WITHIN THE HAPPY CROWD

A THESIS

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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By

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Within the Happy Crowd explores one facet of America's inexorable relationship with the pursuit of happiness, depicting hyper-real environments where many people congregate in order to experience enjoyment. Visiting these types of places has become an American ritual, an experience associated with happy moments and memories. The presence of my camera interrupts these moments, resulting in an image of a peculiar and dramatized environment, one that is at times humorous but always a little unsettling.

These images are the result of a brief encounter between the individuals within these places and myself, an exchange created, mediated, and solidified by the camera. I was attracted to people who seemed simultaneously isolated from, yet tragically bound to, the saturated, plastic environment. A young boy is caught in an ambiguous gesture while standing in front of a carnival game, his overweight body personifying the larger than life, overly saturated environment in which he is situated. An employee wearing a Frisch's Big Boy costume is standing alone quietly gazing at the camera, his or her identity completely veiled by a smiling advertisement. A man quietly poses beside a giant, red and yellow Oscar Meyer Weinermobile, his protruding belly mimicking its shape. "Money is the Root of all Evil" is the simple message printed on his hat. These adults, teenagers, and children are situated in an environment where experience is commercialized and individuality generalized. They exist within a dichotomy of the prosaic and the spectacular, a tension between desire and delight.
Like the individuals in my images, I exchanged an admission fee in order to enter a place conceived and constructed around the idea of providing opportunities for enjoyment. This environment could be considered an exaggerated, fantastical simulation of a society in which each individual is incessantly encouraged to assume a position *Within the Happy Crowd.*
Dedicated to the adults, children, and teenagers I encountered while photographing *Within the Happy Crowd*. 
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO WITHIN THE HAPPY CROWD

Within the Happy Crowd is a collection of 21 color photographs taken with a twin-lens reflex medium-format camera during the spring and summer of 2006 (figure 1). I created the photographs within various entertainment venues in Ohio including the Ohio State Fairgrounds, Paramount Kings Island, Six Flags Wyandot Lake, and the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium. The photographs were digitally printed 9x9 inches, placed in a simple white mat and thin black frame, and presented side-by-side in Hopkins Hall Gallery, which is located on The Ohio State University’s campus in Columbus, Ohio. The images represent some of the individuals that I encountered during my time photographing within these places.

The decision to enter these locations with a camera was driven by an unexplainable desire to connect. I intended to examine the people I might come across in my day-to-day existence but with whom I would otherwise have had no opportunity to associate with. My camera granted me permission to momentarily interact to the adults, teenagers, and children I encountered in these places, individuals who were experiencing what could eventually be considered happy photographic moments in a family album. My images were taken in-between
these photographic moments. Through this process, the joyful place was transformed into something unfamiliar and disconcerting.

I spent many months with these photographs, carefully editing, scanning, printing, sequencing, reflecting, talking, writing, and defending. Throughout this time, my relationship to the individuals within my photographs developed. I was left to imagine the stories of their past and future, the circumstances of their presence in that particular moment in time. I was left to wonder about the society in which I am positioned and why this society feels the need to create enjoyable experiences through the construction of these types of places. The individuals were transformed into characters and the moments became tangible objects for me to contemplate, objects that I could share.

The relationship between the Happy Crowd and myself, an encounter created by the camera and cultivated through the photograph, is the essence of the work.
CHAPTER 2

DESIRE, DELIGHT, AND DISSATISFACTION

Early in the summer of 2006 I visited Wyandot Lake in Columbus Ohio, a water park that was owned and operated by Six Flags Incorporated. My approach to photographing was to walk through the crowds until I came across a particular person or interaction that attracted me. I would then spend as much time as possible attempting to capture this discovery.

I remember walking towards the carnival game and spotting a chubby boy, pictured in *Yelling Boy* (figure 2), wearing camouflage swimming trunks and no shirt. I spent a brief time photographing the boy before he ran off towards another attraction. I have little memory of the exact instance that I selected from the exposures I created of this child. As it often does, the photograph surprised me by revealing a moment that I did not have the ability to see, a single static event removed from an array of activity.

The boy stands just left of the frame’s center. He raises his hands up to his chest in an uncomfortable gesture while opening his mouth wide to speak. Behind the boy is a colorful carnival game with a collection of stuffed animal prizes including one orange lion that looks directly at him with a curious gaze. A
young girl, whose slim figure is in stark contrast to the boy's overweight stature, stands in the background, consumed in the game. While his round body directly confronts the camera, his eyes shift towards something in the distance, causing him to seem disconnected, unfulfilled, perhaps searching for something more.

*Within the Happy Crowd* is a collection of images taken from the following types of places:

1. Fair: A gathering of people to display or trade produce or other goods. The types of events and activities that occur at a fair can vary widely, but I am focusing on the midway of the fair, which typically houses rides, entertainment, and food.

