

**From the Subtle to the Hyperbolic:
The Rise of Irony, Camp and Kitsch in 20th Century Photography**

By
Kathryn Mussallem
BFA Photography, Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, 2000

A THESIS ESSAY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTERS OF APPLIED ART
in
Visual Arts

EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY
2008

© Kathryn Mussallem, 2008

Thesis Abstract

I am an ironist, a lover and creator of ironies. In my photographic practice as well as my everyday life I embrace irony in all its forms. In my written thesis I will discuss irony, the different factors that relate to and lead us to irony: kitsch, camp, cliché, nostalgia and the celebration of the banal, leading this exploration with a discussion of my chosen media for delivery of irony, photography.

In 20th century photography there has been a gradual progression in irony from a subtle hidden gesture that was there to be encoded by the intended learned audience of the art world to an eventual full out hyperbolic critique that leaves nothing for interpretation but irony. This irony that requires no interpretation is the ironic dialogue that exists in much of photography today.

In discussing the different variations of ironic utterances and creations, there are three major variants that I wish to discuss that specifically relate to how irony is used in photography: the interpreted (which can be ironic to some), the pointed (irony with a victim) and the stated (this is ironic!). I will then discuss how these forms of irony specifically relate to selections of work from the photographers I have chosen. I will also refer to cultural and photographic theory as it relates to irony and its use in photography and postmodern culture – referring to the work of Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, Linda Hutcheon and Martha Rosler amongst others.

I have chosen to discuss a selection of photographers that span the 20th century to illustrate my thesis point, I will discuss the photographers in chronological order to illustrate this evolution of irony in photography: Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Diane Arbus, Garry Winogrand, Stephen Shore, Robert Adams, Bill Owens, William Eggleston and Martin Parr. This list of photographers is by no means representative of all of photography and photo-based art but a chronological selection of artists from the canon

of mainstream photography. I will limit my discussion of artists to the boundaries of mainstream photography and the realist tradition within photography of the 20th century.

In this discussion of irony's development in 20th century photography I will also refer to my body of photographic work, how it uses irony and how it relates to the artists discussed in the history of photography. As a student of photography I am influenced by all the artists that I will discuss and I find parallels between their uses of irony and my own.

**From the Subtle to the Hyperbolic:
The Rise of Irony, Camp and Kitsch in 20th Century Photography**

Table of Contents

Thesis Abstract.....	ii
List of Figures.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	ix
Introduction.....	1
Irony's Rise In 20th Century Photography.....	3
Irony – Understatement, Victims and Hyperbole.....	26
Irony With Some Interpretation Required.....	26
Irony With a Victim.....	28
The Stated.....	29
Let's Go Camping – Nostalgia, Kitsch and Camp with Regard to Irony.....	30
Conclusion.....	46
Works Cited.....	48
Works Consulted.....	50

List of Figures

Fig. 1 Evans, Walker. Truck and Sign. 1930. Hambourg, Maria Morris et al. Walker Evans. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. © Walker Evans Archive, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.....	5
Fig. 2 Evans, Walker. Votive Candles. New York, 1929-30. Hambourg, Maria Morris et al. Walker Evans. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. © Walker Evans Archive, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.....	5
Fig. 3 Frank, Robert. Trolley - New Orleans, 1955. Copyright Robert Frank, <u>The Americans</u>	7
Fig. 4 Frank, Robert. Men's room, railway station - Memphis, Tennessee, 1956. Copyright Robert Frank, <u>The Americans</u>	7
Fig. 5 Frank, Robert. Rodeo - Detroit, 1955. Copyright Robert Frank, <u>The Americans</u>	8
Fig. 6 Frank, Robert. Ranch market - Hollywood, 1955-56. Copyright Robert Frank, <u>The Americans</u>	8
Fig. 7 Frank, Robert. Elevator - Miami Beach, 1955. Copyright Robert Frank, <u>The Americans</u>	9
Fig. 8 Frank, Robert. Rodeo - New York City, 1954. Copyright Robert Frank, <u>The Americans</u>	9
Fig. 9 Frank, Robert. Movie premiere - Hollywood, 1955. Copyright Robert Frank, <u>The Americans</u>	9

Fig. 10 Mussallem, Kathryn. My Blue Heaven, Las Vegas NV, 1999.....	10
Fig. 11 Mussallem, Kathryn. Toughguy, Seattle WA, 1999.....	10
Fig. 12 Mussallem, Kathryn. Flags (St. Patrick's Day Parade), Boston MA, 1998.....	10
Fig. 13 Mussallem, Kathryn. Sailors (St. Patrick's Day Parade), Boston MA, 1998.....	10
Fig. 14 Arbus, Diane. Transvestite at Her Birthday Party, NYC. 1969. Arbus, Diane. Diane Arbus an Aperture Monograph. New York, NY: The Aperture Foundation, 1972.....	12
Fig. 15 Arbus, Diane. A Jewish Giant at Home with His Parents in the Bronx, NY. 1970. Arbus, Diane. Diane Arbus an Aperture Monograph. New York, NY: The Aperture Foundation, 1972.....	12
Fig. 16 Arbus, Diane. The King and Queen of a Senior Citizens Dance, NYC. 1970. Arbus, Diane. Diane Arbus an Aperture Monograph. New York, NY: The Aperture Foundation, 1972.....	12
Fig. 17 Winogrand, Garry. Reopening, Waldorf-Astoria Peacock Alley, New York. 1971. Winogrand, Garry. Public Relations. New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 2004.....	13
Fig. 18 Winogrand, Garry. Hard-Hat Rally, New York. 1969. Winogrand, Garry. Public Relations. New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 2004.....	13

Fig. 19 Uncommon Places: The Complete Works. New York, NY: Aperture Foundation, 2004.....	14
Fig. 20 Shore, Stephen. American Surfaces. London, UK: Phaidon Press Limited, 2005.....	14
Figs. 21-22 Shore, Stephen. Uncommon Places: The Complete Works. New York, NY: Aperture Foundation, 2004.....	15
Fig. 23 Mussallem, Kathryn. Number 1 In Breakfast, Niagara Falls ON, 2002.....	15
Fig. 24 Mussallem, Kathryn. Melody Motel, Niagara Falls ON, 2002.....	15
Adams, Robert. What We Bought: The New Word. 1970-74. Dexter, Emma, and Weski, Thomas. Cruel and Tender: The Real in the Twentieth-Century Photograph. London, UK: Tate Publishing, 2003.....	17
Figs.28-33 Owens, Bill. Suburbia. New York, NY: Fotofolio, 1999. © Bill Owens.....	18 - 19
Fig. 34 Eggleston, William. Tallahatchie County, Mississippi. 1976. © Eggleston Artistic Trust, Courtesy Cheim & Read, New York.....	21
Fig. 35 Eggleston, William. Jackson, Mississippi. 1976. © Eggleston Artistic Trust, Courtesy Cheim & Read, New York.....	21
Fig. 36 Parr, Martin. Common Sense. Stockport, UK: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 1999. © Martin Parr/Magnum Photos.....	22

Fig. 37 Parr Martin. New Brighton, Merseyside (The Last Resort). 1983-86. Williams, Val. Martin Parr. London, UK: Phaidon Press Limited, 2002. © Martin Parr/Magnum Photos.....	23
Fig. 38 Parr, Martin. Bethlehem, Isreal. 1995. Parr, Martin. Small World. Stockport, UK: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2007. © Martin Parr/Magnum Photos.....	23
Fig. 39 Parr, Martin. Pisa, Italy. 1995. Parr, Martin. Small World. Stockport, UK: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2007. © Martin Parr/Magnum Photos.....	23
Figs. 40-42 Parr, Martin. Mexico. New York, NY: Chris Boot Limited, 2006. © Martin Parr/Magnum Photos.....	25
Figs. 43-45 Mussallem, Kathryn. The Good Wife, 1999.....	34
Fig. 46 Mussallem, Kathryn. Jane, Vancouver BC, May 2007.	38
Fig. 47 Mussallem, Kathryn. Cheylene, Gibsons BC, June 2007.....	38
Fig. 48 Mussallem, Kathryn. Jeanette, Coquitlam BC, May 2007.....	38
Figs. 49-50 Mussallem, Kathryn. Catscans. 2007.	39
Fig. 51 Mussallem, Kathryn. Jesse, Vancouver BC, September 2007.....	41
Fig. 52 Mussallem, Kathryn. Larry, West Vancouver BC, July 2007.....	41
Fig. 53 Mussallem, Kathryn. James and Stacy, Vancouver BC, May 2007.....	41

Fig. 54 Mussallem, Kathryn. Kristen, North Vancouver BC, May 2007.....	41
Figs. 55-57 Mussallem, Kathryn. In Your Face – Beatings, 2007.....	43
Figs. 58-60 Mussallem, Kathryn. In Your Face – Beatings, 2007.....	44

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Chris Czartoryski, Diyan Achjadi, Karolle Wall and Phil Smith for their guidance and support. I would also like to thank all the artists and their representatives who granted permission to use the images that are reproduced in this thesis.

Introduction

This thesis is an attempt to explore the various types and uses of irony (including its contemporary use and overuse) the interrelated notions of camp and kitsch, how nostalgia relates to irony and photography and the evolution and escalation of the ironic statement in photography as it moved from subtle encoded gesture to the grand hyperbole of photography's current aesthetic. The use of irony in photography employs two specific languages of communication – those of photography and of irony – and interweaves these respective languages to convey the photographer's ideas and critique.

