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The Traffic in Photographs[1]

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I. Introduction: Between Aestheticism and Scientism

How can we work towards an active, critical understanding of the prevailing conventions of representation, particularly those surrounding photography? The discourse that surrounds photography speaks paradoxically of discipline and freedom, of rigorous truths and unleashed pleasures. Here then, at least by virtue of a need to contain the tensions inherent in this paradox, is the site of a certain shell game, a certain dance, even a certain politics. In effect, we are invited to dance between photographic truths and photographic pleasures with very little awareness of the floorboards and muscles that make this seemingly effortless movement possible.

By discourse, then, I mean the forceful play of tacit beliefs and formal conventions that situates us, as social beings, in various responsive and responsible attitudes to the semiotic workings of photography. In itself constrained, determined by, and contributing to "larger" cultural, political, and economic forces, this discourse both legitimates and directs the multiple flows of the traffic in photographs. It quietly manages and constrains our abilities to produce and consume photographic imagery, while often encouraging, especially in its most publicized and glamorous contemporary variants, an apparently limitless semiotic freedom, a timeless dimension of aesthetic appreciation. Encoded in academic and "popular" texts, in books, newspapers, magazines, in institutional and commercial displays, in the design of photographic equipment, in schooling, in everyday social rituals, and —through the workings of these contexts —within photographs themselves, this discourse exerts a force that is simultaneously material and symbolic, inextricably linking language and power. Above all, in momentarily isolating this historically specific ideology and practice of representation we shouldn't forget that it gives concrete form to—thus lending both truth and pleasure to—other discursively borne ideologies: of "the family," of "sexuality," of "consumption" and "production," of "government," of "technology," of "nature," of "communications," of "history," and so on. Herein lies a major aspect of the affiliation of photography with power. And as in all culture that grows from a system of oppressions, the discourses that carry the greater force in everyday life are those that emanate from power, that give voice to an institutional authority. For us, today, these affirmative and supervisory voices speak primarily for capital, and subordinately for the state. This essay is a practical search for internal inconsistencies, and thus for some of the weaknesses in this linkage of language and power.

Photography is haunted by two chattering ghosts: that of bourgeois science and that of bourgeois art. The first goes on about the truth of appearances, about the world reduced to a positive ensemble of facts, to a constellation of knowable and possessable *objects*. The second specter has the historical mission of apologizing for and redeeming the atrocities committed by the subservient—and more than spectral—hand of science. This second specter offers us a reconstructed *subject* in the luminous person of the artist. Thus, from 1839 onward, affirmative commentaries on photography have engaged in a comic, shuffling dance between technological determinism and auteurism, between faith in the objective powers of the machine and a belief in the subjective, imaginative capabilities of the artist. In persistently arguing for the harmonious coexistence of optical truths and visual pleasures, in yoking a positivist scientism with a romantic metaphysics, photographic discourse has attempted to bridge the philosophical and institutional separation of scientific and artistic practices that has characterized bourgeois society since the late eighteenth century. The defenders of photography have both confirmed and rebelled against the Kantian cleavage of epistemology and aesthetics; some argue for truth, some for pleasure, and most for both, usually out of opposite sides of the mouth. (And a third voice, usually affiliated with liberalism, sporadically argues for an ethical dimension to photographic meaning. This argument attempts to fuse the separated spheres of fact and value, to graft a usually reformist morality onto empiricism.)

This philosophical shell game is evidence of a sustained crisis at the very center of bourgeois culture, a crisis rooted in the emergence of science and technology as seemingly autonomous productive forces. Bourgeois culture has had to contend with the threat and the promise of the machine, which it continues both to resist and embrace.[2] The fragmentary and mechanically derived photographic image is central to this attitude of crisis and ambivalence; the embracing issue is the nature of work and creativity under capitalism. Above all else, the ideological force of photographic art in modern society may lie in the apparent reconciliation of human creative energies with a scientifically guided process of mechanization,

suggesting that despite the modern industrial division of labor, and specifically despite the industrialization of cultural work, despite the historical obsolescence, marginalization, and degradation of artisanal and manual modes of representation, the category of the artist lives on in the exercise of a *purely mental*, imaginative command over the camera.[3]

But during the second half of the nineteenth century, a fundamental tension developed between uses of photography that fulfill a bourgeois conception of the *self* and uses that seek to establish and delimit the terrain of the *other*. Thus every work of photographic art has its lurking, objectifying inverse in the archives of the police. To the extent that bourgeois society depends on the systematic defense of property relations, to the extent that the legal basis of the self lies in property rights, every proper portrait of a "man of genius" made by a "man of genius" has its counterpart in a mug shot. Both attempts are motivated by an uneasy belief in the category of the individual. Thus also, every romantic landscape finds its deadly echo in the aerial view of a targeted terrain. And to the extent that modern sexuality has been invented and channeled by organized medicine, every eroticized view of the body bears a covert relation to the clinical depiction of anatomy.

With the rise of the modern social sciences, a regularized flow of symbolic and material power is engineered between fully-human subject and less-than-fully-human object along vectors of race, sex, and class. The social-scientistic appropriation of photography led to a genre I would call *instrumental realism*, representational projects devoted to new techniques of social diagnosis and control, to the systematic naming, categorization, and isolation of an otherness thought to be determined by biology and manifested through the "language" of the body itself. Early anthropological, criminological, and psychiatric photography, as well as motion study photography used somewhat later in the scientific analysis and management of the labor process, constitutes an ambitious attempt to link optical empiricism with abstract, statistical truth, to move from the specificity of the body to abstract, mathematical laws of human nature. Thus photography was hitched to the locomotive of positivism.

Consider for a moment the symbolist cult of metaphor, so central to the rhetoric of emergent avant-garde art photography in the United States in the first quarter of this century. In its attempt to establish the free-floating metaphorical play, or equivalence, of signifiers, this symbolist-influenced photography was fundamentally reactive, the outcome of a desire to seize a small area of creative autonomy from a tainted, instrumentalized medium, a medium that had demonstrated repeatedly its complicity with the forces of industrialism. Thus the free play of metaphorical associations was implicitly contrasted to the slavish metonymy of both instrumental realism and the sentimental realism of late nineteenth-century family photography. With symbolism, the ultimate goal of abstraction also looms, but in metaphysical and spiritualist rather than positivist guise. But both modern science and modernist art tend to end up worshiping in floating cathedrals of formal, abstract, mathematical relations and "laws." Perhaps the fundamental question to be asked is this: can traditional photographic representation, whether symbolist or realist in its dominant formal rhetoric, transcend the pervasive logic of the commodity form, the exchange abstraction that haunts the culture of capitalism. Despite its origins in a radical refusal of instrumental meaning, symbolism appears to have been absorbed by mass culture, enlisted in the spectacle that gives imaginary flesh to the abstract regime of commodity exchange.[4]

No theory of photography can fail to deal with the hidden unity of these extremes of photographic practice without lapsing into mere cultural promotion, into the intellectual background music that welcomes photography into the shopping mall of a bureaucratically administered high culture that has, in the late capitalist period, become increasingly indistinguishable from mass culture in its structural dependence on forms of publicity and stardom. The goals of a critical theory of photography ought, ultimately, to involve the practical, to help point the way to a radical, reinvented cultural practice. Other more powerful challenges to the order of monopoly capitalism need to be discovered and invented, resistances that unite culture and politics. Neo-symbolist revolts are not enough, nor is a purely instrumental conception of politics. This essay is an attempt to pose questions that I take to be only preliminary, but necessary, steps in that direction.