2. Amusement Park: An environment constructed around the idea of providing entertainment that usually includes rides, games, and food.

3. Theme Park: An amusement park that is centered around a specific theme.

4. Animal Theme Park: An environment that combines the characteristics of an amusement park with a zoo.
The characteristics of the types of places represented in *Within the Happy Crowd* originated in the World’s Columbian Exposition, which took place in Chicago in 1893.

The exposition gave us the midway; the Ferris wheel (the first large-scale harnessing of technology solely for the purpose of fun); the presentation of exotic cultural environments as exhibits; a clearly sectored landscape design; a celebration of American technology and industry in a highly entertaining mode of presentation; the merger of engineering and planning to produce a unified, precisely controlled, and minutely organized environment; and perhaps the exhibition’s most important contribution, the actualization of a ‘Celestial City’ serving as a prophetic model for the utopian and spiritual perfection that America has always dreamed its destiny (Adams xiii).

The features introduced by the World’s Columbian Exposition unify the various places represented throughout *Within the Happy Crowd*. The Exhibition allowed customers to enter a miniature utopian world, one constructed around the idea of merging technological advances with entertainment. The
environments represented in *Within the Happy Crowd* are self-contained, idealized, organized, elaborately landscaped, geared towards entertainment, and reflect the pursuit of a utopian world and an American dream in which technology and progress give birth to a “Celestial City” on earth.

Individuals are drawn to these places with the expectation of a happy experience achieved through rides, games, souvenirs, and food. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, happiness can be thought of as “a state of well-being and contentment” or “a pleasurable or satisfying experience” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary). In American society, a great social and economical emphasis is placed on happiness. In fact, within the preamble of the United States Constitution, the “Pursuit of Happiness” is listed as an “unalienable”, or fundamental right. *Within the Happy Crowd* is a project that explores America’s relationship with this pursuit of happiness within these hyper-real places.

In his book *The End of Dissatisfaction? Jacques Lacan and the Emerging Society of Enjoyment*, author Todd McGowan uses the theories of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan to describe how an emphasis on the pursuit of happiness does not actually produce happiness. He describes a shift from an American society founded on the prohibition of enjoyment to a society that commands pleasure, and the dissatisfaction that accompanies this
commandment. For McGowan, one must experience a barrier to enjoyment in order to actually experience feelings of enjoyment.

In the past, it was perceived that society was based on a bond of dissatisfaction, enforced through the prohibition of enjoyment. Within this society of prohibition, individual enjoyment was sacrificed for the sake of the social order. “This type of society operates in the manner of a sports team- in order for the team to win, the individual must give up her or his dreams of wholly individual achievement and fit her or his abilities into the structure of the team” (McGowan 2). A shift has occurred in contemporary society. Instead of each individual working for the common good of the community, each person seeks individual enjoyment. Consequently, the concern for the community as a whole has diminished.

The shift from prohibition to commanded enjoyment has to do with the fact that public law has diminished and superego arisen. The superego is one of the divisions of the psyche formulated by Sigmund Freud. According to Lacan, the superego constantly demands a subject to enjoy.

“Unlike the public law, which prohibits enjoyment, the superego commands it. According to Lacan, ‘Nothing forces anyone to enjoy except the superego. The superego is the imperative of
jouissance- Enjoy!’ The rise of the superego and its demand for enjoyment is correlative to the transformation from a society of prohibition to a society of enjoyment” (McGowan 30).

For Lacan, yielding to the superego’s command to enjoy not only leaves the subject with an increased desire, but also strengthens the superego’s command. The command to enjoy is an omnipresent feature in a contemporary capitalistic society and is spreading abroad rapidly. Americans are bombarded by advertisements, each product seeming to offer enjoyment and the satisfaction of desire through consumption. In order for a capitalistic society to function, a subject must demand commodities. In order to demand a commodity, the commodity must have a sort of use-value for the subject. For the places represented in Within the Happy Crowd, that use value is enjoyment. The individuals within my photographs have entered a place structured around the idea of providing pleasurable experiences, a place where the imperative to enjoy is heightened.

While the subject is commanded to enjoy, he or she is faced with endless possibilities for pleasure, from purchasing a name-brand purse to buying a corndog at the State Fair. This leads the subject to consume, trying to fill him or herself with commodity after commodity in an effort to obey the superego’s
demands. Capitalism thrives on the desiring consumer, creating use-values for useless products. For example, Walt Disney World promises the fulfillment of dreams with a sign marking the entrance to its property: “Walt Disney World: Where Dreams Come True”. The consumer slips from commodity to commodity trying to obtain the impossible object that will provide satisfaction. In the end, one cannot follow a command to enjoy. Enjoyment must be experienced indirectly through prohibition from it. “The barrier to enjoyment is essential to the experience of it” (McGowan 7).