I have chosen to discuss a selection of photographers that span the 20th century to illustrate my thesis point. I will discuss the photographers in chronological order to illustrate this evolution of irony in photography: Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Diane Arbus, Garry Winogrand, Stephen Shore, Robert Adams, Bill Owens, William Eggleston and Martin Parr. This list of photographers is by no means representative of all of photography and photo-based art but a chronological selection of artists from the canon of mainstream photography as a basis for introducing my own visual work. I will limit my discussion of artists to the boundaries of mainstream photography and the realist tradition within photography of the 20th century.

I will begin by discussing this selection of photographers from the 20th century to illustrate the evolution of irony throughout the century. To explore this evolution of irony in photography, I will discuss the following photographers in chronological order: Walker Evans' subtle juxtapositions, Robert Frank's use of clichés of Americana for social commentary, Diane Arbus' denials of cruelty and exploitation, Garry Winogrand's mocking portrayals of high society, Stephen Shore's banal and nostalgic American landscape, Robert Adams' bitter critique of a home once loved and now loathed, Bill Owens' pointed and humorous look at a community from within, William Eggleston's

kitschy journeys through everyday experience and Martin Parr's hyperbolic celebration and exaltation of all that is camp, tacky and horrible. I will then discuss irony, since irony is a more complicated term than a mere dictionary definition can offer, one with many forms and many uses. I will limit my discussion to the major variants of irony that are most commonly used in photography: the understated, the pointed and the hyperbolic. Irony does not stand alone however: cliché, camp, kitsch and nostalgia form an integral part of ironic discourse.

In this discussion of irony's development in 20th century photography I will also refer to my body of photographic work, how it uses irony and how it relates to the artists discussed in the history of photography. As a student of photography I am influenced by all the artists that will be discussed as I find parallels between their uses of irony and my own.

Irony is often misused and overused as a sweeping excuse for bad jokes and bad behaviour. Irony's use in photography as well as the everyday is often cruel. But within this cruelty there is often an admiration and tenderness. Amongst other things, the simple act of taking a photograph, singling out an object for love or ridicule, elevates and validates an object and that object of critique then becomes precious. "Tender cruelty" is a statement that is an obvious oxymoron and in that contradiction, ironic. Tender cruelty is a theme that runs through the work of the photographers discussed as well as my own work. These photographers have the capability (as ironists) to be biting and cruel in a critique of something that is at the same time loved by them.

As I will discuss later there are often signifiers to indicate when ironies are present. In verbal communication, conversation, performance and dialogue there are certain clues, verbal or visual, to let the audience know when irony is being utilized: a wink, rolling eyes, air quotes or a tone of voice. Sometimes it is just the knowledge of who

the ironist is that allows us to determine if the utterance is intended to be ironic. But what is it in a photograph that gives us the clue that the image is intended to be ironic? What convention communicates the ironist's (photographer's) intent? In verbal or oratory communication there are signals, an air of contempt or a gross exaggeration. Photography cannot always rely on the same textual or performative markers as these other types of communication. A photographer must use contextual markers and an assumption of their audience's discursive community to communicate their visual ironies.

Irony requires both the stated and the unstated. It is what is said and at the same time that which is unsaid. Inextricably tied to the postmodern, irony has become an everyday fact of living and communicating in our postmodern world. As a resident of this postmodern world, I embrace irony and utilize it as a tool of criticism and love.

Irony's Rise In 20th Century Photography

Since the beginning of the 20th Century there has been a steady and continuous movement away from the scientific distance of photography's Victorian beginnings where categorized documentation fulfilled the colonialist need to collect and archive the ever-expanding world. The early American photographers represented one of the first major progressions towards an ownership of subject, as photographers such as Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Weston and Ansel Adams represented a major progression in photographic style and subject matter. Full of romantic vision, described as "heroic modernists" (Sontag, On Photography 96), these photographers romanticized America as a flawless land of opportunity, grandeur and endless vistas.

Later technological advances in photography allowed for smaller and less expensive cameras. With this democratization of photography a new breed of photographer

emerged. Photographers were free to leave the distanced formalism of earlier photographers behind and embark on a new subjective photography. In her 1977 book On Photography Sontag writes, “For several decades American photography has been dominated by a reaction against ‘Westonism’ – that is, against contemplative photograph, photography considered as an independent visual exploration of the world with no evident social urgency” (42).

The following discussion is a small sampling, rather than a complete list, of the progression and the escalation of the ironic statement in the last century of photography. I will begin my discussion with Walker Evans, who can be seen as one of the first major American photographers to point out absurdities in American life with the use of subtle irony. Coming to prominence in the 1930’s, Evans was one of the first major American photographers to break from the glorious idealism of the likes of Edward Weston and Ansel Adams with their grandiose majestic landscapes and idealized vision of America and the American Dream. Evans was one of the first prominent photographers to crack the surface and show the flaws of America and to inspire generations of later photographers.

A website for a recent Tate Modern photographic exhibition, of which Evans’ work formed a substantial part, noted that, “Evans’ images were spare and factual, but his interest in the subject matter was always evident” (Cruel and Tender). It was this “factual” distance that gave Evans’ images a great power in conveying his subtle critique. They were beautiful images of the everyday loaded with understated ironies. In Evans’ images this juxtaposition of objects, the examination of objects that do not belong, or the objects that we accept as belonging but are unsure of the reason for this acceptance, creates these subtle ironies. This analysis of the absurdities of the everyday was probably never noticed until isolated and presented for our critique (Figs.1-2). Evans’ observations were so subtle that in their time they ran the risk of not being seen as a critical examination. It was the learned audience of the art world, Evans’

New York contemporaries, who could critically examine his photographic observations and truly appreciate the absurdities of Evans' American landscape often missed by the mass viewer of the time.

Material removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figs. 1-2 These images of Walker Evans illustrate his observations of the absurdities of the everyday – I am especially fond of the image of artificial limbs, canes and a futuristic artificial heart.

Fig. 1 Evans, Walker. Truck and Sign. 1930. Hambourg, Maria Morris et al. Walker Evans. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. © Walker Evans Archive, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fig. 2 Evans, Walker. Votive Candles. New York, 1929-30. Hambourg, Maria Morris et al. Walker Evans. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. © Walker Evans Archive, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

In her book Irony's Edge Linda Hutcheon writes, "Irony removes the security that words mean only what they say. So too does lying, of course, and that is why the ethical as well as the political are never far beneath the surface in discussion of the use and responses to irony" (14). Irony is understood within its discursive community, so within photography which has its place in the community of fine art, the audience of Evans' images has the required tools to decipher the irony, to get the political joke, the pointing out of bad taste or the strange juxtaposition that is inferred in the image. According to Hutcheon, "The multiple discursive communities to which we each (differently) belong cannot be reduced to any single component, such as class or gender. They certainly involve openly held beliefs, but also ideologies, unspoken understandings, assumptions – about what is possible, necessary, telling, essential, and so on – so deeply held that

they are not thought of as assumptions at all” (Irony’s Edge 18). Of course, things like class, race, ethnicity, gender and sexual preference are involved, but so too are nationality, neighbourhood, profession, religion, and all the other micro-political complexities of our lives to which we may not even be able to give labels.

With his use of subtle ironic gestures to criticize the victims of his irony (America, its people, its politics and its landscape), Evans offered up a biting critique to his discursive community but not to average Americans, who were the victims of this criticism. Evans was once quoted with saying “I was really anti-American at the time this photography was a reaction against right thinking and optimism and an attack on the establishment” (Dexter and Weski 15). Evans created a counter aesthetic to the photography of the beginning of the century.

This evisceration of the American ideal, as well as its landscape, is a common thread through the selection of photographers I have chosen to speak about. They share a photographic aesthetic that is in opposition to idealism, an aesthetic free of sentimentality and romanticism and full of criticism and pointed humour. The photographic style of Evans and the photographers who followed his lead can indeed be described as “cruel and tender”. They demonstrate a love for their subjects, whether people or landscape, yet they include a biting cruelty in which the photographer lays the subject’s flaws out for all to see. Lincoln Kirstein, the prominent American writer and art critic and contemporary of Evans, identified Walker Evans’ cool passion regarding the American vernacular as “tender cruelty” (Cruel and Tender). This tender cruelty, a statement ironic in its dichotomy and paradox, will be a thread that ties all the photographers discussed in this thesis including myself.

In the tradition of Evans, but with the point of view of the outsider, Swiss born Robert Frank photographed an American society full of stark contrasts. “His shots of a society at odds with itself along with his disregard for the latent ban on the depiction of social

outcasts meant that his work was widely criticized for its content” (Dexter and Weski 24). Using the snapshot style, which in 1958 was far from the established photographic aesthetic, Frank expressed the feelings and attitude of an entire disenfranchised generation with his ‘twitchy outsiderism’” (Dexter and Weski 34). Using irony to give a biting critique of 1950’s America, Frank tackled issues regarding race, social status and his own place in society (Figs. 3-4). The snapshot style gave his images a perspective that identified him as a part of the scenes he photographed, a move away from the ironic distance of Evans before him. The snapshot also allows the viewer to be a part of his journeys across America – and exposes them to his existential and “beat” point of view.

Material removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figs. 3-4 Images from The Americans where Frank tackled issues regarding race and social status.

Fig. 3 Frank, Robert. Trolley - New Orleans, 1955. Copyright Robert Frank, The Americans.

Fig. 4 Frank, Robert. Men’s room, railway station - Memphis, Tennessee, 1956. Copyright Robert Frank, The Americans.