II. Universal Language

It goes almost without saying that photography emerged and proliferated as a mode of communication within the larger context of a developing capitalist *world order*. No previous economy constituted a world order in the same sense. Inherently expansionist, capitalism seeks ultimately to unify the globe in a single economic system of commodity production and exchange. Even tribal and feudal economies at the periphery of the capitalist system are drastically transformed by the pressures exerted from the aggressive centers of finance and trade. These forces cause local economies and cultures to lose much of their self-sufficiency, their manner of being tied by necessity and tradition to a specific local ecology. This process of global colonization, initially demanding the outright conquest and extermination or pacification of native peoples, began in earnest in the sixteenth century, a period of expanding mercantile capitalism. In the late twentieth century this process continues in a fashion more intensive than extensive, as modern capitalism encounters national political insurrections throughout the colonized world and attempts to fortify its position against a crisis that is simultaneously political, economic, and ecological, a crisis that is internal as well as external. Despite these changes, a common logic of capital accumulation links, for example, the European slave trade in west Africa in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the late twentieth century electronics sweatshops operated by American multinationals in Singapore and Malaysia. And today, established as well as recently insurgent socialist economies are increasingly forced to adjust to the pressures of a global system of currency dominated by these large multinational enterprises of the West.[5]

What are we to make, then, of the oft-repeated claim that photography constitutes a "universal language?" Almost from 1839 to the present, this honorific has been expansively and repetitively voiced by photographers, intellectuals, journalists, cultural impressarios, and advertising copy writers. Need I even cite examples? The very ubiquity of this cliché has lent it a commonsensical armor that deflects serious critical questions. The "universal language" myth seems so central, so full of social implications, that I'd like to trace it as it surfaced and resurfaced at three different historical conjunctures.

An initial qualification seems important here. The claim for semantic universality depends on a more fundamental conceit: the belief that photography constitutes a language in its own right. Photography, however, is *not* an independent or autonomous language system, but depends on larger discursive conditions, invariably including those established by the system of verbal-written language. Photographic meaning is always a hybrid construction, the outcome of an interplay of iconic, graphic, and narrative conventions. Despite a certain fugitive moment of semantic and formal autonomy—the Holy Grail of most modernist analytic criticism—the photograph is invariably accompanied by, and situated within, an overt or covert *text*. Even at the level of the artificially "isolated" image, photographic significa-

tion is exercised in terms of pictorial conventions that are never "purely" photographic. After all, the dominant spatial code in the Western pictorial tradition is still that of linear perspective, institutionalized in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Having made this point, only in passing and only too briefly, suppose we examine what is necessarily the dependent clause, a clause anchored in the dubious conception of a "photographic language."

My first example consists of two texts that constituted part of the initial euphoric chorus that welcomed and promoted the invention of photography in 1839. In reading these, we'll move backwards, as it were, from the frontiers of photography's early proliferation to the ceremonial site of invention, tracing a kind of reverse geographical movement within the same period of emergence.

Early in 1840, a glowing newspaper account of the daguerreotype (mistranslated understandably enough as the "daguerreolite") was published in Cincinnati, Ohio. Cincinnati, a busy center for riverborne shipping in what was then the western United States, would soon support one of the more ornate and culturally pretentious of American photographic portrait establishments, Ball's Daguerrian Gallery of the West.[6] Here is a fragment of what was undoubtedly the first local announcement of the novel invention which was soon to blossom into the very embodiment of Culture: "Its perfection is unapproachable by human hand and its truth raises it above all language, painting or poetry. It is the first universal language addressing itself to all who possess vision, and in characters alike understood in the courts of civilization and the hut of the savage. The pictorial language of Mexico, the hieroglyphics of Egypt are now superseded by reality.[7]

I find it striking that this account glides from the initial trumpeting of a triumph over "all language," presumably including all previous European cultural achievements, to the celebration of a victorious encounter with "primitive" and archeologically remote pictographic conventions, rendering these already extinct languages rather redundantly "obsolete." This optimistic hymn to progress conceals a fear of the past. For the unconscious that resides within this text, dead languages and cultures may well be pregnant with the threat of rebirth. Like zombies, they must be killed again and embalmed by a "more perfect union" of sign and referent, a union that delivers "reality" itself without the mediation of hand or tongue. This new mechanical language, by its very closeness to nature, will speak in civilizing tones to previously unteachable "savages." Behind the rhetoric of technologically derived egalitarianism lurks a vision of the relentless imposition of a new pedagogical power.

Consider also a related passage from one of the central ideological documents of the early history of photography, the report on the daguerreotype given by the physicist and left-republican representative François Arago to his colleagues in the French Chamber of Deputies. This report was published along with the texts of related speeches by the chemist Gay-Lussac and the interior minister Dûchatel in the numerous editions in many languages of Daguerre's instruction manual. As is well known, Arago argued for the award of a state pension to Daguerre for his "work of genius"; this purchase would then be offered "generously to the entire world." Not without a certain amount of maneuvering (involving the covert shunting aside of photographic research by Hippolyte Bayard and the more overt downplaying of Nicephore Niepce's contribution to the Niepce-Daguerre collaboration), Arago established the originality of Daguerre's invention.[8] Arago also emphasized the extraordinary efficiency of the invention—its capacity to accelerate the process of representation—and the demonstrable utility of the new medium for both art and science. Thus the report's principal ideological service was to fuse the authority of the state with that of the individual author—the individuated *subject* of invention.

While genius and the parliamentary-monarchic state bureaucracy of Louis-Philippe are brought together within the larger ideological context of a unified technical and cultural progressivism, the report also touches on France's colonial enterprises and specifically upon the archival chores of the "zealous and famous scholars and artists attached to the army of the Orient."[9] Here is the earliest written fantasy of a collision between photography and hieroglyphics, a fantasy that resurfaced six months later in Ohio:

> While these pictures are exhibited to you, everyone will imagine the extraordinary advantages which could have been derived from so exact and rapid a means of reproduction during the expedition to Egypt; everybody will realize that had we had photography in 1798 we would possess today faithful pictorial records of that which the learned world is forever deprived by the greed of the Arabs and the vandalism of certain travelers.
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> To copy the millions of hieroglyphics which cover even the exterior of the great monuments of Thebes, Memphis, Karnak, and others would require decades of time and legions of draughtsmen. By daguerreotype one person would suffice to accomplish this immense work successfully. . . . These designs will excel the works of the most accomplished painters, in fidelity of detail and true reproduction of atmosphere. Since the invention follows the laws of geometry, it will be possible to re-establish with the aid of a small number of given factors the exact size of the highest points of the most inaccessible structures.[10]

In this rather marked example of what Edward Said has termed "Orientalist" discourse, a "learned" Occident colonizes an East that has either always lacked or has lost all memory of learning.[11] A seemingly neutral, mathematical objectivism retrieves, measures, and preserves the artifacts of an Orient that has "greedily" squandered its own heritage. In a sense, Arago's argument here is overdetermined: France, a most civilized nation, a nation aware of its historical mission, must not fail to preserve and nurture its own inventions. In effect, Arago's speech conflates photography-as-an-end and photography-as-a-means. This shouldn't be at all surprising, given the powerful tendency of bourgeois thought to collapse all teleology into the sheer, ponderous immanence of technological development. Rational progress becomes a matter of the increasingly quantitative refinement of technical means; the only positive transformations are those that stem from orderly technical innovations —hence Arago's emphasis on the conquest of vandalism, greed, and ignorance through speed and the laws of geometry.

In a very different historical context —that of the last crisis-ridden years of Weimar Germany—a text appeared that is reminiscent of both Arago's refined promotion and the hyperbolic newspaper prophecy from Ohio. August Sander, that rigorously and comprehensively sociologistic portraitist of the German people, delivered a radio talk in 1931 entitled "Photography as a Universal Language." The talk, the fifth in a series by Sander, stresses that a liberal, enlightened, and even socially critical pedagogy might be achieved by the proper use of photographic means. Thus Sander's emphasis is less on the pictorial archive anticipated by Arago in 1839 than on a global mode of communication that would hurdle barriers of illiteracy and language difference. But at the same time, Sander echoes the scientistic notions of photographic truth that made their initial authoritative appearance in Arago's report:

> Today with photography we can communicate our thoughts, conceptions, and realities, to all the people on the earth; if we add the date of the year we have the power to fix the history of the world. . . .
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> Even the most isolated Bushman could

understand a photograph of the heavens—whether it showed the sun or the moon or the constellations. In biology, in the animal and plant world, the photograph as picture language can communicate without the help of sound. But the field in which photography has so great a power of expression that language can never approach it, is physiognomy. . . .[12]

Perhaps it is understandable that in his enthusiasm for photographic enlightenment Sander led his unseen radio audience to believe that a Copernican cosmology and a mechanically rendered Albertian perspective might constitute transhistorical and transcultural discourses: photography could deliver the heliocentric and perspectival truths of the Renaissance to any human viewer.