A barrier to enjoyment is necessary in order to experience enjoyment, but my photographs are taken in an environment constructed around the idea of providing enjoyment. Customers within these places are bombarded by opportunities for happiness, but the images allude to the inevitable dissatisfaction left by the super ego’s command to enjoy. Instead of the joyful expressions and happy situations, I present the moments of disconnection, the ambiguous expressions or disturbing interactions: the teenaged girl more interested in her cell phone than the spectacles that surround her, the woman pointing an angry finger at a child in front of a carnival game, or the boy with a “lost kid” tag and a concerned expression, lost within the bright colors and crowds of people.

The people within my photographs may at times delight in their surroundings, but are presented as individuals that continue to pursue
happiness. It is not *happiness*, but the *pursuit* of happiness that is an unalienable right. To pursue is “to find or employ measures to obtain or accomplish” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary). But what is this “something” that will provide measures to obtain or accomplish happiness? In order to understand why Americans might pursue happiness, I will address Lacan’s description of lack and desire.

Lacan was a self-described Freudian. Sigmund Freud was the founder of the psychoanalytic school of psychology, and was interested in studying the unconscious and conscious as divided parts of a human subject. Freud believed that certain repressed thoughts and feelings existed in one’s unconscious, and he worked to discover means to expose those thoughts. Freud was especially interested in uncovering unconscious desires through studying dreams. Freud believed that two processes were important in the formation of dreams: condensation and displacement. Condensation occurs when a complex meaning is compacted into a simpler, or singular idea. For example, the fear of a partner’s infidelity might be represented by an image of a hotel room. Displacement occurs when a symbol gets pushed into something associated with it. In this case, if one fears infidelity, he might dream of a past friendship in which he was betrayed. For Freud, these two mechanisms conceal repressed fears, and might be used to read the unconscious.
Lacan supported Freud's theories, but believed that Freud did not have the necessary tools to explain himself. For Lacan, linguistics is Freud's missing tool. He was interested in the theories of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who was concerned with basic units of language, which he called signs. The sign, for Saussure, consists of two united parts: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the sound of a thing, "not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression it makes on our senses" (Saussure 66), while the signified is the concept of a thing. For example, a signifier would be the sound "pig" while the signified would be the concept of the barnyard animal. Although their relationship is arbitrary, the signifier and signified together make up the sign and cannot be separated. Yet, Saussure contested that "the word arbitrary...should not imply that the choice of signifier depends entirely on the speaker...I mean that it is unmotivated, i.e., arbitrary in that it actually has no natural connection with the signified" (Sassure 68-9). What Saussure means is that the signifier "pig" does not naturally correspond to the signified barnyard animal, but since they are arbitrarily interconnected by language, the sign they constitute is impossible to disconnect. "A bond between the two antithetical forces-arbitrary convention by virtue of which choice is free, and time which causes choice to be fixed. Because the sign is arbitrary, it follows no law other than that of tradition, and because it is based
on tradition, it is arbitrary” (Saussure 74). For Saussure, a language is a network of signs, which take on meaning only when contrasted with other signs.

Lacan was interested in the relationship Saussure describes, but hoped to highlight the primacy of the signifier, which, like Saussure’s sign, derives meaning only through contrasting with other signifiers. For Lacan, there is no signified for the signifier to refer back to. The signifiers form a sort of endless chain effect in which meaning is always deferred to the next signifier. The signified ends up “slipping” beneath and between the individual signifiers. Because the signified never fully corresponds to any one signifier, existing solely in the spaces between, then the signified may only exist in the difference between signifiers -- a signifier means something only because it is contrasted with another signifier. For a simple example, one could think of himself as “male” because he is not “female.” This process does not really get to the heart of what “male” is, but rather defines “male” by contrasting it with something else.

Lacan’s description of the unconscious can be thought of like this continuous sequence of signifiers. Lacan believed that this system of language is deep within a person, so deep that it is involved in one’s unconscious desires. Lacan explains, “It is not only man who speaks, but that in man and through man it speaks, that his nature is woven by effects in which is to be found the structure of language, of which he becomes the material, and that therefore there resounds
in him, beyond what could be conceived of by a psychology of ideas, the relation of speech” (Lacan 284). For Jacques Lacan, it is not man who speaks, but unconscious desires that speak through man’s speech. In psychoanalysis, Lacan was interested not in what his subject is trying to explain, but the signifiers he actually speaks. For example, if a patient of Lacan says, “I’m not sure who handed me a spoon in my dream, but it wasn’t my mother,” Lacan might isolate and pay special attention to the word “mother.” When Lacan says, “It speaks in the Other,” (Lacan 275) he is saying that unconscious desires, the “it”, can be uncovered through interpreting one’s speech.