As Hutcheon has noted, “Sigmund Freud in his analysis of humour in Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious argued that ironic modes such as parody, travesty and caricature are always, despite their seemingly innocent humour, actually ‘directed against people and objects which lay claim to authority and respect’” (Irony’s Edge 53). Freud’s model can be found in the photographs of both Evans and Frank. Both photographers point their judgemental ironic stab at the authoritative hold of society’s norm, the American way of life, and the everyday absurdities that make up the norm of modern (or postmodern) life.

Frank's American landscape is filled with clichés of Americana: sailors, cowboys, parades, flags, diners and waitresses (Fig. 6) that point out the kitschy stereotypical reality of the American road. These are symbols of an innocent American Dream that sit alongside images of the social reality of mid-century America: racism, misplaced blind patriotism, poverty, social inequality and outcasts. The clichés and symbols of an America of the past, Frank's present, are tenderly presented to the viewer. Is it time that makes these images even more ironic in their inherent nostalgia? I often look at Frank's image of the rodeo and dream that this is the American experience that I want: a day at the rodeo surrounded by cowboys, sailors and circa 1950's all American girls (Fig.5). This is the American experience sold around the world in the movies of the 1950's and the later nostalgic movies and television of the 1970's and onwards: American Graffiti, Grease and Happy Days.

Material removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figs. 5-6 Images from The Americans illustrating the clichés of Americana often found in the photographs of Robert Frank.

Fig. 5 Frank, Robert. Rodeo - Detroit, 1955. Copyright Robert Frank, The Americans.

Fig. 6 Frank, Robert. Ranch market - Hollywood, 1955-56. Copyright Robert Frank, The Americans.

Frank's images from The Americans have become part of the collective nostalgia for 1950's America. Did it ever really look like this or was it Frank's aesthetic decisions (what to include what to leave out) that have given us our memories of diners, rodeos, cowboys and parades? It is these tender snapshots of pure romanticized clichéd Americana interwoven with the images of the true climate of the time (the real American

landscape) that give the viewer the great ironic juxtaposition that is The Americans (Figs. 7-9). “The authority of clichés sometimes rests precisely on the fact that there may be something in them that still speaks to us, if we stop and think about it for a moment” (Hutcheon, Irony’s Edge 27).

Material removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figs.7-9 Images from The Americans showing the juxtaposition between the idealized clichéd America and the true climate of the time – the poor elevator operator surrounded by the blurred and anonymous wealthy riders intertwined with an image of a clichéd cowboy and an image of a glamorous movie starlet flanked by her desperate and envious onlookers.

Fig. 7 Frank, Robert. Elevator - Miami Beach, 1955. Copyright Robert Frank, The Americans.

Fig. 8 Frank, Robert. Rodeo - New York City, 1954. Copyright Robert Frank, The Americans.

Fig. 9 Frank, Robert. Movie premiere - Hollywood, 1955. Copyright Robert Frank, The Americans.

In my own photographic work I have spent many years obsessing over and documenting the American landscape. Like Robert Frank, I am an outsider when travelling through America. Even as a Canadian, a geographically close neighbour to the United States, I am nothing like the people I see littered across the landscape and their world is nothing like mine. The clichés that I come across fill me with giddy excitement. The world of the American road is so different than my own experience yet also extraordinarily familiar. It is the American landscape familiar from the movies and television. It is the American landscape that Frank documented so well over half a century ago. Frank’s vision of America still lives in every forgotten corner of the country. In my travels across America, my travelling companions quickly tire of my stopping at every kitschy roadside diners, cheap motels (Fig. 10) and “World’s Biggest...” something by the side of the road (every state seems to have a “World’s Biggest...” to

be proud of). The sight of a ruddy cowboy (Fig. 11) or a pack of uniformed sailors sends my heart racing. I obsess over American parades; Canadian parades have far less flags, uniformed marching bands and teenage baton twirlers than those of our American neighbours (Figs.12-13). It is these clichés of Americana that have excited me for years and play an ongoing role in my photographic practice. I love America and loathe it at the same time. To me it is “so fabulous” because it is “so awful” and I document it with this same cruel and tender subjectivity as the photographers that I am discussing.



Fig. 10 Mussallem, Kathryn. My Blue Heaven, Las Vegas NV, 1999.

Fig. 11 Mussallem, Kathryn. Toughguy, Seattle WA, 1999.



Fig. 12 Mussallem, Kathryn. Flags (St. Patrick's Day Parade), Boston MA, 1998.

Fig. 13 Mussallem, Kathryn. Sailors (St. Patrick's Day Parade), Boston MA, 1998.

As photography entered the 1960's another prominent photographer took hold of this cruel and tender photographic subjectivity. Diane Arbus was possibly more guilty of this cruel and tender ownership of their subject matter than any other photographer discussed in this paper. She was and continues to be interpreted and celebrated by her audience as deeply ironic. With her portraits of the freaks from the fringes of American life, she innocently claimed no ill will towards her subjects. But her stark visual frankness presented an intimate entry into the lives of those whom we wish we could stare at, but politeness does not allow.

Arbus is often accused of being exploitive and lacking in empathy toward her subjects. As Martha Rosler states, "By selecting the right subject, Diane Arbus allows the viewer to stare and to do so without feeling empathy" (307). Arbus insisted that the drag queens, insane asylum patients, freaks, midgets, giants and circus performers were like her children and she so loved them, so how could that be exploitive? Arbus, in her own words describes her process:

The process itself has a kind of exactitude, a kind of scrutiny that we're not normally subject to. I mean that we don't subject each other to. We're nicer to each other than the intervention of the camera is going to make us. It's a little bit cold, a little bit harsh. Now, I don't mean to say that all photographs have to be mean. Sometimes they show something really nicer in fact than what you felt, or oddly different. But in a way this scrutiny has to do with not evading facts, not evading what it really looks like.

Arbus goes on to describe her subjects as aristocrats:

Freaks was a thing I photographed a lot. It was one of the first things I photographed and it had a terrific kind of excitement for me. I just used to adore them. I still do adore some of them. I don't quite mean they're my best friends but they made me feel a mixture of shame and awe. There's a

quality of legend about freaks. Like a person in a fairy tale who stops you and demands that you answer a riddle. Most people go through life dreading they'll have a traumatic experience. Freaks were born with their trauma. They've already passed their test in life. They're aristocrats. (Arbus 2-3)

In her series American Rites, Manners and Customs, Arbus travelled across the country photographing the people, places and events she described as “The considerable ceremonies of our present. These are our symptoms and our monuments. I want simply to save them, for what is ceremonious and curious and commonplace will be legendary” (Arbus Back Cover). By entering into their worlds and presenting us with the uncomfortable reality of her subjects, the viewer is allowed to be cruel, to laugh and to point at the follies of the unfortunate without the guilt (Figs. 14-16). It is an oxymoronic irony in that it is so cruel and biting to point out the faults in people and yet to present them with love. “The camera—according to her deliberately naive image of the photographer’s quest—is a device that captures it all, that seduces subjects into disclosing their secrets, that broadens experience. To photograph people, according to Arbus, is necessarily ‘cruel,’ ‘mean’” (Sontag, On Photography 41).

Material removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figs. 14-16 Examples of the uncomfortable realities of Diane Arbus' subjects.

Fig. 14 Arbus, Diane. Transvestite at Her Birthday Party, NYC. 1969. Arbus, Diane. Diane Arbus an Aperture Monograph. New York, NY: The Aperture Foundation, 1972.

Fig. 15 Arbus, Diane. A Jewish Giant at Home with His Parents in the Bronx, NY. 1970. Arbus, Diane. Diane Arbus an Aperture Monograph. New York, NY: The Aperture Foundation, 1972.

Fig. 16 Arbus, Diane. The King and Queen of a Senior Citizens Dance, NYC. 1970. Arbus, Diane. Diane Arbus an Aperture Monograph. New York, NY: The Aperture Foundation, 1972.

At the same time as Arbus in the late 1960's, a time when images were often loaded with a social conscience, the photographs of Garry Winogrand celebrated "a connoisseurship of the tawdry" (Rosler 321) – socialites and the jet set partaking in garish soirées. Rosler suggests that Winogrand, "aggressively rejects any responsibility (culpability) for his images and denies any relation between them and shared or public human meaning" (339). In his book Public Relations, Winogrand interwove his "tawdry" party images with images of war protests and race riots (Figs. 17-18). The paradox of these simultaneous events defined a tumultuous era – the social protest and unrest that filled the streets and the lavish parties of the ignorant decision makers. Of this style of social criticism Rosler asked, "At what elevated vantage point must we stand to regard society as having 'frailties' and 'imperfections'? High enough to see the circus before our eyes, a commodity to be 'experienced'" (321).

Material removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figs. 17-18 A typical example of the paradox present in Winogrand's Public Relations – images of lavish parties that sit alongside images of social unrest.

Fig. 17 Winogrand, Garry. Reopening, Waldorf-Astoria Peacock Alley, New York. 1971. Winogrand, Garry. Public Relations. New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 2004.

Fig. 18 Winogrand, Garry. Hard-Hat Rally, New York. 1969. Winogrand, Garry. Public Relations. New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 2004.

In the early 1970's the bright colourful, yet ironically banal landscape of Stephen Shore's America was introduced. His images are an acrid and curiously nostalgic portrayal of roadside America (Figs. 19-20). Shore's images at the time of their creation in the 1970's were nostalgic and tenderly lamented the loss of the post-war American Dream of the 1950's. In a contemporary viewing of these images, almost forty years old

now, a double nostalgia emerges as the contemporary viewer waxes nostalgic for these Kodachrome snapshots of the 1970's that are in themselves waxing nostalgic for the 1950's.