Further, Sander describes photography as the truth vehicle for an eclectic array of disciplines, not only astronomy but history, biology, zoology, botany, and physiognomy (and clearly the list is not meant to be exhaustive). Two paragraphs later, his text seeks to name the source of the encyclopedic power to convey virtually all the world's knowledges: "No language on earth speaks as comprehensively as photography, always providing that we follow the chemical and optic and physical path to demonstrable truth, and understand physiognomy. Of course you have to have decided whether you will serve culture or the marketplace."[13] In opposing photographic truth to commercial values, and in regarding photography as "a special discipline with special laws and its own special language,"[14] Sander is assuming an uncompromisingly modernist stance. This position is not without its contradictions. Thus, on the one hand Sander claims that photography constitutes a "language" that is both autonomous and universal; on the other, photography is subsumed within the logical order of the natural sciences. The "laws" that are "special" to photography turn out to be those of chemistry and optics. From this subordinate position photography functions as the vehicle for a scientific pedagogy. For Arago, photography is a means of aggressively acquiring the world's truth; for Sander, photography benignly disseminates these truths to a global audience. Although the emphasis in the first instance is on acquisition, and in the second on distribution, both projects are fundamentally rooted in a shared epistemology. This epistemology combines a faith in the universality of the natural sciences and a belief in the transparency of representation.

For Sander, physiognomy was perhaps the highest of the human sciences, which are in turn merely extensions of natural scientific method. Physiognomic empiricism serves as the basis for what Alfred Döblin, in his preface to Sander's *Antlitz der Zeit*, described as a project methodologically analogous to medical science, thereby collapsing history and sociology into social-anatomy:

> You have in front of you a kind of cultural history, better, sociology of the last 30 years. How to write sociology without writing, but presenting photographs instead, photographs of faces and not national costumes, this is what the photographer accomplished with his eyes, his mind, his observations, his knowledge and last but not least his considerable photographic ability. Only through studying comparative anatomy can we come to an understanding of nature and the history of the internal organs. In the same way this photographer has practiced comparative anatomy and therefore found a scientific point of view beyond the conventional photographer.[15]

The echoes of nineteenth-century positivism and its Enlightenment antecedents are deafening here, as they are in Sander's own implicit hierarchy of knowledge. The grim master-voice is that of August Comte's systematic and profoundly influential effort to invent sociology (or "social physics," as he initially labeled the new discipline) on the model of the physical sciences, in his *Cours de philosophie positive* of 1830–42.[16]

Physiognomy predates and partially anticipates positivism. A number of social scientific disciplines absorbed physiognomic method as a means of implementing positivist theory during the nineteenth century. This practice continued into the twentieth century and, despite a certain decline in scientific legitimacy, took on an especially charged aspect in the social environment of Weimar Germany. Sander shared the then still common belief—which dated back at least as far as Johann Caspar Lavater's *Physiognomische Fragmente* of 1775–78—that the body, especially the face and head, bore the outward *signs* of inner character. Lavater himself had first suggested that this "original language of Nature, written on the face of Man" could be deciphered by a rigorous physiognomic *science*.[17] The "science" proceeded by means of an analytic isolation of the anatomic features of the head and face—forehead, eyes, ears, nose, chin, and so on—and the assignment of a significance to each. "Character" was judged through a concatenation of these readings.

Of course Sander never proffered so vigorous a mode of physiognomical interpretation for his photographs. He never suggested that each fragment of facial anatomy be isolated through the kind of pictorial surgery sketched by Lavater and practiced by his myriad disciples. I suspect Sander wanted to envelop his project in the legitimating aura of science without violating the aesthetic coherence and semantic ambiguity of the traditional portrait form. Despite his scientistic rhetoric, his portraits never achieve the "precision" and "exactitude" so desired by physiognomists of all stripes. Sander's commitment was, in effect, to a sociologically extended variant of formal portraiture. His scientism is revealed in the ensemble, in the attempt to delineate a social anatomy. More than anything else, physiognomy served as a telling *metaphor* for this project.

The historical trajectories of physiognomy, and of the related practices of phrenology and anthropometrics, are extremely complicated and are consistently interwoven with the history of photographic portraiture. And as was the case with photography, these disciplines gave rise to the same contradictory but connected rationales. These techniques for reading the body's signs seemed to promise both egalitarian and authoritarian results. At the one extreme, the more liberal apologetic promoted the cultivation of a common human understanding of the language of the body: all of humanity was to be both subject and object of this new egalitarian discourse. At the other extreme—and this was certainly the dominant tendency in actual social practice—a specialized way of knowledge was openly harnessed to the new strategies of social channeling and control that characterized the mental asylum, the penitentiary, and eventually the factory employment office. Unlike the egalitarian mode, these latter projects drew an unmistakable line between the professional reader of the body's signs—the psychiatrist, physiologist, criminologist, or industrial psychologist—and the "diseased," "deviant," or "biologically inferior" object of cure, reform, or discipline.

August Sander stood to the liberal side of positivism in his faith in a universal pedagogy. Yet like positivists in general, he was insensitive to the *epistemological* differences between peoples and cultures. Difference would seem to exist only on the surface; all peoples share the same modes of perception and cognition, as well as the same natural bodily codes of expression. For nineteenth-century positivism, anthropological difference became quantitative rather than qualitative. This reduction opened the door to one of the principal justifications of social Darwinism. Inferiority could presumably be measured and located on a continuous calibrated scale. Armed with calipers, scalpel, and camera, scientists sought to prove the absence of a governing intellect in criminals, the insane, women, workers, and nonwhite people.[18] Here again, one lineage stretches back beyond positivism and social Darwinism to the benign figure

of Lavater, who proclaimed both the "universality of physiognomic discernments" and defined a "human nature" fundamentally constituted by a variable mixture of "animal, moral, and intellectual life."[19]

But Sander, in contrast to his nineteenth-century predecessors, refused to link his belief in physiognomic science to biological determinism. He organized his portraiture in terms of a social, rather than a racial, typology. As Anne Halley has noted in a perceptive essay on the photographer, herein lay the most immediate difference between Sander's physiognomic project and that of Nazi race "theorists" like Hans F.K. Günther who deployed physiognomic readings of photographic portraits to establish both the biological superiority of the Nordic "race" and the categorical otherness of the Jews.[20] The very universalism of Sander's argument for photographic and physiognomic truth may well have been an indirect and somewhat naïve attempt to respond to the racial particularism of the Nazis, which "scientifically" legitimated genocide and imperialism.

