THE SOCIAL SCENE

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DAMAGED

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In their pursuit of images of a troubled 1960s America, Diane Arbus and Garry Winogrand perhaps represent opposite poles of post-New York School documentary aesthetics. Both photographic projects emerged in the late 1950s, at a moment when older models of liberal social documentary had ceased to function amidst the enormous social upheavals of the post-World War II era, and as a once-thriving "picture magazine" culture found itself challenged by television and changing audiences.

While earlier photographers of social dysfunction and decay, from Jacob Riis to Walker Evans, were implicated in a modernist fascination with marginality, they nonetheless sublimated this gaze to an avowedly reformist project, presenting their damaged subjects as potential objects of governmental aid and charitable concern.[1] By the 1960s, however, the camera itself became, in Arbus's words, "a kind of license" to look, as a newly liberalized photojournalism increasingly sought out social margins, and once dissident forms of photographic modernism encountered the changing conditions of an expanding media culture. If Arbus's emotionally confrontational work pushes to extremes the inherent power ambivalence and subjective discomfort so often repressed in earlier documentary photography, performing a kind of "stress test" on the photographic encounter, Winogrand's chaotic urban images perpetually press the limits of what kinds of visual information can be contained within the photographic frame, performing a related test on pictorial models.

Arbus, as we know, focused on the portrait: on the individual, or often the couple or family. Her groupings were bound by a certain implied intimacy or connection—a structure reinforced by the occasional exception, such as the *Two girls in matching bathing suits, Coney Island, N.Y.*, from 1967, which depicts the pair side-by-side in their matching striped bikinis. In Arbus's 1972 Aperture monograph, groups appear in the final section (devoted to mentally handicapped patients photographed at Longwood, N.J.), that evoke a different kind of shared condition. Carefully posed and framed in nearly-archaic modes of formal frontal portraiture, generally isolated from any setting (except for certain domestic interiors, which themselves function as extensions of those portrayed), Arbus presents these as distinct individuals, unique subjects with a history, a complex interiority, an inner life.

And indeed, the images' effect rests on our capacities for identification with the subjects— our speculation about their lives and feelings, our awareness of the possible incongruities between how we see them and how they may see themselves. Commentaries on Arbus, both sympathetic and critical, are full of stories about her encounters with her subjects: her pursuit of them, relation-ships with them, identification or fascination with them. For all the criticism of Arbus's voyeurism or exploitation, hers nonetheless appears as a deeply humanist project, one recording the contact between photographer and human subjects in all its problematic intimacy, complexity and potential danger.

Winogrand, the inheritor of the twenti-eth-century project of "street photography," restlessly documented the chance encounters and

groupings of the public urban scene. Where couples and occasionally families crop up, they always appear amidst the crowd, the social landscape. After the early portraits of boxers and performers, relatively few solo subjects appear in Winogrand's published work: in separate images from *The Animals* (1969), an older woman wearing sunglasses stands in front of two rhinoceroses, and an anonymous male worker cleans the window on an aquarium holding two enormous white whales. In other 1960s shots, a man stares out of an airport phone booth, and various young women stand in front of store windows or stride across city streets—all subjects momentarily isolated against urban or suburban surroundings. From all accounts, Winogrand shot them on the fly, rapidly, quasi-instinctively. He did not know these people nor, most likely, even speak to them. The resulting images are famously "casual" in their framing and presentation—distorted by the wide-angle lens, often tilted and off-center. The people portrayed may occasionally be solitary figures, but they are not "individuals," their pictures not "portraits." While Winogrand's titles share a generic quality with Arbus's (and most modernist documentary, with its claim to neutral recording of "facts"), they note places or occasions: London, New York, Hard Hat Rally, Central Park—situations, not subjects.