Material removed due to
copyright restrictions.

Figs. 19-20 Examples of Shore's nostalgic and acrid American landscape.

Fig. 19 Uncommon Places: The Complete Works. New York, NY: Aperture Foundation, 2004.

Fig. 20 Shore, Stephen. American Surfaces. London, UK: Phaidon Press Limited, 2005.

Shore's banality exaggerates just how everyday these scenes are. But in their everydayness, these landscapes and moments become much more. In her discussions of camp and nostalgia Susan Sontag states, "Another effect: time contracts the sphere of banality. (Banality is, strictly speaking, always a category of the contemporary.) What was banal can, with the passage of time, become fantastic" ("Notes on Camp").

As with Robert Frank before him, Shore utilizes the informality of the snapshot in his journeys across North America. Using the power of cumulative imagery, Shore records a dirty world. His snapshots are of the American road: dirty toilets, stale and greasy food, cheap motels, boarded up shops and empty main streets. Shore presents the viewer with a vast terrain of banalities of the American experience offered up in sheer number. Shore's images are nostalgic. Yet by offering up so many examples of loss, a biting criticism is conveyed. The viewer is forced to think about what caused these empty streets and lost dreams as they enter into the nostalgic journey viewing the crumbling American landscape and the disappearing American Dream (Figs. 21-22).



Figs. 21-22 The empty shopfronts and streets documented in Shore's images of America.
Shore, Stephen. Uncommon Places: The Complete Works. New York, NY: Aperture Foundation, 2004.

In my own photographic journeys across North America, like Shore, I have documented urban decay and forgotten main streets. My examination is not only limited to the crumbling American Dream but the equally dissolving new world dream of my native Canada. I have made annual trips to my Mother's hometown in the Niagara Region of Southern Ontario. With these images of forgotten landscapes I document the loss of a once prosperous region reliant on forgotten industry and now absent tourists and honeymooners (Figs. 23-24).



Fig. 23 Mussallem, Kathryn. Number 1 In Breakfast, Niagara Falls ON, 2002.

Fig. 24 Mussallem, Kathryn. Melody Motel, Niagara Falls ON, 2002.

Robert Adams, another photographer of the 1970's, like Shore, offers up a nostalgia tainted with banality. In his series What We Bought: The New World Adams returns to

the Colorado of his youth. New urban infrastructure has popped up overnight, replacing the nature that lured people to Denver, his hometown, in the first place. One person's dream of suburban joy and the "American Dream" is another person's nightmare. Adams gives us a banal landscape of cookie cutter prefab homes and endless parking lots, yet these images are also loaded with a sense of nostalgic loss of the home he once knew and loved. The loss of innocence of a young frontier of the American West is presented to the viewer to see the irony of a former loved one, his former home, which he has now come to despise. Louise Hayward describes this reaction in the following manner:

Horried by the rapid degradation of natural resources during the development of suburban communities, Adams could not contemplate the magnificence of American wilderness that had inspired his ancestors, and instead documented, without irony, the transformation of that landscape by human intervention. This was a deliberate move to counter popular landscape photography, which nostalgically recalled a naive beauty associated with the American wilderness. Adams strove not to judge compositions in terms of the picturesque and consequently avoided mountain-top vistas and central objects of focus. In some ways the subjects in his photographs are oblique: the action is taking place elsewhere, leaving us to view the debris of lives unknown, only guessed at. (qtd. in Dexter and Weski 256)

Although the images are taken with such a flat banality that Hayward suggests that these images were "documented, without irony", I would argue that the irony is present in the acts of the absentee residents of these landscapes, the missing people that have transformed and paved over the nature that originally brought them to Colorado (Figs. 25-27). In 1995 Adams said of this series, "The pictures record what we purchased,

what we paid, and what we could not buy. They document a separation from ourselves, and in turn, from the natural world that we professed to love” (Dexter and Weski 256).

Material removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figs. 25-27 Robert Adams’ empty landscapes of suburban Denver from the series What We Bought: The New World.

Adams, Robert. What We Bought: The New World. 1970-74. Dexter, Emma, and Weski, Thomas. Cruel and Tender: The Real in the Twentieth-Century Photograph. London, UK: Tate Publishing, 2003.

Like Robert Adams, Bill Owens photographed the newly sprouting suburbs of the Western United States. Unlike Adams, who returned to a former home only to be an outsider filled with disdain for his once loved natural Colorado, Owens is a proud and active member of this Californian suburban sprawl. In his 1970 book Suburbia Owens explores the rapidly expanding suburbs that have swallowed up the landscape around him. In his 1999 introduction to Suburbia David Halberstam wrote of Owens:

In a way, Bill Owens stumbled into this book. The migration was all around him — it was as if he was being swallowed up in it. Everywhere he turned houses were springing up, row upon row; what had been farmland one day was a city the next. In 1968 he was breaking in as a photographer for a small newspaper in Livermore, California. And there, around him in every day was this new, stunning social phenomenon. And so he began photographing it— understanding that he was witnessing something special, that these people were, in the best American way buying not just houses, but dreams—often long suppressed in their families —of a better life. (Halberstam 5)

Owens' images are the ultimate expression of the American Dream. A dream that is the promise of an instant wonderful life supplied by a move to the suburbs. His suburbia is filled with young happy families sprinkling their newly rolled out instant turf yards (Figs. 28-29).



My husband, Pat, has a theory about watering our newly seeded lawn. The water has to trinkle from heaven and fall like tender little rain drops...otherwise the lawn won't grow properly.

We enjoy having these things.

Figs.28-29 Owens' suburban residents enjoying their green lawns and treasured possessions.
Owens, Bill. Suburbia. New York, NY: Fotofolio, 1999. © Bill Owens.

As a member of this world himself Owens has a unique insight and understanding of his subjects. What comes through in the images is his empathy for the subjects. To tackle the widespread social criticism of the outward uniformity of the suburbs, Owens illustrates the hidden realities of the people inside the cookie cutter boxes with the sometimes-surprising quotes that appear below the images (Figs. 30-31). Owens states, "You assume the mask of suburbia for outward appearances and yet no one knows what you really do" (Owens 5).



We feel most people have the wrong attitude towards sex, that it's nasty and to be done only in the dark. With us sex takes care of itself.



We don't have to conform.

Figs. 30-31 Images of the surprising and sexually liberated residents of Owens' Suburbia.
Owens, Bill. Suburbia. New York, NY: Fotofolio, 1999. © Bill Owens.

Owens' irony is that of an insider in a community that can present his world with criticism and love. Like the other photographers discussed, he is cruel and tender to his subjects. He enters into his subject's worlds and relishes their apparent happiness or hidden disillusionment with the "American Dream". Owens peeps into the often-strange world behind the facade of normalcy that is suburbia and exposes the hidden reality. Viewers, depending on their own opinion of the suburbs, are left to decide on whether his portrayal of suburban joy is mocking or loving (Figs. 32-33).



Figs. 32-33 Are Owens' images of smiling happy suburbanites mocking or loving?
Owens, Bill. Suburbia. New York, NY: Fotofolio, 1999. © Bill Owens.

Like Adams and Owens before him, another photographer of the 1970's, William Eggleston turned his camera toward the familiar locale of home, only to offer the viewer a sense of alienation, loneliness and longing. Photographing the Southern United States, specifically in his home of Memphis, Eggleston exposes the quirky individuals that populate his familiar landscape. In the tradition of Arbus, Eggleston starkly shows us the often sad, tragic and humorous lives and circumstance of his subjects.

Eggleston's photographs display a minute interest in seemingly banal subject matter. He has described this methodology as 'democratic', encouraging the viewer to look again at objects that the eye would normally pass over, and to find beauty in the everyday. Sometimes these images feature people, but often they are devoid of activity, focussing instead on the traces of human presence such as an incomplete jigsaw puzzle or a flaming barbeque [...] It has been suggested that the mundane subject matter and the slight unease that these early images provoke is reminiscent of David Lynch's films, which reveal a sense of disquiet beneath the veneer of the suburban idyll. (Dexter and Weski 259)

The first photographer to have his colour photographic work accepted by the art and photographic establishment, and "known for his pioneering use of colour and his non-hierarchical approach to recording the everyday" (Dexter and Weski 259), Eggleston's bright and saturated images add a humorous jab to his critique of his subjects, as opposed to the slightly more banal and soft colour palate of Stephen Shore. He uses elements of composition and juxtaposition to expose the fringes of society both in places and people, the social injustice of his native Southern United States and the kitschy elements of everyday experience (Figs. 34-35).



Figs. 34-35 An overly decorative resident and equally banal landscape of Eggleston's American South – these images show the dichotomy that is present in William Eggleston's Guide.

Fig. 34 Eggleston, William. Tallahatchie County, Mississippi. 1976. © Eggleston Artistic Trust, Courtesy Cheim & Read, New York.

Fig. 35 Eggleston, William. Jackson, Mississippi. 1976. © Eggleston Artistic Trust, Courtesy Cheim & Read, New York.

A book on photographic theory offers a favourite, although a simple, definition of irony as “Irony, (also ‘easy irony’) The use of something to convey its opposite meaning and often mocking the subject used. See Kitsch” (La Grange 241). This notion of “easy irony” is probably the best classification of the irony used by many artists in photography today. As irony has escalated its presence in contemporary photography, many of the artists that utilize irony have moved to the use of this “easy irony”. With many of the photographers of today the ironic statement hardly needs an interpretation, the irony is stated loudly and clearly “I AM IRONIC!”. This is the case with the work of Martin Parr.