Lacan describes desire as “neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting.” Desire is particular like need but unclassifiable like demand, meaning that although desire has a particular object, it is ultimately insatiable. The object of desire is the center of all signifiers in the signifying chain. For Lacan, everyone wants to be or have this center of language, where nothing is lacking. One word Lacan uses to describe this center is phallus, which replaces Freud’s description of the penis within a child’s castration complex. The child perceives the desire of his mother to be the phallus, or identifies his mother with the phallus, so he wishes to be the phallus. If he can become the phallus, then he could end the separation between his self
and his mother, who has become Other. This desire to be the phallus creates a never-ending lack because one can never exist in this realm; this ability was alleviated once the baby entered into language, and was introduced into the rules and laws of society. The phallus is thus a signifier of desire and of a lack. Once the baby enters into language, or culture, he experiences castration or separation from the center, the Other, or the phallus and therefore lack. Language is always about this lack since signifiers are needed only when an object is missing. The phallus is the object, a signifier of this lack, which Lacan identifies as castration.

Considering Lacan's description of desire, one might conclude that every person is, from birth, lacking and will spend his or her life unconsciously slipping from object to object, just as from signifier to signifier, tying to obtain the impossible object of desire. The society of commanded enjoyment not only encourages the subject to enjoy, but provides endless opportunities for enjoyment. Yet, within the society of commanded enjoyment, desire is insatiable. An individual might purchase a Cotton Candy at the fair in an unconscious attempt fill the lack he or she is experiencing, but in the end, nothing can satisfy desire and each subject is left ultimately dissatisfied.

_Yelling Boy_ exists in an environment that begs him to enjoy, but he frustratedly opens his mouth to speak a language that is all about desire. He looks off into the distance, towards another vendor or brightly colored prize.
Within this environment, he moves from item to item trying to obtain the object that will satisfy him. His overweight body, which becomes part of the spectacle that is his environment, exemplifies this process of consumption, which ultimately leaves him unfulfilled. The tension between excess and lack, between the boy’s physical connection to the environment and the detached anxiety he radiates, are the characteristics that attracted me to him, and are the qualities that reoccur within the individuals I photographed.
CHAPTER 3

MONEY IS THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL

While photographing the 2006 Ohio State Fair, I encountered a
Weinermobile. A Weinermobile is an automobile intended to look like a hot dog
on a bun that travels across America in order to promote the cold cut company
Oscar Mayer. I spent a large amount of time photographing patrons admiring the
Weinermobile. I remember photographing the man in Money is the Root of All
Evil (figure 3), the photograph that I eventually selected out of this series of
images. I was attracted to his unkempt, gruff appearance, his large stomach,
which imitated the shape of the hot-dog bumper, and the water bottle stuffed into
his front pocket. At one point he noticed me, and briefly posed beside the
Weinermobile, looking angrily back at my camera.

In order to enter the fair, the man paid an admission fee. When he wanted
a drink of water, he purchased a bottle from a merchant. As the man enjoyed the
shade of the tree, he was bombarded by the giant Weinermobile advertisement.
During “free” time, this man is supported the consumer economy and was
surrounded by messages intending to promote various products. This is not to
say that the man might have been aware of this unavoidable actuality. Although
he was participating in the commodity-driven event, the man wore a hat with a small message that demonizes the bright, happy, bubbly Weinyermobile that accompanied him: “Money is the Root of all Evil.”

A society based on prohibition has shifted to a society completely centered around the pursuit of what was prohibited, enjoyment. German philosopher Karl Marx describes a similar shift in the first volume of his 1867 *Capital*. Where once the love of money and possession was looked down upon, contemporary society “greets gold as its Holy Grail, as the glittering incarnation of the very principle of its own life” (Marx 133). Marx believed that the shift towards a society based on the commodity was a negative one.

According to Marx, the central problem with a capitalistic society is the exploitation of labor, through which relationships between individuals transform into relations between commodities. To offer an example, an assembly line worker trades his labor power as commodity for the commodity of money, which he needs in order to survive. Through his labor process, the worker helps create bottles of water. The bottled water company then sells the bottled water on a world market for a higher price than the worker’s wage. The bottled water company keeps the profit from the exchange and, therefore, makes money by exploiting the worker’s labor. The bottled water is sold to the pot-bellied man at the fair, who has also traded his labor power for money and who has no
knowledge of the plant worker's association or involvement in the creation of the bottled water. The plant worker likewise has no knowledge of precisely what happens to the commodity he has helped produce. Therefore, the worker-become-commodity helps create but is simultaneously disconnected from his world as his or her individuality is replaced by commodity.