When we look at Winogrand's images, what we see are precisely these "situations"— chance configurations, architectural and social,

which both stage and dominate the people in them: people who are "subjects" mostly in the sense of being "subjected to," "subjected by." Everything seems to bear down on and confine them: the street, the light, the frame, other people. Yet we enjoy looking at them, perhaps speculating about how they came to be where they are, doing what they're doing: Why is that woman with the ice-cream cone (*New York City*, 1968) laughing? Is the young demonstrator with blood streaming down his face (*Demonstration Outside Madison Square Garden, 1968*, 1968) badly hurt? While we could stop to dissect Winogrand's endless young women with Arbus's eye for "the gap between intention and effect" in personal self-presentation, noting their visible bra lines, occasional bulges, and now-dated 1960s coifs and attire, to do so would clearly go against the grain of the images—Winogrand's title *Women are Beautiful* (1975) does not appear to be ironic. To adopt Roland Barthes's model of photography as an object of three "practices"—to do (the photographer), to undergo (the subject), and to look (the spectator)—these images would seem to position both spectator and photographer as detached viewers taking in the photographic scene, rather than addressing us as potential subjects or eliciting our troubled identifications with those on view.[2] It's the 1960s, and certain shifts in style of dress and social display are presented to largely comic effect, yet a strange vulnerability ensues.

In a 1977 interview with Charles Hagen, Winogrand dismissed the rhetoric of those photographers, like Arbus, who claimed to reveal truths based on risk-taking encounters and carefully-developed "intimacy" with their photographic subjects, countering that "they're really talking about their own comfort." Instead, he contentiously asserts, "I have never seen a photo-

GARRY WINOGRAND
Untitled, c. 1969

graph from which I could tell how long the photographer was there, how well he knew it." Regarding Arbus, Winogrand challenges, "How do you know from the photographs—forget all the rhetoric—from the photographs, that she didn't rush in an make 'em, bang, and rush out like a thief?"[3] And indeed, the only explicit "danger" Winogrand reports while taking photographs was a serious injury he incurred while photographing a football game from the sidelines, when he was accidentally hit by three charging players—an anecdote echoing, in now ludicrous form, the once-heroic documentary ethos that "the best images come from situations of physical risk."

Instead, Winogrand poses his photographic risks as mostly formal, pictorial: "testing what's possible within the frame," finding places where "the content is on the verge of overwhelming the form." His only criteria (echoing that of Donald Judd) is that an image be "interesting." Thus, in deciding what to print, "if it looks interesting, I look at the contacts: hopefully, if all is going well, looking at the contacts is a similar kind of adventure as shooting is."[4]

It would be easy to attribute these strategic differences to certain all-too-familiar dichotomies of gender: Arbus, the vulnerable, risk-taking, and ambivalently "liberated" female artist, whose own sense of marginality is empathetically enacted in her culturally transgressive identifications with transvestites, "freaks," and other socially marginal figures; Winogrand, the physically imposing, macho adventurer charging into crowds to snap images, aggressively pursuing attractive women on city streets to produce almost textbook examples of sexist "objectification." And indeed, such accounts appear with unsurprising frequency in the critical commentary on their work.

And yet, there is enormous aggression in Arbus's work, and an enormous pathos in Winogrand's. Norman Mailer is said to have protested that "giving a camera to Diane Arbus is

like putting a live grenade in the hands of a child."[5] According to the limited accounts we have from her more well-known portrait subjects (such as those recounted by Germaine Greer and Ti Grace Atkinson in Patricia Bosworth's *Diane Arbus: A Biography*), Arbus was capable of using harassment and deceit, as well as her famously disarming charm, to get the pictures she wanted.[6] But even without such accounts, anyone with a grasp of portrait conventions immediately understands the implicit aggression, as well as the seduction, of Arbus's move to present her subjects within the modes of the European grotesque. Arbus's postwar career in middlebrow fashion photography, constructing reassuring fantasies for upscale public consumption, may have prepared her all-too-well for revealing the darker anxieties which under-gird tenuous gender and class ideals. After ten years in fashion photography, she knew how to make people look good on camera—or not. As photohistorian Colin Westerbeck notes, Arbus's innovative use of flash in daylight "gave an unnatural feel to the pictures. It gave her subjects a certain fun-house presence, picking up the shine on faces in a way that made them physically gross, even grotesque, or that brought a careworn quality to them."[7]

Arbus's use of techniques of lighting, framing, and camera angles to subtly recast the figure draws on models from Expressionist painting—for instance, the grotesque deformations of the body in Egon Schiele's work, a project with deep roots in older European pictorial forms (e.g., Bosch) as well as in the almost quintessentially modernist pursuit of extreme forms of subjective self-dissolution. Arbus undoubtedly inherits this model of "revelation through distortion" via her teacher, the Viennese émigré photographer Lisette Model, whose own photographs of drag performers and transvestites were (along with those of Brassaï) among the first to systematically probe gendered subjectivity and the social construction of sexuality.