In his photographs Parr lays out a blatant ironic statement and presents the viewer with a glorification of the horrible. The ugly, tacky, dated, discarded things in life are celebrated and elevated. The artist's intent becomes cruel and biting yet at the same time tender. This precious-making of the horrible gives it a new life and a new audience of appreciation. The close up macro aesthetic allows the viewer to closely examine everyday objects and scenes that would normally be passed by. These macro images of everyday experience are now presented to be carefully considered. At the same time, the use of a ring flash saturates the colours to an extreme making cheap “crap” look even cheaper and crappier.

The ironic progression in photography throughout the 20th century moved from the subtle observational ironies of Evans and Frank to the blatant, in your face, sickly sweet and saturated images of Parr. With Parr there is no subtlety or interpretation required. These photographs state, "I am horrible, I am tacky, I am Ironic, Love it or hate it!" As Susan Sontag defined, "the ultimate Camp statement: it's good because it's awful" ("Notes on Camp").

Parr uses juxtaposition not just to create the subtle visual ironies as Frank and earlier photographers did, but to exacerbate the punch of the irony. In his published books and exhibitions the placement of adjacent images change how we look at an individual image that is already ironic. In the following example from Parr's book Common Sense the already horribly tacky close up of an overly tanned hairy chest becomes even more sticky and greasy when placed on the facing page of an image of similarly coloured, sticky and greasy pieces of meat hanging on hooks (Fig. 36). Even the title of the book is loaded with ironies. These images are of the common everyday things that we see all around us and are the trope of the common people, the tasteless working class of Parr's native classist Britain.



Fig. 36 An example of a spread of facing pages from Martin Parr's Common Sense.
Parr, Martin. Common Sense. Stockport, UK: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 1999. © Martin Parr/Magnum Photos.

Although the earlier photographers limited their ironic commentary to America, Parr,

like the consumer based culture he attacks, expands his commentary to encompass the globe. The entire world is now caught in the saturated embrace of global consumerism. Parr offers the viewer a kitsch aesthetic which gloriously confronts the establishment of taste.

In the 1980's Parr began his exaltation of the common, banal, tacky and horrible things of every day life in his native UK. As a middle class southerner, he turned his critical eye on the lower working classes of England's north. Parr introduced us to England's seaside resorts (Fig. 37), banal roadside eateries, holiday camps and over-wallpapered living rooms. As time passed Parr realized that the upper classes were just as tacky and he moved his ironic observations to the British middle and upper classes. He then followed all of these Britons abroad, to witness the scourge they wrought on the lands they visited (Figs. 38-39).



Figs. 37-39 The tourist traps of Martin Parr's world: the wonderful British seaside where sun and filth are on offer, the juxtapositions of a roadside stand in the Holy Land and tourists being "original" at the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

Fig. 37 Parr Martin. New Brighton, Merseyside (The Last Resort). 1983-86. Williams, Val. Martin Parr. London, UK: Phaidon Press Limited, 2002. © Martin Parr/Magnum Photos.

Fig. 38 Parr, Martin. Bethlehem, Isreal. 1995. Parr, Martin. Small World. Stockport, UK: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2007. © Martin Parr/Magnum Photos.

Fig. 39 Parr, Martin. Pisa, Italy. 1995. Parr, Martin. Small World. Stockport, UK: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2007. © Martin Parr/Magnum Photos.

Parr records a kind of garbage colonialism, the leaving behind of consumerist junk and souvenirs. Parr has now crossed the globe observing and relishing all the crap that modern life has to offer. He takes the snapshot to new extremes with the intense close up in sickly plastic, saturated colours that illustrate "the flotsam and jetsam of consumer

culture” (Dexter and Weski 17) – a deluge of western consumer leftovers, out of place, scattered amongst the developing world. In his introduction to Small World, Geoff Dyer says of Parr,

Back in the 1950’s the Swiss tourist Robert Frank travelled through America photographing ‘the kind of civilization born here and spreading everywhere’. Frank was right: forty years down the line Parr finds bits and pieces of the American imperium everywhere. (He also records the contrary tendency whereby one no longer has to travel to Egypt – with the attendant threat of terror – to experience the orient; it can be found in Las Vegas, in the shape of the Luxor.) In order to escape the tentacles of the homogenizing ‘civilization’ it is necessary to travel further and further afield. And by so doing you drag those tentacles after you. We are all responsible for the ruination we lament.
(5)

In Martin Parr’s series Mexico he takes the viewer on a journey “into and beyond the clichés of Mexico. It is his photographic exploration of the visual language of Mexico today and the battle of cultures being fought out at street level—between the country’s catholic vernacular and the brands of global consumerism” (Villarreal qtd. in Parr, Mexico book cover). Would a cultural observation of irony be interpreted by those immersed in said culture as irony or just everyday occurrences? Does it take a learned understanding of mass consumerism and an opinion of distaste for it to realize the ironies? If the viewer was not a member of the discursive community of the gallery art viewer but a member of the discursive community of the Mexican migrant worker, would he view the ongoing repetition of US corporate sponsored baseball hats (Figs. 40-42) as ironic or as just the experience of the everyday? In viewing Parr’s Mexico images it is immediately striking how contradictory to their environment these corporate logos are, how telling of our world today, a tale of corporate outsourcing and exploitation running rampant.



Figs. 40-42 The repetitive image of Mexican migrant workers wearing American corporate sponsored baseball caps appear throughout Martin Parr's Mexico illustrating the long reach of corporate America. Parr, Martin. Mexico. New York, NY: Chris Boot Limited, 2006. © Martin Parr/Magnum Photos.

Parr's contemporary photographic images provide an over attribution of irony to everyday objects and experiences. His overwhelming repetition of: food, plastic, inflatable dolls, bad manicures, baseball caps, advertisements, toys, religious statues, donuts, cakes and Virgin Mary's offer up a never ending deluge of ruthless images. They assault our senses and sensibilities until we become numb to their effect. The only thing that can shock the viewer is more of the same. Parr is the perfect example of how visual ironies in photography have been pushed to extremes in the contemporary photographic aesthetic. When our everyday experience is so filled with useless consumer goods and pointless experiences, Parr's "in your face" repetition and saturated aesthetic is the only way we will even notice how truly horrible it all is.

Irony – Understatement, Victims and Hyperbole

In discussing these different photographic variations of ironic utterances and creations, there are three major variants that I wish to discuss that specifically relate to how irony is used in photography: the understated (which can be ironic to some), the pointed (irony with a victim) and the overtly stated (this is ironic!). In her discussion of the extremes of irony Linda Hutcheon writes, “Almost every manual of rhetoric states that hyperbole and litotes or meiosis represent the two common extremes of ironic signalling and certainly, examples of both exaggeration and understatement are not hard to find” (Irony’s Edge 156).

Irony With Some Interpretation Required

At one extreme of the ironic spectrum is understated irony. This type of irony is framed by the subtlest of ironic gestures, if there are any at all. This is an irony easily misunderstood since a set of specific codes is required to interpret it and the chance of missing the irony is here at its greatest.

Irony is often the convention of the intellectual. Ironic humour is often seen as clever since there is a required lexicon to “get” the ironic statement. “It is said that... Irony creates hierarchies: those who use it, then those who ‘get’ it and at the bottom, those who do not” (Hutcheon, Irony’s Edge 17). One of the great advantages of using irony is that the ironist can deliver the irony to an intended audience directly in front of the target, assured in the knowledge that the irony will race right by the ironist’s target. Irony relies on a common language built from experience, memory, influences and society in order to be interpreted. An ironist takes advantage of these differences to stage an irony that is coded beyond the comprehension of the target.

The complexities of irony come from comprehension. Distortion or misinterpretation comes from the different worlds, different languages, different communities and different social contexts of the parties involved in the irony. An ironic joke may not seem like a joke to a person who has a different social and community experience. Irony can be easily understood within a closed or specific social group. These social groups are the result of many factors: culture, age, history, place, religion, political lean, economy, education, even a rhetorical community (that which is brought together by shared media experience, television, radio and film). These social groups have the codes to get the jokes. In this structure irony often become elitist or takes on a sadistic stance. The irony can be aimed at an unwitting target, one who lacks the codes to crack the joke.

One who fails to understand the ironic communication is often called ignorant but as Hutcheon points out, "But perhaps what is called ignorance (and even lack of practice or context) is simply a question of the ironist and the interpreter belonging to different discursive communities which do not intersect or overlap sufficiently for the comprehension of an utterance as ironic to occur. In other words, we are back to the problem of the complexity of the intersubjective activity of setting irony in motion" (Irony's Edge 98). Ironists utilize this difference in discursive communities to their advantage in their creation of clever ironies.

"The important thing to realize is that we all live in many discursive communities at one and the same time... That these different communities might offer conflicting decisions (especially about appropriateness) is part of the complexity of the reception of irony" (Hutcheon, Irony's Edge 100-101). I am a member of several discursive communities: I am an artist, a photographer, a college instructor, a student, a makeup artist, a feminist, a lover of music, a cat lover and a vegetarian. But just because I belong to any of the above communities, it does not mean that I share the same sensibilities and therefore sense of what can be ironic as other members of any of these respective communities. It is the unique combination of these communities that gives me my particular sense of irony.

Irony With a Victim

The ironist is not the only performer or participant in irony an audience and/or a target is required. Therefore, in this interactive process, if the irony has success or failure the blame is shared. Although there are instances when irony is not necessarily a two-part communication but a one-sided attack, irony can be used as a weapon of words. In this interaction there is the ironist, the creator of the irony, and the target of the irony. In this relationship the targets are chosen deliberately because of their different discursive communities. The targets of the irony miss the ironies of the statement and the unwitting target becomes a victim by not belonging to the same discursive community as the ironist: education, social status and experiences that are required to interpret the irony may be lacking and the punch of the irony is missed.

