate to ink or paint on his prints with a Chiclet pointillism. And there is nothing the matter with an orange foot emerging from a green thigh. Meanwhile, he puts his mimic talents through their paces. One discovers Lucas the howler, the ecstatic, the coquettish, the gangster, the saintly, the infantile, the paranoid, or any other emotionalistic mask, you name it, that would besmirch his normally pleasant features. If this weren't enough, he places the camera at the nerviest angles, so that you might feel like an ant under his naked heel, or, more extreme still, a bugger or a crucifier. Under such circumstances, his figure turns into the craziest putty, and the well-known looming distortions of a stretched depth of field are nowhere more promiscuously handled than here. So radical is the leap from the flat painted surface to the tiny, foreshortened rear of head or toe, that the space involved seems almost astronomical.

Still, these mock aggressions are put into series analogically juxtaposed with each other. The *Samaras Album* is filled with "runs" in which the subject seems to be rolling languidly over from shot to shot, crawling away, quietly slipping above or beneath the frame in a progressive manner, and otherwise worming, sniffing, or pawing to get out at some invisible crease in the middle or over into the next photo. Obviously there is a cinematic mind at work here (natural in one who starred in his own movie, called *Self*). He is anxious to give his life, as revealed through his face and body, a narrative dimension. In contrast though he is just as emphatic in his will to make all this — the two feet one of which is a hand, the fusion of male and female — into a satisfying, repeated pattern. In the autointerviews of Lucas Samaras we come upon the first account of how it feels to be a model for one of those uncanny portraits which is treated objectively as a thing by itself. Certainly, too, they contain the only testimony of a portraitist who submitted to the exposure with which others are psychologically undressed. "When people make comments about my body I feel peculiar. They can't see my separation from it." Yet this is a body most characteristically seen in the act of making different kinds of love to itself. Could there be any poetic justice in the fact that a polaroid, the ideal, illicit medium for recording a naked flounce at home, comes into being with the destruction of its negative? "What is your reflection to you? A disembodied relative."

"To think," wrote Rilke in *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*

> . . .that I have never been aware before how many faces there are. There are quantities of human beings, but there are many more faces, for each person has several. There are people who wear the same face for years; naturally it wears out, it gets dirty, it splits at the folds, it stretches, like gloves one has worn on a journey. These are thrifty, simple people; they do not change their face, they never even have it cleaned. It is good enough, they say, and who can prove to them the contrary? The question of course arises, since they have several faces, what do they do with the others? They store them up. Their children will wear them. But sometimes, too, it happens that their dogs go out with them on. And why not? A face is a face. ■

Diane Arbus, *Four people at a gallery opening*, 1968.

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