The implications of this crucial relationship with Model (who, along with Richard Avedon, was perhaps the central figure for Arbus) have yet to be critically engaged, perhaps because the extent of Model's photographic production remains unpublished and little-known. The larger art historical question, of how transplanted central European émigré cultures significantly formed postwar American artistic practice, is vast and relatively unexplored. Yet particularly for a figure such as Arbus, who drew so deeply on the Weimar-era portraiture of August Sander, a sense of how earlier portrait models and conventions are structurally transformed in the postwar American context is essential. Where Sander included socially marginal and physically disfigured individuals in a larger social typology, Arbus pursued them systematically, making them the template for even her more apparently "normative" subjects.

If, by the postwar era, the single physiognomic likeness no longer seems to hold access to the complexity and fragmentation of modern subjectivity, Arbus paradoxically reinvigorates the bourgeois portrait genre by putting once "unrepresentable" figures in center stage. Shot in the full-frame frontality of formal portraiture, the social outcast becomes the model for subjectivity as such.[8]

In the emerging media culture of the 1960s, this strategy may have been less disruptive than it initially appears. Feminist art historian Ariella Budick has recently argued that Arbus's "images of sexually ambiguous figures and transvestites, as well as her representations of motherhood, constitute a critique of the rigidity of gender roles in the later 1950s and early 1960s, a period in which sexuality was clearly prescribed by social and ideological conventions."[9] Yet enforced norms require some awareness of "deviance," and Arbus's work of the 1960s was itself made possible by the relative accessibility of certain social "margins" to middle class social voyeurs—the 42nd Street freak shows and drag clubs catering to heterosexual clientele were, after all, already favorite haunts for edgier street photographers like Weegee and Model.

As the history of postwar censorship battles demonstrates, by the early to mid-1960s it is no longer a matter of the total *prohibition* of representation of sex/gender "deviance" (subjects long available in the increasingly "pop" sociological and scientific literature), but a question of how they would become visible, and in what modes of representation, in the increasingly "liberalized" urban media culture of which Arbus was an active participant—even if, reading Thomas Southall's account in *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, one is mostly struck by her failures. When it came to providing fully spectacularized forms

LISETTE MODEL
Hubert's Freak Museum and Flea Circus,
Forty-second Street, New York, c. 1945
Gelatin-silver print
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles
opposite:
ROBERT FRANK
Motorama—Los Angeles, 1955

for representing social difference, and making these commercially viable and successful, Arbus was no Avedon. Her position was ambivalent. Nonetheless, I feel that by relentlessly imaging socially marginal lives as tragic and naive—as subjects offering no resistance—and by presenting non-normative female figures as almost uniformly monstrous, Arbus herself, in my opinion, offers less resistance than we might wish to the social anxieties and repressive capacities of mainstream American culture.

The pathos of Winogrand's work is harder to pin down in any single image: it accumulates almost horrifically over the years and the pages, over the dozens and hundreds of published images and, no doubt, over the literally hundreds-of-thousands of shots Winogrand took in his final years, which he left mostly undeveloped and unprinted. The awkward status of these late, "unfinished" images should alert us to a structural failure or impossibility internal to Winogrand's project—a perception reinforced by our awareness that, according to his friend and colleague Tod Papageorge (who also edited *Public Relations*), the notoriously restless Winogrand had already begun to lose interest in printing his film by the late 1960s. By the 1970s, he seems to have relied on friends to print, edit and present his work: a curious state of affairs for a photographic project about voyeuristic looking.[10]