The signifiers that alert the audience to the irony are often subtle. The more ambiguous the hint is to the irony the more likely misinterpretation is to occur. The beliefs and intentions of the ironist must be inferred; the interpreter must know the attitude, the politics and the reputation of the ironist to get the irony.

These subtlest of ironies, those that are coded with the least amount of explanation, are often the most efficacious. When the irony runs a greater risk of incomprehension and misinterpretation, it often has a greater punch when delivered to the ironist's more selective audience as it races by the target. The more subtle the signifiers of the irony are and the less stated the irony is, the greater its overall effect.

The Stated

At the other end of the ironic spectrum is hyperbolic or stated irony with which interpretation is hardly required. This is present in statements that are so blatant and obvious that there is no room for misinterpretation – in this situation the irony is clearly labelled and explained. This usage of irony has become extremely common in media and culture today and is generally loaded with obvious signifiers and deliberate exaggeration.

Why has irony become so obvious and hyperbolic in media, comedy, the visual and performing arts? It is perhaps indicative of a dumbing down of irony as it has now become commodified and in that commodification some simplifying has had to take place to make the irony readable to the masses. If the audience is no longer as literate in the codes that cleverly masked the ironies of the past, it seems that the ironist must create a less coded work to be understood by the audience.

As with all things once considered subversive such as rock and roll, punk, grunge and tattoos things that were once the property of subculture have now been packaged and sold at the local Wal Mart to thirteen year old girls. Ironic language (once the property of the intellectual) has been absorbed into mass culture and is now being created and packaged differently on a larger scale to be consumed by the masses. In irony's watering down as a consumer product it has become a little less clever and a little simpler for the mass audience to understand.

Irony's dilution could also parallel many things that once were subversive or risky, in order to maintain their punch the boundaries must be pushed. To keep its outsider appeal and to keep that cleverness that irony has always held dear, cutting-edge irony has been forced to become extreme. Many contemporary photographers such as Martin Parr push the envelope and create ironies that are so blatant that they cannot be misinterpreted.

Perhaps it is a less literate public that requires ironies to be so over the top in their delivery that there is no way the irony can be missed. This stated irony attempts to prevent misinterpretation by stating its ironic intent before the statement is even made. This type of irony also is often used as a disclaimer, an excuse to allow the cruelty of the utterance to pass. Whatever was said is excusable because it was meant to be ironic not cruel.

When all becomes ironic, does the point of irony disappear or is it the ultimate irony? In what has been called the post-ironic condition, the over-proliferation of irony in contemporary culture has led to irony's downfall. Hutcheon writes, "...commodification of irony by the very generation (the "twentysomething" generation) that was said to be using irony as its only defence against commodification" ("Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern"). Now irony itself has become commodified, like the consumer products that flood every corner of our modern world: a cheaper, less coded, less intelligent irony is presented for us to consume.

Let's Go Camping – Nostalgia, Kitsch and Camp with Regard to Irony

Irony rarely exists on its own; it is closely related to and intertwined with many other concepts. The hyperbolic irony that is so common today has escalated to such a state of exaggeration that it has almost become camp. "The traditional means for going beyond straight seriousness – irony, satire – seem feeble today, inadequate to the culturally over-saturated medium in which contemporary sensibility is schooled. Camp introduces a new standard: artifice as an ideal, theatricality" (Sontag, "Notes on Camp").

Although not exclusive or integral to irony, camp often goes hand in hand with irony. To be camp, to be deliberately exaggerated and theatrical in style is often a part of hyperbolic ironic utterances. In Susan Sontag's 1964 essay "Notes on Camp" she

opens with the statement, “— Many things in the world have not been named; and many things, even if they have been named, have never been described. One of these is the sensibility -- unmistakably modern, a variant of sophistication but hardly identical with it -- that goes by the cult name of ‘Camp’” (Sontag, “Notes on Camp”). Camp has become the method of deliberate exaggeration so needed to push the ironic utterances of today’s culture “over the edge”.

“Camp is the consistently aesthetic experience of the world. It incarnates a victory of ‘style’ over ‘content’, ‘aesthetics’ over ‘morality’ of irony over tragedy” (Sontag, “Notes on Camp”). Camp can be described as the playful side of irony, as camp is almost always ironic, but irony is not always camp. Where irony can often be tragic and pointed, camp is always celebratory. “Camp and tragedy are antitheses. There is seriousness in Camp (seriousness in the degree of the artist’s involvement) and, often pathos” (Sontag, “Notes on Camp”).

Irony, kitsch, camp all of these concepts and cultural forms of the postmodern, are heavily based in nostalgia. Camp is by its nature almost always a throwback to another time – that object that is seen as “oh so fabulous” and “oh so camp” today, was in its original context, cutting edge. The passing of time also elevates things to camp stature; the theatricality that comes from things once seen as contemporary that have become outmoded. There is often little foresight in the purveyors of design, pop culture, entertainment and fashion as to the shelf life of their products. With the fast paced thrill and turnover of fashions and fads, fashionable things become camp within a few short years. What was stylish becomes old and out of date. When the out of date object is too close to an experienced memory it is passé but give it a little time and it becomes fabulously camp. Sontag writes,

Of course, the canon of Camp can change. Time has a great deal to do with it. Time may enhance what seems simply dogged or lacking in fantasy now

because we are too close to it, because it resembles too closely our own everyday fantasies, the fantastic nature of which we don't perceive. We are better able to enjoy a fantasy as fantasy when it is not our own.

This is why so many of the objects prized by Camp taste are old-fashioned, out-of-date, *démodé*. ("Notes on Camp")

It is highly unlikely that the Madison Avenue ad men of the 1950's had any idea that their Chatelaine and Good Housekeeping pages full of plastic, smiling showroom dummies selling the lifestyle of the perfect housewife making a martini and bringing a pipe to their husband would later become the object of ridicule and eventually the object of kitsch fascination. Did any moviegoer of the 1940's and 50's think that the acting styles of matinee idols like Cary Grant and Doris Day would appear over exaggerated and become camp to future generations?

Objects, works of art or literature with no ironic intent at inception can become ironic in another time. Retro irony comes from many factors, including the campiness of stereotypes or "over the top" archetypes and characters, a situation of elevated drama or through academic ironic attribution giving the work more credibility and cachet than was possibly intended at creation. As with the work of Robert Frank, clichés at inception create ironies. However in a later interpretation of the same photograph, when those clichés become *passé*, a past irony can become exaggerated or an entirely new irony can be created where there once was none.

Although nostalgia is often sentimental and about loss it can also be ironic. Much like the connoisseur of camp the nostalgist looks at what is old, tatty, decayed and discarded and elevates and glorifies it. The *passé* becomes fabulous for its horribleness. The passing of time creates falling out of favour and throwing away, which in turn creates nostalgia for the campy or kitschy nature of the object or concept and it

returns to favour in a new and exaggerated form.

Like camp, nostalgia is also romanticized; the nostalgist has a selective memory (if lived) or selective knowledge (if not lived) of a past time:

Nostalgia, in fact, may depend precisely on the irrecoverable nature of the past for its emotional impact and appeal. It is the very pastness of the past, its inaccessibility, that likely accounts for a large part of nostalgia's power—for both conservatives and radicals alike. This is rarely the past as actually experienced, of course; it is the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire. In this sense, however, nostalgia is less about the past than about the present. It operates through what Mikhail Bakhtin called 'an historical inversion': the ideal that is not being lived now is projected into the past. It is memorialized as past, crystallized into precious moments selected by memory, but also by forgetting, and by desire's distortions and reorganizations. Simultaneously distancing and proximating, nostalgia exiles us from the present as it brings the imagined past near. The simple, pure, ordered, easy, beautiful, or harmonious past is constructed (and then experienced emotionally) in conjunction with the present—which, in turn, is constructed as complicated, contaminated, anarchic, difficult, ugly, and confrontational. (Hutcheon, "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern")

I am a nostalgist. I have an incredible love for the aestheticism of the past, especially that of the mid 20th Century. I am particularly fascinated with the 1950's – I enjoy the ignorant bliss of post-war era America and the packaged delight of the "happy days are here again" mentality of the time. To use Hutcheon's term, I create an "imagined past" a pick and mix of the elements I enjoy of the 1950's ignoring the elements that do not appeal to me.

My photographic work has almost always contained some level of this nostalgia. The Good Wife (Figs. 43-45) is a series of constructed photographs inspired by an article on the “happy pills” that were marketed to housewives in the 1950’s and 1960’s when these women became disillusioned with being perfect wives. I did not live the 1950s and I have no delusions about the repressive and ignorant circumstances of the era. I by no means want to be a 1950’s housewife smiling blankly as I prepare my husbands pipe and slippers but with my selective nostalgia I thoroughly enjoy the aesthetic of the time. The ignorance and naivety become the things that I love about the era. It is that foolishness, that foolish ignorance and mass painting over a sinister paranoid Cold War era with colourful plastic, pin up girls, happy housewives, idyllic suburbia and Leave it to Beaver that appeal to me. To me the 1950’s is “oh so fabulous” because “it is so camp”.



Figs. 43-45 Mussallem, Kathryn. The Good Wife, 1999.

Photography by its nature is a nostalgic practice; the moment happens and is over before the image is even recorded to a medium. As Roland Barthes points out, “What the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially” (4). Every viewing, theorization, critique and permutation of the image is a practice in preservation and memory of the moment that the button was pressed and the shutter opened and closed.