The conflict between Sander and Nazi *Rassentheorie*, which culminated in the gestapo's destruction of the plates for *Antlitz der Zeit* in 1934, is well remembered and celebrated by liberal historians of photography. One is tempted to emphasize a contrast between Sander's "good" physiognomic science and the "bad" physiognomic science of Günther and his ilk, without challenging the positivist underpinnings of both projects. That is, what is less apparent is that Sander, in his "scientific" liberalism, shared aspects of the same general positivist outlook that was incorporated into the fascist project of domination. But in this, Sander was little different from other social democrats of his time. The larger questions that loom here concern the continuities between fascist, liberal capitalist, social democratic, and bureaucratic socialist governments as modes of administration that subject social life to the authority of an institutionalized scientific expertise.[21]

The politics of social democracy, to which Sander subscribed, demand that government be legitimated on the basis of formal representation. Despite the sense of impending collapse, of crisis-level unemployment, and imminent world war conveyed by Sander in his radio speech of 1931, he sustains a curiously inflected faith in the *representativeness* of bourgeois parliamentary government: "The historical image will become even clearer if we join together pictures typical of the many different groups that make up human society. For instance, we might consider a nation's parliament. If we began with the Right Wing and moved across the individual types to the farthest Left, we would already have a partial physiognomic image of the nation."[22] Just as a picture stands for its referent, so parliament stands for a nation. In effect, Sander regards parliament as a picture in itself, a synecdochic sample of the national whole. This conflation of the mythologies of pictorial and political representation may well be fundamental to the public discourse of liberalism. Sander, unlike Bertolt Brecht or the left-wing photomontagist John Heartfield, believed that political relations were evident on the surface of things.[23] Political revelation was a matter of careful sampling for Sander, his project shares the logic of the opinion poll. In this, Sander stands in the mainstream of liberal thinking on the nature of journalism and social documentation; he shares both the epistemology and the politics that accompany bourgeois realism. The deceptively clear waters of this mainstream flow from the confluence of two deep ideological currents. One current defends science as the privileged *representation* of the real, as the ultimate source of social truth. The other current defends parliamentary politics as the *representation* of a pluralistic popular desire, as the ultimate source of social good.

Despite Sander's tendency to collapse politics into a physiognomic typology, he never loses sight of the political arena as one of conflict and struggle. And yet, viewed as a whole, Sander's compendium of portraits from the Weimar period and earlier possess a haunting—and ideologically limiting—synchronicity for the contemporary viewer. One witnesses a kind of false stasis, the appearance of a tense structural equilibrium of social forces. Today, Sander's project suggests a neatly arranged chessboard that was about to be dashed to the floor by brown-shirted thugs. But despite Sander's and Döblin's claims to the contrary, this project was not then and is not now an adequate reading of German social history.

What of an even more ambitious photographic project, one that managed not only to freeze social life but also to render it invisible? I'm thinking here of that celebrated event in American postwar culture, the exhibition *The Family of Man*. Almost thirty years after Sander's radio talk, the photographer Edward Steichen, who was director of the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art, voiced similarly catholic sentiments in an article published in 1960 in *Daedalus*, the journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Despite the erudite forum, the argument is simplistic, much more so than anything Sander ever claimed. "Long before the birth of a word language the caveman communicated by visual images. The invention of photography gave visual communication its most simple, direct, universal language."[24] Steichen went on to tout the success of his Museum of Modern Art exhibition, *The Family of Man*, which by 1960 had been seen by "some seven million people in the twenty-eight countries." He continued, introducing a crude tautological psychologism into his view of photographic discourse: "The audiences not only understand this visual presentation, they also participate in it, and identify themselves with the images, as if in corroboration of the words of a Japanese poet, 'When you look into a mirror, you do not see your reflection, your reflection sees you.'"[25] Steichen, in this moment of fondness for Zen wisdom, understandably neglected to mention that the Japanese recipients of the exhibition insisted on the inclusion of a large photographic mural depicting the victims of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, thus resisting the ahistoricity of the photo essay's argument.

The Family of Man, first exhibited in 1955, may well be the epitome of American cold war liberalism, with Steichen playing cultural attaché to Adlai Stevenson, the would-be good cop of U.S. foreign policy, promoting a benign view of an American world order stabilized by the rule of international law. *The Family of Man* universalizes the bourgeois nuclear family, suggesting a globalized, utopian family album, a family romance imposed on every corner of the earth. The family serves as a metaphor also for a system of international discipline and harmony. In the foreign showings of the exhibition, arranged by the United States Information Agency and cosponsoring corporations like Coca-Cola, the discourse was explicitly that of American multinational capital and government—the new global management team—cloaked in the familiar and musty garb of patriarchy. Nelson Rockefeller, who had served as president of the MoMA board of trustees between 1946 and 1953, delivered a preview address that is revealing in terms of its own father fixation.

Rockefeller began his remarks in an appropriately internationalist vein, suggesting that the exhibition created "a sense of kinship with all mankind." He went on to say that "there is a second message to be read from this profession of Edward Steichen's faith. It demonstrates that the essential unity of human experience, attitude and emotion are perfectly communicable through the medium of pictures. The solicitous eye of the Bantu father, resting upon the son who is learning to throw his primitive spear in search of food, is the eye of every father, whether in Montreal, Paris, or in Tokyo."[26] For

Rockefeller, social life begins with fathers teaching sons to survive in a Hobbesian world; all authority can be metaphorically equated with this primary relationship.

A close textual reading of *The Family of Man* would indicate that it moves from the celebration of patriarchal authority—which finds its highest embodiment in the United Nations—to the final construction of an imaginary utopia that resembles nothing so much as a protracted state of infantile, preoedipal bliss. The best-selling book version of the exhibition ends with the following sequence. First, there appears an array of portraits of elderly couples, mostly peasants or farmers from Sicily, Canada, China, Holland, and the United States. The glaring exception in regard to class is a Sander portrait of a wealthy German landowner and his wife. Each picture is captioned with the repeated line from Ovid, "We two form a multitude." From these presumably archetypal parent figures we turn the page to find a large photograph of the United Nations General Assembly, accompanied by the opening phrases of the U.N. Charter. The next page offers a woman's lower body, bedecked in flowers and standing in water. The following five pages contain smaller photographs of children at play throughout the world, ending with W. Eugene Smith's famous photograph of his son and daughter walking from darkness into light in a garden. The final photograph in the book is quite literally a depiction of the oceanic state, a picture by Cedric Wright of churning surf.

A case could also be made for viewing *The Family of Man* as a more-or-less unintentional popularization of the then-dominant school of American sociology, Talcott Parsons's structural functionalism. Parsons's writings on the family celebrate the modern nuclear family as the most advanced and efficient of familiar forms, principally because the nuclear family establishes a clear-cut division of male and female roles. The male function, in this view, is primarily "instrumental" and oriented towards achievement in the public sphere. The female function is primarily "expressive" and restricted to the domestic sphere. Although *The Family of Man* exhibits a great deal of nostalgia for the extended family engaged in self-sufficient agrarian production, the overall flow of the exhibition's loosely knit narrative traces a generalized family biography that adheres to the nuclear model.[27]

The familialism of *The Family of Man* functions both metaphorically and in a quite specific, literal fashion as well. For audiences in the advanced capitalist countries, particularly in the United States, the celebration of the familial sphere as the exclusive arena of all desire and pleasure served to legitimate a family-based consumerism. If nothing else, *The Family of Man* was a massive promotion for family photography, as well as a celebration of the power of the mass media to represent the whole world in familiar and intimate forms.[28]

The Family of Man, originating at the Museum of Modern Art but utilizing a mode of architecturally monumentalized photo-essayistic showmanship, occupies a problematic but ideologically convenient middle position between the conventions of high modernism and those of mass culture. The modernist category of the solitary author was preserved, but at the level of editorship. The exhibition simultaneously suggested a family album, a juried show for photo hobbyists, an apotheosis of *Life* magazine, and the magnum opus in Steichen's illustrious career.

A lot more could be said about *The Family of Man*, particularly about its relation to the domestic sexual politics of the cold war and about its exemplary relation to the changing conventions of advertising and mass-circulation picture magazines in the same period. This will have to wait. My main point here is that *The Family of Man*, more than any other single photographic project, was a massive and ostentatious bureaucratic attempt to *universalize* photographic discourse.