Unlike Arbus, who sought out individualized subjects, Winogrand initially followed the path of Robert Frank, finding images of misery in anonymous public scenes—grainy, chaotic scenes of distance, disconnection and anomie amongst the milling crowd. Yet, where Frank's *The Americans* (1959) portrays an almost stereotypical version of 1950s existential "alienation," Winogrand's images stay curiously flat; he holds certain scenes up for our inspection, but it is not always clear why. Later street images and airport scenes, in particular, can seem to have little or nothing going on. In one of his most acclaimed
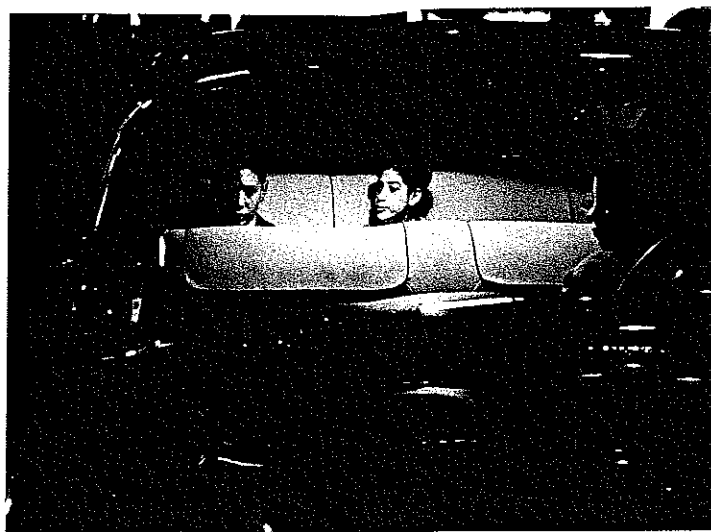
photographs, Winogrand captures a back-lit scene of three glamorous women in short skirts and big hair, strolling down a sidewalk, next to a crippled figure in a wheelchair, half-hidden in shadow (*Hollywood Boulevard, Los Angeles, California, 1969*). Yet even in images such as this, in which the most dramatic social contrasts are portrayed, the apparent social "message" is quickly obscured by chaotic surrounding detail: a group of women waiting for the bus, a taxi pulling up, a boy on a bench looking over at the scene, the large plate-glass window which reflects the female trio less clearly than an older group hidden behind them, the street sign which reads "Vine St/1600 N." Intelligible social "meaning" emerges, then ebbs away: "information" presented for analysis produces a sense of impenetrability and pathos instead.

Paradoxically, the deeply anti-humanist implications of Winogrand's project, and his actual assault on pictorially based models of photographic meaning, were grasped more clearly by his detractors than his friends. In a harshly critical review of *Public Relations* (1977) in the Society for Photographic Education journal *Exposure*, Candida Finkel argues that the book offers "a catalogue of incomprehensible events," and that Winogrand's camera is "a metaphorical weapon. He uses it to take away human vitality and integration with the world. His pictures show people who had been transformed in lifeless, rigid

mannequins."[11] Protesting the amoral detachment of the professionalized mass media, Finkel decries the leveling effects of Winogrand's project, its failure to differentiate or make connections:

> All experience is democratized by the roving professional photographer. Beatings, blast-offs, parties, press conferences—it is all the same to him. The horrifying juxtaposition in *Public Relations* of violent demonstrations with fancy art openings implies that these public events are not morally distinguishable. These are no longer people; they are pictures.[12]

On the surface, such complaints only play into all-too-familiar models of modernist fragmentation and detachment. However, if Winogrand's systematic stripping away of human subjectivity from photographic *content* is, of course, deeply recuperable for photographic modernism—the confusion of human and machine, of animate and inanimate, are, after all photographic tropes dating back to Atget's days—what is less recuperable by art photography is his implicit stripping away of subjectivity from photographic *authorship.* As Finkel notes:

> Winogrand finds it difficult to make decisions about his pictures. . . He rarely prefers one image to another. I suspect that the reason is that he does not understand what the pictures mean. Facts require interpretation, and Winogrand has no time. He continually searches for more information rather than

analyzing what his pictures already contain.[13]

Within the confines of socially committed documentary or fine art photography, such failure to "make decisions" can only be a fault: both practices rest on models of selectivity, of differentiation, of favoring certain images and not others. For photography to function as a signifying practice that carries meanings, whether social or aesthetic, it must repress the non-differentiating, non-selective, quasi-automatic nature of its own apparatus: its threatening technical capacity to produce too many images. Within this ethos, to be an artist, to be an "author," is to edit: to subject the impartiality of the apparatus to human judgment and decision.