Marx believed that within a capitalistic society, commodities replace individuality and relations between people morph into relations between commodities. What was social interaction between individuals has disintegrated into "material relations between persons and social relations between things" (Marx 1). Marx calls this process "Commodity Fetishism" and stresses the simultaneous unifying and alienating effect on individuals existing in an economy built around the commodity. Within this system, consumers and producers have no agreement to provide for each other, and concern for community has transformed into self-interest. Marx describes individual existence in a capitalistic society as no longer based on being, but based on the commodity or on having.

In his 1967 work The Society of the Spectacle, theorist Guy Debord updates Marx's critique of the commodity, which was conceived of before the post-World War II modernization of Europe. The book, which is comprised of 221 theses, presents a Marxist critique of contemporary society. The "Spectacle" is a
complicated term with no singular definition. To begin with, the “Society of the Spectacle” is a society in which “the commodity completes its colonization of social life” (Debord 29). Indeed, it is hard to imagine an activity or entity that does not somehow serve or promote the commodity economy, including visiting a theme park.

Within Debord’s Society of the Spectacle, existence is based not on being or having, but only appearing. For example, events around the world are presented as spectacular images on the television screen so that one does not actually have to live life in order to passively inhale it. These events are used to promote the television channel, which is probably owned by a powerful corporation. In this way, life is reduced into an array of spectacle-commodities that serve the economy. While the Spectacle is life reduced to appearance it is also an incessant reminder that “everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear.” The attitude that it demands in principle is the same passive acceptance that it has already secured by means of its seeming incontrovertibility, and indeed by its monopolization of the realm of appearances” (Debord 15). The Society of the Spectacle does not only refer to consumer society, but also to all the deceitful means the economy employs in order to keep individuals passive: the positive image of a society in which relations between commodities have completely replaced relations between individuals.
The majority of Americans are caught in an endless cycle of working and spending, yearning to be closer to the Spectacle in order to quench desire. Leisure time is offered as a way to fill the worker's lack, yet individuals are still completely occupied by and in service to the commodity economy when spending time away from the job. Debord describes how an individual's time constitutes his or her existence. Time spent serving the Spectacle is a life lost and Debord believes that all time is occupied by service to the commodity economy. "There can be no freedom apart from activity, and within the spectacle all activity is banned- a corollary of the fact that all real activity has been forcibly channeled into the global construction of the spectacle. So what is referred to as 'liberation from work,' that is, increased leisure time, is a liberation neither within labor itself nor from the world labor has brought into being" (Debord 22).

I am documenting Americans during a time when every aspect of life seems to have been overcome by Spectacle. During the 1950s, photographer Robert Frank sensed this transition to an American life based on commodity. Frank, a Swiss immigrant, received a grant from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation in 1955 to document the United States. He later compiled 83 of his 28,000 exposures into a book entitled The Americans, first published in France in 1958, and the next year in the United States. Beat Generation writer Jack Kerouac composed the introduction to the book, and pointed out that "After
seeing these pictures you end up finally not knowing any more whether a juke box is sadder than a coffin" (Wells 93).

Frank chose to photograph the United States during a transitional period. World War II and the Great Depression had ended; the economy was rising, and along with it a booming consumer society. “Frank caught America at the point where commonplace life was about to be turned into myth, where even the banal and the prosaic was soon to be commoditized into spectacle” (Wells 93). I am photographing one aspect of American life approximately 60 years later, a time in which this spectacle has finished its commoditization of all life, when one does not need to visit the amusement park or fair to be completely bombarded by commodities intended to offer enjoyment. Reality mimics the hyper-reality contained within the places I photograph, and even the most banal becomes spectacular.

Frank seems keenly aware of the isolation experienced by Americans during the shift to a society that will eventually be taken over by commodity. Instead of photographing bright, happy, hopeful faces, his photographs are pessimistic and his subjects despondent. These qualities remain even when Frank points his camera at the most joyful of occasions, like a parade. The image Parade Hoboken, New Jersey (figure 4) depicts two windows of what appears to be an apartment building overlooking a parade in New Jersey. There
is an American flag that hangs over the widows, covering one of the individual’s faces. The other individual’s face is hidden beneath a window blind. Although the two individuals appear side-by-side in Frank’s frame, they are separated by a wall dividing their apartment buildings. The image negates the individuality of these two individuals by covering their faces and alludes to their simultaneous isolation, both physical and emotional, and connection by placing the separate apartments into one frame.

The subjects are bound by a title, *The Americans*, but each American Frank photographs appears to be disconnected from the next. There is little interaction within groups of people and individuals become lost within spectacle of their environment. Frank’s images were difficult for Americans to digest because they did not reflect their country in the way that Americans were used to seeing themselves represented.