Five hundred and three pictures taken by 273 photographers in 68 countries were chosen from 2 million solicited submissions and organized by a single, illustrious editorial authority into a show that was seen by 9 million citizens in 69 countries in 85 separate exhibitions, and into a book that sold at least 4 million copies by 1978—or so go the statistics that pervade all accounts of the exhibition. The exhibition claims to fuse universal subject and universal object in a single moment of visual truth and visual pleasure, a single moment of blissful identity. But this dream rings hollow, especially when we come across the following oxymoronic construction in Carl Sandburg's prologue to the book version of the exhibition: Sandburg describes *The Family of Man* as a "multiplication table of living breathing human faces."[29] Suddenly, arithmetic and humanism collide, forced by poetic license into an absurd harmony. Here, yet again, are the twin ghosts that haunt the practice of photography: the voice of a reifying technocratic objectivism and the redemptive voice of a liberal subjectivism. The statistics that seek to legitimate the exhibition, to demonstrate its value, begin to carry a deeper sense: the truth being promoted here is one of enumeration. This is an aestheticized job of global accounting, a careful cold war effort to bring about the ideological alignment of the neocolonial peripheries with the imperial center. American culture of both elite and mass varieties was being promoted as more universal than that of the Soviet Union.

A brief note on the cultural politics of the cold war might be valuable here. Nelson Rockefeller, who welcomed *The Family of Man* with the characteristic exuberance noted above, was the principal architect of MoMA's International Circulating Exhibitions Program, which received a five-year grant from the Rockefeller Brothers' Fund beginning in 1952. Under the directorship of Porter McCray, this program exhibited American vanguard art abroad, and, in the words of Russell Lynes "let it be known especially in Europe that America was not the cultural backwater that the Russians during that tense period called 'the cold war' were trying to demonstrate that it was."[30] Eva Cockcroft has convincingly shown that this nongovernmental sponsorship was closely allied with CIA efforts to promote American high culture abroad while circumventing the McCarthyist probings of right-wing congressmen who, for example, saw Abstract Expressionism as a manifestation of the international communist conspiracy.[31] But since the formal rhetoric of *The Family of Man* was that of photo-journalistic realism, no antagonism of this sort developed; and although a number of the photographers who contributed pictures to the exhibition were or had been affiliated with left parties or causes, Steichen himself, the grand author of this massive photo essay, was above suspicion. Thus *The Family of Man* was directly sponsored by the USIA, and openly embraced by the cosponsoring corporations as a valuable marketing and public relations tool. The exhibition was intended to have an immense *popular* appeal, and was more extensively circulated than any other MoMA production. Even medium-sized cities in the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, Japan, and the Third World received the show. For example, in India it turned up in Bombay, Agra, New Delhi, Ahmedabad, Calcutta, Madras, and Trivandrum. In South Africa *The Family of Man* traveled to Johannesburg, Capetown, Durban, Pretoria, Windhoek (Southwest Africa), Port Elizabeth, and Uitenboge. In domestic showings in New York State alone, the original MoMA exhibition was followed by appearances in Utica, Corning, Rochester, and Binghamton. Shades of American television, but with higher pretensions.

From my reading of the records of foreign showings, it seems clear that *The Family of Man* tended to appear in political "hot spots" throughout the Third World. I quote from a United States Infor-

mation Agency memo concerning the exhibition in Djakarta in 1962: "The exhibition proved to have wide appeal . . . in spite of the fact that . . . the period coincided with a circus sponsored by the Soviet Union, complete with a performing bear. The exhibit was opened with a reception to which members of the most important target groups in Djakarta were invited."[32]

In a more lyrical vein, Steichen recalled the Guatemala City showing in his autobiography, *A Life in Photography:*

> A notable experience was reported in Guatemala. On the final day of the exhibition, a Sunday, several thousand Indians from the hills of Guatemala came on foot or muleback to see it. An American visitor said it was like a religious experience to see these barefoot country people who could not read or write walk silently through the exhibition gravely studying each picture with rapt attention.
>
> Regardless of the place, the response was always the same . . . the people in the audience looked at the pictures and the people in the pictures looked back at them. They recognized each other.[33]

At the risk of boring some readers with more statistics, allow me to recall that in 1954, only fourteen months earlier, the United States directly supported a coup in Guatemala, overthrowing the democratically elected government of Jacobo Arbenz, who had received 72 percent of the popular vote in the 1950 elections. American pilots flew bombing missions during the coup. When Arbenz took office, 98 percent of the land in Guatemala was owned by 142 people, with corporations counted as individuals. Arbenz nationalized 200,000 acres of unused United Fruit Company land, agreeing to pay for the land with twenty-five-year bonds, rather than engaging in outright expropriation. In establishing the terms of payment, the Guatemalan government accepted the United Fruit valuation of the land at $600,000, which had been claimed for tax purposes. Suddenly United Fruit claimed that the disputed land was worth $16 million, and approached the U.S. State Department for assistance. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who was both a United Fruit stockholder and a former legal counsel to the firm, touted the successful invasion and coup as a "new and glorious chapter in the already great tradition of the American States."[34] Following the coup the U.S.-sponsored dictatorship of Colonel Castillo Armas dismantled agrarian reform and disenfranchised the 70 percent of the population that could, in Steichen's words, "neither read nor write." In this context, "visual literacy" takes on a grim meaning.

Finally, my last exhibit concerning this cold war extravaganza: a corporate commentary on the showing of *The Family of Man* in Johannesburg in 1958 attempted to link the universalism of the exhibition to the global authority of the commodity: "At the entrance of the hall the large globe of the world encircled by bottles of Coca-Cola created a most attractive eye catching display and identified our product with *Family of Man* sponsorship."[35] And thus an orbiting soft drink answered the technological challenge of sputnik. *The Family of Man* worked to make a bottled mixture of sugar, water, caramel color, and caffeine "humanly interesting" —to recall Steichen's expressed ambition for his advertising work of the late 1920s and 1930s. In the political landscape of apartheid, characterized by a brutal racial hierarchy of caloric intake and forced separation of black African families, sugar and familial sentiment were made to commingle in the imagination.

Clearly, both the sexual and international politics of *The Family of Man* are especially interesting today, in light of the headlong return of American politics to the familialism and interventionism of a new cold war, both domestic and international in scope. *The Family of Man* is a virtual guidebook to the collapse of the political into the familial that so characterizes the dominant ideological discourse of the contemporary United States. In a sense, *The Family of Man* provides a blueprint of sorts for more recent political theater; I'm thinking here of the orchestrations of the Vietnam POW "homecoming" and the return of the American hostages from Iran. It would be a mistake, however, not to realize that *The Family of Man* eschewed the bellicosity and racism that accompanies these latter dramas; in this, it represented the limit of an official *liberal* discourse in the cold war era.[36] The peaceful world envisioned by *The Family of Man* is merely a smoothly functioning international market economy, in which economic bonds have been translated into spurious sentimental ties, and in which the overt racism appropriate to earlier forms of colonial enterprise has been supplanted by the "humanization of the other" so central to the discourse of neocolonialism.[37]

Again, what are we to make of the argument that photography constitutes a universal language? Implicit in this claim is the suggestion that photography acts as a miraculous universal solvent upon the linguistic barriers between peoples. Visual culture, having been pushed to an unprecedented level of technical refinement, loses specificity, cultural difference is cancelled, and a "common language" prevails on a global scale. Paradoxically, a medium that is seen as subtly reponsive to the minutest details of time and place delivers these details through an unacknowledged, naturalized, epistemological grid. As the myth of a universal photographic language would have it, photography is more natural than natural language, touching on a common, underlying system of desire and understanding closely tied to the senses. Photography would seem to be a way of *knowing* the world directly—this is the scientistic aspect of our faith in the powers of the photographic image. But photography would also seem to be a way of *feeling* the world directly, with a kind of prelinguistic, affective openness of the visual sense—this is the aestheticist aspect of our faith in the medium. As a symbolic practice, then, photography constitutes not a universal language but a paradoxical yoking of a primitivist, Rousseauian dream, the dream of romantic naturalism, with an unbounded faith in a technological imperative. The worldliness of photography is the outcome, not of any immanent universality of meaning, but of a project of global domination. The language of the imperial centers is imposed, both forcefully and seductively, upon the peripheries.