Winogrand's failure to do this is, of course, legendary: from the proliferation of "stacks of pictures all over the floor, boxes and boxes stacked up on top of each other" that a bemused Meyerowitz recalled from Winogrand's "cavern of an apartment" in New York of the 1960s, to the incomprehensible mass of material a horrified John Szarkowski encountered when preparing Winogrand's posthumous 1988 retrospective at New York's Museum of Modern Art:

> At the time of his death in 1984 more than 2,500 rolls of exposed film remained undeveloped, which seemed appalling, but the real situation was much worse. An additional 6,500 rolls had been developed but not proofed. Contact sheets (first proofs) had been made from some 3,000 additional rolls, but only a few of these bear the marks of even desultory editing. Winogrand's

GARRY WINOGRAND
Demonstration Outside Madison Square Garden, New York, 1968, 1968
opposite:
GARRY WINOGRAND
Kent State Demonstration, Washington, D.C., 1970, 1970

processing records indicate that he developed 8,522 rolls of film during his Los Angeles years, while the backlog grew larger. Part of the unedited work was shot in Texas; nevertheless, it would seem that during his Los Angeles years he made more than a third of a million exposures that he never looked at.[14]

As Szarkowski dryly remarks, "To expose film is not quite to photograph."[15]

For a curator or art historian, such quantitative excess can only function to erode the author function—and, by all accounts, Winogrand was artistically "out of control" in his final years in L.A. Bemoaning the "dogged, repetitive, absentminded, oddly ruminative work" of the later years, Szarkowski recounts Winogrand randomly, aimlessly, shooting from car windows: "he photographed whether or not he had anything to photograph, and . . . he photographed most when he had no subject, in the hope that the act of photographing might lead him to one."[16] Szarkowski speculates that "the technical decline of the last work was perhaps accelerated by Winogrand's acquisition, in 1982, of a motor-driven film advance for his Leicas, which enabled him to make more exposures with less thought,"[17] and laments, "Winogrand was at the end a creative impulse out of control, and on some days a habit without an impulse, one who continued to work, after a fashion, like an overheated engine that will not stop even after the key has been turned off."[18]

This specter, of the camera-without-operator, making exposures unharnessed by human agency, unmoored to human vision or desire, clearly haunts Szarkowski. Even if it represents a logical extension of a 35mm practice decried by Edward Weston as "machine-gun photography" (and correctly perceived by Weston as the antithesis and negation of his own model of aesthetic "pre-visualization"), this triumph of machine over man can have no place in fine art photography. Even Szarkowski's heroic, laborious, and almost stupefying effort to retrospectively

retrieve "good" images from this authorless mass comes up mostly empty. Unlike his own historical venture to aestheticize instrumental and amateur photographies in *The Photographer's Eye* (1966), this attempt to turn the "death of the author" into an occasion for the astute viewer/scavenger/collector fails.

The other alternative, which cannot enter the confines of art photography, is precisely to embrace the non-selectivity of the machine, to understand its relation to the principles of random accumulation in the work of John Cage and Robert Rauschenberg, and the conceptual projects of the 1960s and 1970s—as in Douglas Huebler's 1971 proposal to photograph "everyone alive," which mockingly embraces photography as a technology of arbitrary and unlimited social surveillance. Yet, ultimately, Winogrand is not a conceptual artist, nor can he admit the structures of archive, apparatus, and accumulation that nonetheless pervade his work. Unlike Huebler, Rauschenberg, or Ed Ruscha, he doggedly clings to an older photographic model of authorial agency, subjectivity and desire, even as it implodes around him during his final years, dispersed in the countless stacks of print, rolls of exposed but unprinted film, boxes of printed but unviewed contact sheets.

As countless images from *Public Relations* make clear, Winogrand was well aware of the changing conditions of mass-media culture, and its capacity to make the older, pictorial

models of 35mm documentary photography quaint and irrelevant. Arbus's project also went into crisis by the end of the 1960s, as the extreme focus of the classic square-format photographs gives way to the more off-kilter framing and blur of the late, untitled images, with their strange disavowal of authorial control. A certain distanced view on damaged life—the precarious detachment of photographic modernism—is no longer possible.