America in the 1950s is now often recalled as an idyllic world of suburban homes, each with a station wagon parked in the driveway, steaks sizzling on the patio grill, and a brand-new television set in the living room. On that TV set - in a kind of closed loop - we see the Ozzi and Harriet Show, Leave it to Beaver, or some other version of white, middle-class family life. Obviously that
picture never captured the whole truth. It corresponds to an image of America offered in much of the popular photography and advertising of the time. There were others who provided an alternative view (Wells 147).

Frank’s images, although they do not present a completely objective view of American life in its entirety, are a telling documentary of the United States during this period through the eyes of an outsider.

Frank’s photographs were a departure from previous, more concerned documentary styles of photographers like Jacob Riis, Lewis Hine, or The Farm Security Administration Photographers. Frank set a precedent, and numerous documentary photographers in the 1960s and beyond followed in his tradition, presenting their personal reactions, investigations, and questions towards life through documentary-style photography. I am following in this tradition by investigating a subject, questioning what I encounter, and inserting my own personal reactions. I use photography as a means of exploration.

When asked to address the criticism towards his photographs, Frank stated, “Above all, I know that life for a photographer cannot be a matter of indifference. Opinion often consists of a kind of criticism. But criticism can come out of love.” According to Frank, the source of a photographer’s criticism may not
be necessarily birthed from a malicious place, but can be accompanied by empathetic intentions. For example, perhaps Frank found the increasing post World War II consumer society in the United States disturbing, and was attempting to express his concern for the changing society. I have been accused photographing overweight people in order to objectify or make fun of them - a criticism that becomes especially harsh when directed at my photographs of children. The fact that there are reoccurring overweight people in my images is both deliberate and coincidental. A large number of the adults and children I encounter are overweight as a result of the heightened consumption that the culture encourages. I want to display these images in order to comment on the society to which these individuals are inevitably bound. Is the society in which these individuals exist a factor in their health? Can the lack that is reinforced and the alienation that is created by this society be causing these individuals to over-consume? These are some of the questions that arose when photographing Within the Happy Crowd.
CHAPTER 4

THE DOCUMENTARY QUESTION

One spring day in 2006 I visited the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium. While photographing the participants there, I ran across an employee dressed in a Big Boy costume. Big Boy is the mascot for Frisch’s Big Boy restaurant chain. The zoo was busy that day, and patrons were lining up to say hello to Big Boy. Instead of capturing the happy interaction with the corporate mascot, I waited patiently for the moment I wanted: Big Boy alone in my frame (figure 5).

The individual beneath the Big Boy costume’s identity is completely shrouded by advertisement. The worker is not only serving a corporation, but has also transformed into a walking, positive personification of this corporation. Because Big Boy is photographed alone and not surrounded by excited, happy people, the photograph has a static quality, and Big Boy becomes more threatening than friendly.

To a viewer, it might seem as though he or she is having a one-on-one encounter with the strange, smiling character. I placed Big Boy to the left of the center of my frame and photographed from a low perspective. Because of the lower perspective and asymmetry, Big Boy seems a bit more precarious than if
one were to view him at center eye level. By itself, the camera is an objective machine. The decisions a photographer makes when using the camera contribute to how the photograph will communicate to a viewer. Roland Barthes describes, “Man’s interventions in the photograph...all effectively belong to the plane of connotation...” (Barthes 44). Through fundamental photographic actions such as framing, vantage point, and the decision of when to press the shutter, I have transformed the characteristics of the actual event into an image that communicates my personal reaction to the subject.

Throughout my process of photographing, I have been confronted with certain questions towards my role and responsibilities as a photographer. Most photographers that represent social situations through photography are considered “documentary” photographers. Scottish filmmaker John Grierson is responsible for creating the term “documentary” in 1926 “to designate work based upon the ‘creative interpretation of reality’” (Wells 252). “Documentary” is defined as something “of, relating to, or employing documentation in literature or art; broadly: FACTUAL, OBJECTIVE” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary).

If the term documentary implies objectivity, but the very act of photographing is subjective, what would be the definition of a documentary photograph? Obviously we cannot classify documentary photography as purely
objective photography, because this does not exist. In his essay, “Making sense of Documentary Photography”, James Curtis explains:

A documentary photographer is an historical actor bent upon communicating a message to an audience. Documentary photographs are more than expressions of artistic skill; they are conscious acts of persuasion. The work of the most accomplished photographers reveals a fervent desire to let images tell a story. Documentarians from Mathew Brady to Dorothea Lange succeeded because they understood the desires of their audience and did not shy from molding their images accordingly. Far from being passive observers of the contemporary scene, documentary photographers were active agents searching for the most effective way to communicate their views (Curtus 5).