III. Universal Equivalent

Photography was dreamed of and slowly invented under the shadow of a fading European aristocracy; it became practical and profitable in the period of the continental European revolutions of 1848, the period in which class struggle first took the clear form of an explosive political confrontation between bourgeoisie and urban proletariat waged against the conflict-ridden backdrop of everyday industrial production. Photography proliferated, becoming reproducible and accessible in the modern sense, during the late nineteenth-century period of transition from competitive capitalism to the financially and industrially consolidated monopoly form of capitalist organization. By the turn of the century, then, photography stood ready to play a central role in the development of a culture centered on the mass marketing of mass-produced commodities.

Perhaps more than any other single technical invention of the mid nineteenth century, photography came to focus the confidence and fears of an ascendant industrial bourgeoisie. This essay is an attempt to understand the contradictory role played by photography within the culture dominated by that class. As we have seen briefly and will see again, this role combined a coldly rational scientism with a sentimental and often antirational pursuit of the beautiful.

But my argument here seeks to avoid simple deterministic conclusions: to sug-

gest that the practice of photography is entirely and inseparably bound by capitalist social relations would be reductive and undialectical in the extreme. As a social practice photography is no more a "reflection" of capitalist society than a particular photograph is a "reflection" of its referential object. Conversely, photography is not a neutral semiotic technique, transparently open to both "reactionary" and "progressive" uses. The issue is much more complicated than either extreme would have us believe. Although I want to argue here that photography is fundamentally related in its normative way of depicting the world to an epistemology and an aesthetics that are intrinsic to a system of commodity exchange, as I've suggested before, photography also needs to be understood as a simultaneous *threat* and *promise* in its relation to the prevailing cultural ambitions of a triumphant but wary western bourgeoisie of the mid nineteenth century. The historical context was one of crisis and paradox; to forget this is to risk achieving an overly harmonized understanding of the contradictory material and symbolic forces at work in the development of bourgeois culture.

With this warning in mind, I'd like to turn to an extraordinary text written by the American physician, essayist, and poet, Oliver Wendell Holmes, published in 1859 in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Holmes is in many senses an exemplary, even if unique, figure in nineteenth-century New England culture. Furthermore, he embodies the oscillating movement between scientism and aestheticism that so pervades the discourse of photography. Holmes was both a practical man of science—an advocate of positivism—and a genteel man of letters—the archetypal Boston Brahmin, Autocrat, Poet, and Professor of the Breakfast Table. He was a founding member of the American Medical Association and, in company with Emerson, Lowell, and Longfellow, a founder of the *Atlantic Monthly*. Characteristically, Holmes's writing veers between surgical metaphors and allusions to the classics. Perhaps there was no American writer who was better prepared, both rhetorically and ideologically, to envelop photography in the web of Culture.

Holmes's essay "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph" was one of many optimistic early attempts to both philosophize and prognosticate about photography. Significantly, English and American physicians seem to have been prominent in voicing unqualified enthusiasm for the powers of the camera. Holmes, however, goes to hyperbolic extremes. Citing Democritus, he suggests that photography establishes a means of capturing the visual effluvia that are continuously "shed from the surface of solids."[38] Arguing, as was common at the time, that photographs are products of the sun's artistry, he coins the phrase "mirror with a memory,"[39] thereby implying that the camera is a wholly passive, reflective, technical apparatus. In this view nature reproduces itself. Thus, while Holmes casually prefaces his discussion of photography with a mention of the railroad, the telegraph, and chloroform, it would seem that photography constitutes a uniquely privileged technical invention in its refusal or inability to dominate or transform the realm of nature. Photography would seem to offer an inherently preservationist approach to nature. So far, there is nothing in Holmes's argument that is not relatively common to what is by now the thoroughly institutionalized discourse of photographic naturalism.

But the essay takes a rather bizarre turn as Holmes ventures to speculate about the future of photography in a conclusion that seems rather prototypical of science fiction, even if entirely deadpan in its apocalyptic humor: "*Form is henceforth divorced from matter*. In fact, matter as a visible object is of no great use any longer, except as the mould on which form is shaped. Give us a few negatives of a thing worth seeing, taken from different points of view, and that is all we want of it. Pull it down or burn it up, if you please."[40] [Holmes's italics] Perhaps it is important to interject that Holmes is discussing the stereograph apparatus, the most effective of nineteenth-century illusionistic machineries in its ability to reconstruct binocular vision and thus offer a potent sensation of three-dimensional depth. (Holmes invented the hand-held stereo viewer and was an avid collector of stereo views.)

Also, like the diorama and the lantern-slide show, the stereoscope delivered a total visual experience: immersed within the field of the illusion, eyes virtually riveted to the sockets of the machine, the viewer lost all sense of the pasteboard or glass material substrate of the image. Despite the slight discomfort caused by the weight of the machine, the experience was one of disembodied vision, vision lacking the illusion shattering boundary of a frame. Thus the stereo process was particularly liable to give rise to a belief in dematerialized form.

Would it be absurd for me to suggest that Holmes is describing something analogous to the capitalist exchange process, whereby exchange values are detached from, and exist independently of, the use values of commodities? The dominant metaphor in Holmes's discussion is that of bourgeois political economy; just as use value is eclipsed by exchange value, so the photographic sign comes to eclipse its referent. For Holmes, quite explicitly, the photograph is akin to money. The parallel with political economy becomes even more apparent as Holmes continues: "Matter in large masses must always be fixed and dear; form is cheap and transportable. We have got hold of the fruit of creation now, and need not trouble ourselves with the core. Every conceivable object of Nature and Art will soon scale off its surface for us."[41]

But we are not simply talking about a global political economy of signs, we are also invited to imagine an epistemological treasure trove, an encyclopedia organized according to a global hierarchy of knowledge and power. Diderot's ghost animates Holmes's Yankee enthusiasm: "The time will come when a man who wishes to see any object, natural or artificial, will go to the Imperial, National, or City Stereographic Library and call for its skin or form, as he would for a book at any common library."[42] How prophetic and typical that an American, writing in an aggressively expanding republic, should invoke the fictitious authority of empire in his vision of the future. Finally, Holmes gets down to brass tacks: "Already a workman has been traveling about the country with stereographic views of furniture, showing his employer's patterns in this way, and taking orders for them. This is a mere hint of what is coming before long."[43] (In fact, by 1850, traveling clock salesmen are known to have carried boxes of daguerreotypes illustrating their line of products.) Holmes's vision of an expanded system of photographic advertising leads to a direct appeal for an expanded economy of images: "And as a means of facilitating the formation of public and private stereographic collections, there must be arranged a comprehensive system of exchanges, so that there might grow up something like a universal currency of these banknotes, on promises to pay in solid substance, which the sun has engraved for the great Bank of Nature."[44] Note that Holmes, true to the logic of commodity fetishism, finds the origin of this moneylike aspect of the photograph, not in human labor, but in a direct "miraculous" agency of Nature. Recall Marx's crucial definition of the commodity fetish, first published in 1867, in the first volume of *Capital*:

> The definite social relation between men themselves . . . assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human

race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.[45]

For Holmes, photographs stand as the "universal equivalent," capable of denoting the quantitative exchangeability of all sights. Just as money is the universal gauge of exchange value, uniting all the world goods in a single system of transactions, so photographs are imagined to reduce all sights to relations of formal equivalence. Here, I think, lies one major aspect of the origins of the pervasive formalism that haunts the visual arts of the bourgeois epoch. Formalism collects all the world's images in a single aesthetic emporium, tearing them from all contingencies of origin, meaning, and use. Holmes is dreaming of this transcendental aesthetic closure, while also entertaining a pragmatic faith in the photograph as a transparent gauge of the real. Like money, the photograph is both a fetishized end in itself and a calibrated signifier of a value that resides elsewhere, both autonomous and bound to its referential function:

> To render comparison of similar objects, or of any that we may wish to see side by side, easy, there should be a stereographic *metre* or fixed standard of focal length for the camera lens. . . . In this way the eye can make the most rapid and exact comparisons. If the "great elm" and Cowthorpe Oak, the State-House and Saint Peter's were taken on the same scale, and looked at with the same magnifying power, we should compare them without the possibility of being misled by those partialities which might make us tend to overrate the indigenous vegetable and the dome of our native Michel Angelo.[46]