Arbus and Winogrand push this practice to some kind of breaking point. They represent the end of the line for a postwar documentary practice in which, in Benjamin Buchloh's analysis, "the masochistic identification with the victim" takes over.[19] The new projects of "subcultural" documentary which emerge in their wake will permit photographers like Larry Clark and Nan Goldin to claim positions of "insider" authenticity and belonging—and disavow the ambivalent power relations that make Arbus's and Winogrand's photos so painful and poignant, while nonetheless replicating their ceaseless social voyeurism.

Notes

This essay owes a great deal to discussions with Christopher Phillips and Lutz Bacher, and to the work of Benjamin Buchloh. The author has made several factual and editorial changes in response to objections from the Diane Arbus estate. Permission to reproduce the pictures in this volume was conditional upon making these changes.

1. The classic analysis of this failure of liberal/progressive social documentary photography is Martha Rosler, "In, Around, and Afterthoughts (on Documentary Photography)" (1981), in Richard Bolton, ed., *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1989), 303-41.
2. From Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 9-10.
3. Charles Hagen, "An Interview with Garry Winogrand," *Afterimage* (December 1977): 8. By most accounts, Arbus received the lion's share of attention after the 1967 "New Documents" exhibition, and Winogrand's remarks may well reflect a large degree of professional rivalry, beyond his awareness of the fundamental incompatibility of their photographies. The reverse also appears true; according to Joel Meyerowitz, Arbus didn't especially like Winogrand's work. He claimed "she couldn't see it," adding that

Winogrand's images "seemed incredibly casual to people making more concrete-looking work;" in Colin Westerbeck and Joel Meyerowitz, *Bystander: A History of Street Photography* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 1994), 383.
4. Hagen, 9, 11.
5. Norman Mailer, cited in Thomas W. Southall, "The Magazine Years, 1960-1971," in Doon Arbus and Marvin Israel, eds., *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work* (Millerton, N.Y.: Aperture, 1984), 161.
6. See the accounts of Germaine Greer and Ti Grace Atkinson, in Patricia Bosworth's unauthorized *Diane Arbus: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984). Despite the tremendous limitations of Boswell's account, it may be precisely the enormous repression on information about Arbus, enforced in part by her estate, that continues to make it essential reading.
7. Westerbeck, 384. Meyerowitz notes how Arbus's use of flash in daylight on the streets "introduced an idea that has really been picked up by everybody."
8. Of course, all such supposedly "unrepresentable" figures—the insane, the criminal, the sexual deviant, and the racial other—have been photographic subjects almost from the outset, but their images appeared in diverse scientific, anthropological, police and medical photographies, and not within "art" photography. Part of Arbus's innovation, following Sander, is to photograph the socially marginal subjects—previously relegated to instrumental practices—within conventions of bourgeois portraiture.
9. "Diane Arbus: Gender and Politics," *History of Photography* 19, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 123.
10. Meyerowitz recounts that "Garry was progressively pulling away from the darkroom, and my recall is that probably half the pictures in *The Animals* [published in 1966] were printed by Tod" (378).
11. Candida Finkel, "Public Relations," *Exposure* 16, no. 1 (March 1978): 41-42.
12. *Ibid.*, 41.
13. *Ibid.*, 42. Winogrand's constant recourse to a formalist vocabulary, his repeated insistence that his work was about photographic problems, about how things look in pictures, and not any kind of social commentary, has naturally drawn sustained criticism from politically oriented critics—especially given the overt sexual voyeurism of *Women are Beautiful* and the apparent misogyny or racism of certain images.
14. John Szarkowski, *Winogrand: Figments from the Real World*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1988), 35-36.
15. *Ibid.*, 36.
16. *Ibid.*, 38, 39.
17. *Ibid.*, 39-40.
18. *Ibid.*, 36.
19. From a talk in April, 1994. See my "Aesthetics of 'Intimacy,'" in Deborah Bright, ed., *The Passionate Camera: Photography and Bodies of Desire* (New York: Routledge, 1998) for a discussion of the "insider documentary" photography of Nan Goldin and others.

Diane Arbus

top:

Teenage couple on Hudson Street, N.Y.C., 1963

bottom:

A young man with his pregnant wife in

Washington Square Park, N.Y.C., 1965

Garry Winogrand

Elliot Richardson Press Conference,
Austin, 1973, 1973