If one uses Curtis’ description, a documentary photograph would be a photograph that is not constructed beyond the essential acts of framing, timing, etc., and that is used in order to communicate an idea or feeling about this subject. I am approaching my environment as it exists- that is, I am not posing the individuals within my frame or telling certain individuals to create a certain
expression. While the images are "straight" in this sense, I am also making very
deliberate decisions about where to point the camera and when to click the
shutter. These decisions are driven by my personal reaction to the environment.

If I digitally manipulate my images, are they still considered "documentary"
photographs? For example, in the image Boy Scout, a pole behind the boy's
head was distracting, so I removed it using a computer application (figure 6).
Does this mean that this is not a documentary image anymore? What if I change
his expression, exaggerating his frown, is this no longer a documentary image?
If I told him to frown and then took his image, would this be any different? What
are the boundaries between what is truth and what is fiction, and where does
"documentary photography" fit in?

What seems to be the most pressing concern towards digital
manipulation is a threat to the photograph's perceived relationship to the truth.
Objective truth in photography is a modernist characteristic- the photograph is
"taken" from reality, captures a moment in time, and is not constructed.
Modernist photographer and leader of the F64 group, Edward Weston once
stated, "The problem of learning to see photographically would be simplified if
there were fewer means of control than there are" (Wells 106). Weston alleged
that the moment of camera exposure was the central act of photography and
encouraged minimal manipulation by the photographer. Weston believed that
the essence of photography could be achieved by using the machine’s intrinsic qualities to clearly present what he called “The Thing Itself.” Surely, Weston would dismiss the means of digital imaging as “not photographic”, and would clump digital manipulation along with other methods that would diminish the epitome of the object being represented, such as cropping after the fact, selective focus, etc. His search for an “objective truth” (Mitchell 8) was embedded in precise representation, in using the camera for its unique qualities, and digital photography opens a superfluous door to manipulation and post-exposure control. The moment of exposure, the moment that Weston considered to be most important, becomes the first in a long line of artistic decisions for many photographers.

The very existence of digital imaging makes the truth-value of any photograph open to discussion, since any photograph can be faultlessly altered. With digital manipulation, “content and form” can be separated, shattering Henri Cartier-Bresson’s notion of the “decisive moment.” Cartier Bresson once stated:

Photography implies the recognition of a rhythm in the world of real things. What the eye does is to find and focus on the particular subject within the mass of reality; what the camera does is simply to register upon film the decision made by the eye...
photograph, composition is the result of a simultaneous collation, the organic coordination of elements seen by the eye. One does not add composition as though it were an afterthought superimposed on the basic subject material, since it is impossible to separate content from form. Composition must have its own inevitability about it (Goldberg Photography in Print 384).

Today, Cartier-Bresson would not necessarily have to wait for that perfect moment, but could simply place elements into the frame, however he might like. Fred Ritchin considers:

The ‘decisive moment,’ the popular Henri Cartier-Bresson approach to photography in which a scene is stopped and depicted at a certain point of high visual drama, is now possible to achieve at any time. One’s photographs, years later, may be retroactively ‘rephotographed’ by repositioning the photographer or the subject of the photograph, or by adding elements that were never there before but now are made to exist concurrently in a newly elastic sense of space and time (Squiers 28).
Digital imaging gives the photograph an additional means of post-photographic manipulation, a manipulation that ends Bresson’s “inevitability” of in-camera composition.

Prior to the world of Photoshop fix, photographs had been staged in order to achieve a certain composition or as a means of propaganda. What brings about concern is that with digital manipulation the artist’s hand is so easily inserted into the photograph’s trusted relationship to a specific time and place. The photographer does not have to succumb to the circumstances of the world but may construct his own visual reality.

The camera might be a machine, but photographing is not an objective act. Vicki Goldberg states, “There is no such thing as a truly neutral photograph or one without a viewpoint and a judgment, except perhaps those taken mechanically in a particle accelerator or an orbiting telescope” (Goldberg, Peter Granser, Coney Island 14). In manipulating space and time, digital imaging reinforces the fictional nature of the photograph, which has existed all along, and emphasizes photographed objects as signifiers, as suggestions, as accessories to the truth rather than equivalents of truth. Martha Rosler criticizes the truth-value of the straight photograph to begin with, stating that “Without an adequate discussion of the context and meaning of the social relations represented, such images cannot work, unless the audience already shares certain presumptions
about what things mean" (Rosler 292). To say that digitally manipulating a photograph diminishes the "truth" within the photograph wrongly assumes that the photograph ever equaled truth. The neutrality of a photograph is alleviated once the photographer isolates the entire moving world into a small, static frame.