In what may be a typically American fashion, Holmes seems to be confusing quantity with quality, even in modestly suggesting the inferiorities of the American natural and architectural landscape. More generally, Holmes shares the pervasive faith in the mathematical truth of the camera.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, like most other promoters of photography, manages to establish a false discursive unity, shifting schizophrenically from instrumentalism to aestheticism, from Yankee pragmatism and empiricism to a rather sloppy romanticism, thus recalling that other related incongruity, Ralph Waldo Emerson's linkage of the "natural fact" and the "spiritual fact."[47] The ideological custodians of photography are forced periodically to switch hats, to move from positivist to metaphysician with the turn of a phrase. It is the metaphysician who respiritualizes the rationalized project of photographic representation. Thus Holmes in a later essay on photography, speaks of carte-de-visite portraits as "the sentimental 'greenbacks' of civilization."[48] All of this is evidence of a society in which economic relations appear, as Marx put it, "as material relations between persons and social relations between things."[49] Holmes ends his earlier essay with an appropriately idealist inversion of the Promethean myth: "a new epoch in the history of human progress dates from the time when He . . . took a pencil of fire from the hand of the 'angel standing in the sun' and placed it in the hands of a mortal."[50] So much for bourgeois humanism: Prometheus is no longer an arrogant rebel but a grateful recipient of divine favors. And so technical progress is reconciled with theology. Photography, as it was thus conceived in mid ninteenth-century America, was the vocation of pious accountants.

IV. Conclusion

A final anecdote to end this essay, much too long already. Crossing the cavernous main floor of New York's Grand Central Station recently, I looked up to see the latest installment in a thirty-odd year series of monumental, back-illuminated dye-transfer transparencies; a picture, taken low to the wet earth of rural Ireland, a lush vegetable apparition of landscape and cottage was suspended above this gloomy urban terminal for human traffic. With this image—seemingly bigger and more illusionistic, even in its stillness, than Cinerama—everything that is absent is made present. Above: stillness, home, hearth, the soil, the remote old country for many travelers, an affordable or unaffordable vacation spot for others, a seductive sight for eyes that must strain hurriedly in the gloom to read timetables. Below: the city, a site for the purposeful flow of bodies. Accompanying this giant photograph, a caption read, as nearly as I can remember: "PHOTOGRAPHY: THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE / EASTMAN KODAK 1880–1980."

And what of the universality of this name, Kodak, unknown to any language until coined in 1888 by George Eastman, inventor of roll film, pioneer in horizontal and vertical corporate integration, in the global mass-marketing of consumer goods? Eastman offered this etymological explanation in 1924 in *American Photography*: "Philologically, therefore, the word 'kodak' is as meaningless as a child's first 'goo.' Terse, abrupt to the point of rudeness, literally bitten off by firm unyielding consonants at both ends, it snaps like a camera shutter in your face. What more could one ask?"[51] And so we are introduced to a "language" that is primitive, infantile, aggressive—the imaginary discourse of the machine. The crucial question remains to be asked: can photography be anything else? ***End***

Notes

1 An earlier, shorter version of this essay was published in the *Australian Photography Conference Papers,* Melbourne, 1980. I'm grateful to the editors of the *Working Papers on Photography*, Euan McGillvray and Matthew Nickson, for the opportunity to present the preliminary version there.

2 In 1790, Kant separated knowledge and pleasure in a way that fully anticipated the bastard status of photography: "If art which is adequate to the *cognition* of a possible object performs the actions requisite therefor merely in order to make it actual, it is *mechanical* art; but if it has as its immediate design the feeling of pleasure, it is called *aesthetical* art." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J.H. Bernard, New York, 1951, 148.

A number of texts seem relevant to the question of the photographer as mere "appendage to the machine." Of specific importance is Bernard Edelman's *Ownership of the Image: Elements for a Marxist Theory of Law*, London, 1979. Less directly related, but valuable are Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, New York, 1974, Alfred Sohn-Rethel's *Intellectual and Manual Labor*, London, 1978, and an essay by Raymond Williams, "The Romantic Artist," in *Culture and Society*, New York, 1958, 30—48.

3 I'm grateful to Sally Stein for discussions about the relation between scientific management and the development of a mechanized visual culture in the early twentieth century, and especially for showing me an unpublished essay written in 1980 on this issue, "The Graphic Ordering of Desire: Modernization of *The Ladies' Home Journal*, 1914—1939." Her criticisms and support were very important.

Another friend, Bruce Kaiper, deserves thanks for a lucid essay, "The Human Object and Its Capitalist Image," *Left Curve*, no. 5, 1976, 40—60, and for a number of conversations on this subject.

4 For an earlier discussion of the relation between symbolist and realist photography see my "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," *Artforum*, XIII, no. 5, 1975, 36—45.

5 A useful introduction to some of the cultural implications of an international capitalist economy can be found in Samir Amin's "In Praise of Socialism," in *Imperialism and Unequal Development*, New York, 1977, 73—85. In this connection, a recent and perhaps sardonic remark by Harold Rosenberg comes to mind: "Today, all modes of visual excitation, from Benin idols to East Indian chintz, are both contemporaneous and American." (Harold Rosenberg, "The Problem of Reality," in *American Civilization: A Portrait from the Twentieth Century*, ed. Daniel J. Boorstin, London, 1972, 305).

6 See Richard Rudisill, *Mirror Image: The Influence of the Daguerreotype on American Society*, Albuquerque, 1971, 201.

7 "The Daguerreolite," *The Daily Chronicle* (Cincinnati), 17 January 1840, 2, quoted in Rudisill, *Mirror Image*, 54.

8 See Helmut and Alison Gernsheim, *L.J.M. Daguerre: The History of the Diorama and the Daguerreotype*, New York, 1968, 88, 99.

9 François Arago, "Report," in Josef Maria Eder, *History of Photography*, trans. Edward Epstean, New York, 1945, 235. The earliest English translation of this address appears in L.J.M. Daguerre, *A Historical and Descriptive Account of the Daguerreotype and the Diorama*, London, 1839.

10 Arago, "Report," 234—35.

11 Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York, 1978.

12 August Sander, "Photography as a Universal Language," trans. Anne Halley, *Massachusetts Review*, XIX, no. 4, 1978, 674—75.

13 *Ibid.*, 675.

14 *Ibid.*, 679.

15 Alfred Döblin, "About Faces, Portraits, and Their Reality: Introduction to August Sander, *Antlitz der Zeit*" (1929), in *Germany: The New Photography, 1927—33*, ed. David Mellor, London, 1978, 58.

16 August Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830—42) in *August Comte and Positivism: The Essential Writings*, ed. Gertrud Lenzer, New York, 1975. Lenzer's introduction is especially valuable.

17 Johann Caspar Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy*, trans. Henry Hunter, London, 1792, I, preface, n. pag. This is the first English translation of *Physiognomische Fragmente, zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntniss und Menschenliebe*, Leipzig and Winterthur, 1775—78.

18 I'm preparing an essay that deals with the relation between physiognomy and instrumental realism in much greater detail. Much of this work revolves around a study of the two principal schools of late nineteenth-century European criminology, the Positivist School of the Italian forensic psychiatrist Cesare Lombroso and the Statistical School of the French police official Alphonse Bertillon. Lombroso advanced the profoundly racist and long-lived notion of an atavistic criminal *type*, while Bertillon, applying the social statistics developed by the Belgian statistician Adolphe Quételet in the 1820s and 1830s, sought to identify absolutely the criminal "individuality." Bertillon's method of police identification, which linked a series of anthropometric measurements to a photographic *portrait—parlé*, or "speaking likeness," was the first "scientific" system of police intelligence. Perhaps the most striking example of the quantification inherent in these searches for the absolute, objective truth of the incarcerated body is found, not in criminological literature, but in the related field of medical psychiatry.