Susan Stewart in her examination of nostalgia On Longing, examines photography’s

instant reduction of a moment lived into a souvenir. The photograph at the click of the shutter becomes a transformed past.

The photograph as souvenir is a logical extension of the pressed flower, the preservation of an instant in time through a reduction of physical dimensions and a corresponding increase in significance supplied by means of narrative. The silence of the photograph, its promise of visual intimacy at the expense of the other senses (its glossy surface reflecting us back and refusing us penetration), makes the eruption of that narrative, the telling of its story, all the more poignant. For the narration of the photograph will itself become an object of nostalgia. Without marking, all ancestors become abstractions, losing their proper names; all family trips become the same trip—the formal garden, the waterfall, the picnic site, and the undifferentiated sea become attributes of every country. (138)

Photography is perhaps the best media for preservation but not a true documentation, because the photographer had to choose what moment he/she captured, what elements to leave in the composition and what to leave out, the type of photographic media, the method of printing, the colour palette chosen, the final image production at the hand of an editor and the contemporary use of digital image enhancement. All of these decisions and processes lead to an already twisted interpretation of the moment, a romanticized or critical version of the truth. And although we have always done so and still tend to accept a photograph as a document of truth, it has always been far from this.

In my current body of photographic work I am equally divided between two projects, both following in the path of this tender cruelty towards my subjects. Both projects consist of photographic portraits. The first is straight portraiture of randomly obtained strangers as my subjects. The second is a contrived portraiture, staged and theatrical,

of my friends and loved ones.

Pet Project, is a photographic portrait project of strangers, taken in the tradition of Arbus. For this series I enter into peoples lives and homes. I do not know these people until the moment in which I begin to set up for the shoot but during our time together and in subsequent conversations I learn about them. I gather many of my subjects from the online community website Craigslist, a website where one can buy, sell or rant about anything under the sun. My ad reads: "Graduate student to photograph you and your pets, in your home for free." I respond to all those who answer the posting and a date and time is set up for the shoot.

Some of the subjects are also found as I am walking down the street or sitting in a coffee shop. If they seem interesting, if the relationship between the owner and the pet excites me, I ask them to pose for me and give them my card. Surprisingly, many of these strangers from the street contact me, invite me into their homes and the relationship begins.

Who are these people who invite a stranger who solicited them over the internet or on the street into their homes? But then again who am I to have the desire to do it? I am a voyeur who pleasures in the "sneak attack", wearing the guise of photographer. Perhaps they are exhibitionists who want someone to see their private worlds.

Diane Arbus spoke about entering into people's (actually strangers') homes:

If I were just curious, it would be very hard to say to someone, 'I want to come to your house and have you talk to me and tell me the story of your life.' I mean people are going to say, 'You're crazy.' Plus they're going to keep mighty guarded. But the camera is a kind of license. A lot of people, they want to be paid that much attention and that's a reasonable kind of attention to be paid (Arbus 1).

In On Photography, Susan Sontag quotes Arbus in discussing her photographic license, “Photography was a license to go wherever I wanted and to do what I wanted to do” (41): Sontag goes on to write,

The camera is a kind of passport that annihilates moral boundaries and social inhibitions, freeing the photographer from a responsibility toward the people photographed. The whole point to photographing people is that you are not intervening in their lives, only visiting them. The photographer is supertourist and extension of the anthropologist, visiting natives and bringing back news of their exotic doings and strange gear. The photographer is always trying to colonize new experiences or find new ways to look at familiar subjects—to fight against boredom. For boredom is just the reverse side of fascination: both depend on being outside rather than inside a situation, and one leads to the other. (41-42)

The pets are my ticket, my invitation into these stranger’s worlds. These subjects, like those of Arbus and Owens, are unwitting participants in the irony. An irony that is created in the contrasts of environments and means, the cross section of people and places I explore: urban and rural environments (Figs. 46-47), from wealthy and refined to limited income and disorganized. These images are also filled with the clichés of pets that look like their owners, pets that take over an owner’s life, designer breeds that suit their young designer owners, the over pampered dog with an accessorized outfit and matching doggie booties.



Figs. 46-47 Images from the series Pet Project. These images illustrate the particular contrasts between the urban and rural environments that exist within the project.

Fig. 46 Mussallem, Kathryn. Jane, Vancouver BC, May 2007.

Fig. 47 Mussallem, Kathryn. Cheylene, Gibsons BC, June 2007.

People change their lives for the love of a pet. Animals can fill the void of a partner or child. Often potential partners are driven away by the pet owners' obsessions. In our time together many of the people that I photographed spoke of ex-partners who just did not understand or did not like coming in second place in terms of affections. In one instance one of my subjects (Fig. 48) had in her menagerie five cats, two dogs, a hedgehog, two turtles, four dwarf hamsters, three 60 gallon fish tanks filled with assorted fish, two love birds, a screaming child and an ex-husband. Upon returning two months later with prints of her images I found she had added two more dogs, another cat and three more turtles living in a small backyard swimming pool positioned in her once dining room.



Fig. 48
Mussallem, Kathryn. Jeanette, Coquitlam BC, May 2007.

Like my photographic subjects I am also the victim of my pets. The majority of this paper has been written in coffee shops, to avoid my cats who think a good place to take a nap is across my computer's keyboard. When I was scanning the images for this essay one of my cats decided that the scanning bed was an appropriate place to be cute (Figs. 49-50). I do not pass judgement on my subjects as an outsider. I am a part of their community. Maybe not to the extremes that some of them are, but I am a pet lover and owner who has had to adjust my life accordingly, to fit the needs of my two cats. This provides another level of irony to the project because I am a member of this same community – as I point out the absurdities in their lives and laugh at my subjects I am also laughing at myself.



Figs. 49-50
Mussallem, Kathryn. Catscans. 2007.

It has been asked of me if this is a portrait project on people and their pets or pets and their people. It is almost as if the portraits are of the pets, presenting me with a glimpse of their lives. “Here is my human, my toys and my outfits.” One of the many ironies of Pet Project is that the pet often wields the power in the traditional master and subordinate relationship.

In Pet Project, the photographs are not constructed. True to the moment, I do not move furnishings; I do not move a piece of dirt from the floor. I do however ask the

subjects to choose a location in their home that they want photographed, and I ask the subject to be comfortable with their pet and look straight at the camera. What I capture always exists even if just for 1/250 of a second. Like the images of Parr if the moment is horrible, ugly, ironic, funny, it is because for that fraction of a second it was. In this sense, they are as Roland Barthes terms it, “posed”.

What founds the nature of Photography is the pose. The physical duration of this pose is of little consequence; even in the interval of a millionth of a second (Edgerton's drop of milk) there has still been a pose, for the pose is not, here, the attitude of the target or even a technique of the Operator, but the term of an 'intention' of reading: looking at a photograph, I inevitably include in my scrutiny the thought of that instant, however brief, in which a real thing happened to be motionless in front of the eye... in the Photograph, something has posed in front of the tiny hole and has remained there forever. (Barthes 78)

The images are shot wide angle, as the rooms and environments tell more about the subject than an image of the people and their pets would. With every stain on the carpet and chewed up sofa the scale and scope of how the pet has taken over becomes apparent (Fig. 51). The wide shot also gives the viewer the clues needed to figure out the relationship between pet and owner. Is the pet merely a fashionable accessory to its owner or is the pet the center of the owner's world (Fig. 52)?



Fig. 51-52 Images from the series Pet Project, these images illustrate how the love of animals can take over an owner's lives.

Fig. 51 Mussallem, Kathryn. Jesse, Vancouver BC, September 2007.

Fig. 52 Mussallem, Kathryn. Larry, West Vancouver BC, July 2007.

There are many layers to the ironies in Pet Project: the obvious clichés of pet ownership, the juxtaposition of environments and lifestyles between different subjects, the reversal of relationship between pet and owner, the flat banality of the scenes and the unwitting participation of my subjects in the irony (Figs. 53-54). But the major irony in these images is that I am also one of these people. Like Owens in his suburban splendour, I see the world of the pet fanatic from the inside. I justify my intrusion because I am a member of their community; I am one of them. This is an act of self portraiture and like Owens' Suburbia a look at a community from within.



Fig. 53 Mussallem, Kathryn. James and Stacy, Vancouver BC, May 2007.

Fig. 54 Mussallem, Kathryn. Kristen, North Vancouver BC, May 2007.

By contrast, In Your Face – Beatings is a theatrical space where real life and fiction merge. These images are raw, harsh and rough, but the dramatic lighting and the over-the-top defined space of the studio hints at the theatricality of the imagery. In this series I play with these notions, especially that of the photograph as theatre. As Barthes writes,

Photography seems to me closer to the Theatre, it is by way of a singular intermediary (and perhaps I am the only one who sees it): by way of Death. We know the original relation of the theatre and the cult of the Dead: the first actors separated themselves from the community by playing the role of the Dead: to make oneself up was to designate oneself as a body simultaneously living and dead (31-32).

As a makeup artist and a photographer I have the ability to envision my creation without an intermediary – I am fully in control of my vision. In the beginning the models, all my friends who are not always comfortable in front of the camera, are nervous and unsure of what I want from them. As the makeup application continues they sink into the character. The more blood, bruises and sweat on their faces the more powerful the subjects feel and in turn the pose is struck.