I would like to cite one example to emphasize the nature of this thinking. Hugh Welch Diamond, a minor English psychiatrist and founding member of the genteel Photographic Society, attempted to use photographic portraits of patients in the Surrey County Women's Asylum for empirical research, therapy, and surveillance of the inmate population. Diamond read a paper on his work to the Royal Society in 1856. "The photographer, on the other hand, needs in many cases no aid from any language of his own, but prefers rather to listen, with the pictures before him, to the silent but telling language of nature . . . the picture speaks for itself with the most marked pression and indicates the *exact* point which has been reached in the *scale* of unhappiness between the first sensation and its utmost height. [Italics mine. Hugh W. Diamond, "On the Application of Photography to the Physiognomic and Mental Phenomena of Insanity" in *The Face of Madness: Hugh W. Diamond and the Origin of Psychiatric Photography*, ed. Sander L. Gilman, Secaucus, N.J., 1977, 19.]

I have found the work of Michel Foucault particularly valuable in considering these issues, especially his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York, 1977. My interest in this area began in conversations with Martha Rosler; her video "opera" *Vital Statistics of A Citizen, Simply Obtained* (1976) is an exemplary study of the power of measurement science over the body, with a feminist inflection that is absent in the work of Foucault.

19 Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy*, 13.

20 Anne Halley, "August Sander," *Massachusetts Review*, XIX, no. 4, 1978, 663—73. See also Robert Kramer, "Historical Commentary," in *August Sander: Photographs of an Epoch*, Philadelphia, 1980, 11—38, for a discussion of Sander's relation to physiognomic traditions.

21 Fascist ideology is overtly metaphysical in character, depending in large measure on cults of racial and national superiority and on the ostentatious display of charismatic authority. Nevertheless, the actual functioning of the fascist corporate state demands the sub rosa exercise of a bureaucratic rationalism that is profoundly rooted in positivist notions of the commanding role of science and of technical elites. Nazi ideologues felt the need, in fact, to legitimate the führer cult scientifically. One text in particular is relevant to our discussion of Sander and physiognomy. Alfred Richter in his *Unsere Führer im Lichte der Rassenfrage und Charakterologie*, Leipzig, 1933, sought to demonstrate the racial ideality and innate political genius of Adolf Hitler and the host of top party officials by means of handsomely lit formal portraits that were accompanied by flattering physiognomical analyses. This research-project-cum-souvenir-album provides unintended evidence that the seemingly charismatic authority of the fascist leader has the quality of an apparition, an Oz-like aspect that requires amplification through the media and legitimation through an appeal to the larger, abstract authority of Science. In this light, Hitler shines as the embodiment of a racial principle. In its assault on parliamentary pluralism, fascist government portrays itself not only as a means of national salvation but as the organic *expression* of a nonrational, biologically driven will to domination.

22 Sander, "Photography as a Universal Language," 678.

23 Walter Benjamin in "A Short History of Photography," [1931], trans. Stanley Mitchell, *Screen*, XIII, Spring 1972, 24, quotes a very explicit and often-cited statement by Brecht in this regard: "For, says Brecht, the situation is 'complicated by the fact that less than at any time does a simple *reproduction* of *reality* tell us anything about reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or GEC yields almost nothing about these institutions. Reality proper has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relationships, the factory, let's say, no longer reveals these relationships. Therefore something has actually to be *constructed*, something artificial, something set up.'"

One could argue that even the *assemblage* of portraits pursued by Sander merely reproduces the logic of assigned individual places, and thus of reification.

24 Edward Steichen, "On Photography," reprinted in Nathan Lyons, ed., *Photographers on Photography*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1966, 107.

25 *Ibid.*

26 Nelson Rockefeller, "Preview Address: 'The Family of Man,'" *U.S. Camera 1956*, ed. Tom Maloney, New York, 1955, 18. I'm grateful to Alex Sweetman for calling my attention to this article.

27 See Talcott Parsons et al., *Family, Socialization, and Interaction Progress*, New York, 1955, and the critique provided in Mark Poster, *Critical Theory of the Family*, New York, 1978, 78—84. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of Experts' Advice to Women*, New York, 1978, are excellent on the issue of familial ideology in the postwar period.

28 Russell Lynes presents evidence that Steichen's appointment to the position of director of the MoMA department of photography in 1947 involved an unsuccessful plan to bring direct funding from photographic corporations into the museum. Although unsurprising today, in an era of direct corporate funding, this was a novel move in the late 1940s. Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern*, New York, 1973, 259—60.

29 Carl Sandburg, "Prologue," *The Family of Man*, New York, 1955.

30 Lynes, *Good Old Modern*, 233.

31 Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum*, XII, no. 10, 1974, 39—41. See also Max Kozloff, "American Painting During the Cold War," *Artforum*, XI, no. 9, 1973, 43—54; William Hauptman, "The Suppression of Art in the McCarthy Decade," *Artforum*, XII, no. 2, 1973, 48—52. Of general interest is Christopher Lasch's "The Cultural Cold War: A Short History of the Congress for Cultural Freedom," in *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History*, ed. Barton Bernstein, New York, 1969, 322—59. It is interesting, if not terribly relevant to my present argument, to note that Harry Lunn, currently regarded as the biggest photographic dealer in the U.S., was a principal agent in the CIA's infiltration of the National Student Association in the 1950s and 1960s, according to Sol Stein, "NSA and the CIA, A Short Account of International Student Politics and the Cold War," *Ramparts, v, no. 9,* March 1967, 33.

32 United States Information Agency memo, subject "Djakarta showing of *Family of Man*," 5 February 1962. A copy of this memo is in the files of the International Program Office of MoMA.

33 Edward Steichen, *A Life in Photography*, New York, 1962, n. pag.

34 Department of State White Paper, *Intervention of International Communism in Guatemala,* 1954, 33, quoted in David Horowitz *Free World Colossus*, New York, 1965, 160. My summary of events in Guatemala is taken largely from Felix Greene, *The Enemy*, New York, 1971, 196—98, with some references to Horowitz, 160—81.

35 *Coca-Cola Overseas*, December 1958, 15.

36 Writing in *Commentary* in 1955, while that magazine was being covertly funded by the CIA, Hilton Kramer attacked *The Family of Man* for displaying liberal naïveté in an era of harsh political realities, claiming that the exhibition was "a reassertion in visual terms of all that has been discredited in progressive ideology." Hilton Kramer, "Exhibiting the Family of Man," *Commentary*, XX, no. 5, October 1955.

37 For further criticism of *The Family of Man* from the political left see Roland Barthes, "The Great Family of Man," in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers, New York, 1972, 100—02. I also found an unpublished English translation of an essay by Edmundo Desnoes, "The Photographic Image of Underdevelopment" (translator unknown) extremely valuable. This essay appeared in Spanish in *Punto de Vista,* Havana, 1967.

38 Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," *Atlantic Monthly*, III, no. 20, June 1859, 738. My attention was directed to this essay by an insightful article by Harvey Green, "'Pasteboard Masks,' the Stereograph in American Culture, 1865—1910," in *Points of View: The Stereograph in America—A Cultural History*, Rochester, N.Y., 1979, 109.

39 Holmes, "Stereoscope," 739.

40 *Ibid.*, 747.

41 *Ibid.*, 748.

42 *Ibid.*

43 *Ibid.*

44 *Ibid.*

45 Karl Marx, *Capital*, trans. Ben Fowkes, New York, 1977, I, 165.

46 Holmes, "Stereoscope," 748.

47 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson,* I, Cambridge, 1971, 18.

48 Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Doings of the Sunbeam," *Atlantic Monthly*, XIII, no. 49, July 1863, 8.

49 Marx, *Capital*, I, 166.

50 Holmes, "Stereoscope," 748.

51 George Eastman, quoted in J.M. Eder, *History of Photography*, trans. E. Epstean, New York, 1945, 489.