The subjects are not victims. They gaze directly into the camera, confronting the viewer ready to take on the next fight. They are the victors of the imaginary battle and they are empowered by the struggle (Figs. 55-57). I utilize direct eye contact and large scale prints to confront the viewer – the close-ups on the faces add to this the feeling of confrontation and the unsettling nature of these images. Deep depth of field ensures that every bead of sweat is in focus – the chimera of the real is thus presented; the theatrical artifice of television and movies has become real and has desensitized us to the reality of violence as it is presented.



Figs. 55-57 Mussallem, Kathryn. In Your Face – Beatings, 2007.

Barthes called photography inherently a violent act. He utilized the loaded language of photography in his writings: “shooting”, “shots”, “punctum” and “targets”.

The Photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed (that we can sometimes call it mild does not contradict its violence: many say that sugar is mild, but to me sugar is violent, and I call it so) [...] Now it is this same relation which I find in the Photograph; however ‘lifelike we strive to make it (and this frenzy to be lifelike can only be our mythic denial of an apprehension of death), Photography is a kind of primitive theatre, a kind of Tableau Vivant, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead (91).

The ironic statement of In Your Face exists in the images themselves with the dichotomy of beautifully lit and presented images of seemingly horrific subject matter. I deliberately use soft Rembrandt lighting, a single source of light positioned on one side

that causes extreme contrast between light and shadow. When printed, the rich blacks that come from the chiaroscuro shadows mimic a charcoal drawing and draw the viewer in to an image that is beautiful yet horrible at the same time.



Figs. 58-60 Mussallem, Kathryn. In Your Face – Beatings, 2007.

However the larger irony in these images arises in the interpretation. In my experience of showing this work I get one of two reactions: those who love the images and ask when they can be the next victim, and the opposite, those who are immediately disturbed by the images and enter into a discourse of reasons why the images elicit such a reaction. The negative reactions elicited in this process have been visceral and are generally presented very vocally. The true irony in this project is not content based; it is a third person irony. The held opinion of the viewer becomes the agent in the irony and the interpreter becomes the victim of the irony. The viewer who approaches the work with a preset ideological viewpoint thus becomes a victim.

With this series I am relying on interpretation, that people intuitively choose to interpret art. As Sontag writes in Against Interpretation, “In most modern instances, interpretation amounts to the philistine refusal to leave the work of art alone. Real art has the capacity to make us nervous. By reducing the work of art to its content and

then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, conformable” (5). As a creator of irony I am dependent on this need to interpret. Without it the irony would not exist.

I am taking aim at my subjects, who all happen to be my friends and loved ones and members of my discursive community, who all have shared sensibilities. I utilize the language of Barthes’ photographic violence: “shooting”, “victims” and “targets” in my process. When I first conceived this project, these images were intended to be humorous and tongue in cheek. When I exhibited these images I had to come to terms with the fact that people outside of my discursive community did not see the same humour and the dramatic hyperbole that I had intended. With this realization, the image making process changed and became more provocative. I began to consider whom I could offend with the images and how I could extract a stronger reaction from this segment of my audience.

As the ironist I take no responsibility for their misinterpretation. The members of my discursive community, the victims (subjects) of the photographs, my friends and loved ones who are all members of my discursive community, get the irony and become players in the creation of the statement.

To summarize, my current body of work consists of two portrait-based projects with different approaches and intentions: the posed, staged but “true” portrait in Pet Project and the theatrical contrived portrait of In Your Face. The flat lighting, wide angled lens and seemingly objective perspective of strangers of Pet Project, in which the flatness of the light and straight expressions of the subjects give the viewer a voyeuristic and banal foray into their lives. This contrasts with In Your Face and its dramatic theatrical lighting, close-in telephoto lens and intimate confrontational perspective. Both projects have intentionally different approaches with intentionally different ironic interpretations. In Pet Project the subject is the unintentional victim of the irony and in In Your Face the viewer

becomes the active agent in the irony. Like the photographers who inspire me I am both cruel and tender to my subjects or shall I say “victims”?

Conclusion

Photography’s bitter eye offers an ironic and tender nostalgia. In the seven decades that have passed since Walker Evans, the judgmental eye of the photographic documentarian has passed from what began as a subtle observational jab at the absurdity of their subjects to become more cruel and obvious in their portrayal of the absurdities of modern life. No longer a subtle observation of the world from an ironic distance, photography has become blatant and often insulting in its examinations. In contemporary photography there is generally a very obvious victim of the ironic statement, instead of the subtle ironic gestures of the past.

Irony happens in the space between expression and understanding and the workings of irony are complex and numerous with endless variables. One person’s irony may not be another’s. The relationship that creates the understanding between the ironist and the interpreter of the irony is complex. In regard to photography there is a third party present in the creation of irony, the subject. It is the photographer, the subject and the viewer that create the irony. The passing of time, context, social status, cultural influences and a myriad of other factors lead to an image’s success in presenting irony.

Although I have chosen to speak about the documentary tradition in photography many of my own photographs are constructed. However, when it comes to irony the same rules apply. I am the ironist I decide what to create in the photograph whether it be in the inclusion of an object to suggest irony or the creation of a carefully constructed ironic tableau. In my early work I utilized kitsch, camp and nostalgia to create easy ironies. I started my workings through irony in my photographic process like those

of Martin Parr: obvious and stated. In my more recent work I have begun to create ironies that require interpretation – scenes and situations that may not be ironic to all who view them. These photographs can be just as easily interpreted as a simple portrait of a person and their pet or they can be seen as a fantastically ironic foray into the obsessive world of the animal lover. From my early street images full of clichés of Americana like those of Robert Frank, to the more blatant celebrations of the tacky and horrible like those of Martin Parr, in my practice I have attempted to work through almost every stage of photography's historical irony that I have discussed.

Photography is no longer limited to a subtle observation of the world from an ironic distance; as in most cultural ironies of the postmodern, photography has had to become more overtly blatant in its ironic statement, to be camp, hyperbolic and cruel. Today photography has almost written off the interpreter, since interpretation is hardly required to “get” the blatant irony; it relies solely on the creator (the photographer) and the victim (the subject) to succeed.

Works Cited

Arbus, Diane. Diane Arbus An Aperture Monograph. New York, NY: The Aperture Foundation, 1972.

Barthes, Roland. Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography. London, UK: Vintage, 2000.

Cruel and Tender. London, UK: The Tate, February 15 2008.
<http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/cruelandtender/>

Dexter, Emma, and Weski, Thomas. Cruel and Tender: The Real in the Twentieth-Century Photograph. London, UK: Tate Publishing, 2003.

Halberstam, David. Introduction. Suburbia. New York, NY: Fotofolio, 1999.

Hutcheon, Linda. Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony. London, UK: Routledge, 1995.

---. "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern". University of Toronto. 1998. April 17 2007.
Online, <<http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>>.

La Grange, Ashley. Basic Critical Theory for Photographers. Oxford, UK: Focal Press, 2005.

Owens, Bill. Suburbia. New York, NY: Fotofolio, 1999.

Parr, Martin. Mexico. New York, NY: Chris Boot Limited, 2006.

---. Small World. Stockport, UK: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2007.

Rosler, Martha. "In, Around and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)". The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography. Ed. Richard Bolton. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1989.

Sontag, Susan. Against Interpretation and Other Essays. New York, NY: Picador, 2001.

---. "Notes on Camp". Georgetown University Online. 1964. March 14 2007.
<<http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/theory/Sontag-NotesOnCamp-1964.html>>.

---. On Photography. New York, NY: Dell Publishing Company, 1977.

Stewart, Susan. On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993.

Works Consulted

Allison, Dorothy. Two or Three Things I know for Sure. New York, NY: Dutton, 1995.

Boym, Svetlana. The Future of Nostalgia. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2001.

Danesi, Marcel. Of Cigarettes, High Heels, and Other Interesting Things: An Introduction to Semiotics (Semaphores and Signs). New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1999.

Frank, Robert. The Americans. Zurich, Switzerland: SCALO, 1998.

---. Storylines. Göttingen Germany: Steidl Publishers, 2004.

Frizot, Michel. The New History of Photography. Köln, Germany: Könemann Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 1998.

Galassi, Peter. American Photography: 1890-1965. New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 1995.

Gillian, Lesley. Kitsch Deluxe. London, UK: Mitchell Beazley, 2003.

Greenberg, Clement, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch". Clement Greenberg. 1939. May 16 2007.

<http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/kitsch.html>

Hambourg, Maria Morris et al. Walker Evans. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Hemmingway, Wayne. Just Above the Mantelpiece. London, UK: Booth-Clibborn Editions Limited, 2000.

Martin Parr's Moving Pictures. Dir. Colin Luke, London, UK: BBC, 1999.

Newhall, Beaumont. The History of Photography. New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 1982.

Parr, Martin. Common Sense. Stockport, UK: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 1999.

---. Think of England. London, UK: Phaidon Press Limited, 2000.

Parr, Martin, and Badger, Gerry. The Photobook: A History Volume I. London, UK: Phaidon Press Limited, 2004.

---. The Photobook: A History Volume II. London, UK: Phaidon Press Limited, 2006.

Szarkowski, John. William Eggleston's Guide. 2nd ed. New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002.

Shore, Stephen. American Surfaces. London, UK: Phaidon Press Limited, 2005.

---. The Nature of Photographs. London, Phaidon Press Limited, 2007.

---. Uncommon Places: The Complete Works. New York, NY: Aperture Foundation, 2004.

Williams, Val. Martin Parr. London, UK: Phaidon Press Limited, 2002.

Winogrand, Garry. Public Relations. New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 2004.

Young, Toby, and Vanderbilt, Tom. "The End of Irony?" The Modern Review 1.14, April-May 1994, Pages 6-7.