For example, Dorothea Lange's iconic 1936 photograph *Migrant Mother* (figure 7) depicts a woman named Florence Owens Thompson, the wife of a migrant farmer working in the United States. Working for Farm Security Administration, Lange’s photographs were intended to convey the plight of migrant farm workers during the Depression. Lange used the camera in order to communicate certain feelings towards the subject. Lange framed the image closely, and chose an instance in which Thompson gazes away from the camera with two children helplessly leaning over her shoulder. Lange could have chosen a moment in which Thompson locks directly at the camera or a moment in which she is interacting with her children. Instead, Lange decided to photograph Thompson within a moment and gesture that makes her seem tired yet strong, and her children look as if they are helpless and dependent. Lange has made choices such as how to frame the image, from what vantage point to shoot, and at what moment to click the shutter, in order to communicate something about her subject.
Photography should not be criticized for breaking an allegiance to reality because a photographer makes certain decisions through the basic act of photographing that shatter the objectivity of an image. I controlled the machine that created the photographs contained in *Within the Happy Crowd*. Although the images do contain factual information as to the way things appeared in a particular place at a particular time, *Within the Happy Crowd* is a collection of photographs that also represent my personal reaction to and experiences within this environment.
CHAPTER 5

PRESENTING THE HAPPY CROWD

One summer day at Paramount's King's Island, I spotted a young boy crying in front of a tent with a sign that read, "Balloon Time". A woman with a tired, stern face and wet, stringy hair accompanied the child. As is the case with all of the individuals within my photographs, this mother and child seemed to display an awkward detachment from the fantastical environment, a quality that caused me to linger with them for several moments.

*Woman With Balloons* (figure 8), the photograph I selected from the series of images I took of this mother and child portrays a moment in front of a carnival game. The mother is holding the balloons that she picked up from the "Balloon Time" tent. She is looking sternly, almost violently, at the boy, saying something to him, and pointing an accusatory finger. He points his own finger back towards his body in response. The balloons that the lady holds in her hands stretch in the opposite direction, as if in response to her frightening characteristics. In the background one can make out the blurry colors and shapes of the amusement park rides and vendors.
A viewer coming to this image would not know the circumstances of the event. They would not know that the boy was crying in front of the “Balloon Time” stand and they would not know that I spent a large part of the day following this boy. The details are left to the imagination: What is this woman saying to the boy? Did the boy misbehave? What happened before this moment and what will happen next? Once photographed, real individuals transform in characters and actual situations morph in dramatized scenes. I want the viewer to be left to uncover and get lost within the stories contained in each composition. As photographer Diane Arbus once pointed out, “A photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it tells you the less you know” (Phillips 278).

When asked to address photographer Diane Arbus’ images, Peter Bunnell, former curator of photography at The Museum of Modern Art once commented, “It seems to me, what disturbs people more than the subjects of these pictures, is the intensity of their power to dominate us, to literally stop us in mid-life and demand we ask ourselves who we are” (Phillips 50). Arbus, who was born in 1923, was a native of New York City. Arbus is probably best known for photographing “freaks”, people on the fringes of society like midgets, transvestites or exhibitionists. What interests me about her photographs is not the depiction of these people as much as her depictions of “normal” people, individuals she somehow managed to represent in a way that brought about their
freakish qualities. For me, her work is not about individual people, but a group of people and the oddities that exist within this group.

In 1963, Arbus applied for a Guggenheim foundation grant. The words she used to articulate what she intended to do with her photographs are of importance to me as I am trying to pinpoint what it is, exactly, I am interested in when photographing:

I want to photograph the considerable ceremonies of our present because we tend while living here and now to perceive only what is random and barren and formless about it. While we regret that the present is not like the past and despair of its ever becoming the future, its innumerable inscrutable habits lie in wait for their meaning. I want to gather them, like somebody’s grandmother putting up preserves, because they will have been so beautiful...

These are our symptoms and our monuments. I want simply to save them, for what is ceremonious and curious and commonplace will be legendary (Phillips 41).
Arbus' work is about a group of people, Americans, and the activities in which they participate. She wanted to document these "symptoms", "monuments", or "ceremonies of our present," because she felt that they were beautiful, significant, and telling of a group of people. I feel that my photographs are representing one piece of what Arbus is referring to - a concentrated look of a particular "ceremony" of my present time. Through Arbus' statement, we know that she was not intending to represent these things in order to evoke change or understanding. Rather, her intention was to gather and collect, to point at, and to question the society in which she found herself.

A striking characteristic of Arbus' photographs is her ability to capture a sort of loneliness or isolation in her subjects. Even the most normal person seems to carry a quality of "otherness." Colin Wood, the distressed boy represented in Child with a Toy Hand Grenade in Central Park, N.Y.C. 1962, (figure 9) as an adult explains, "She captured the loneliness of everyone. It's all people who want to connect but don't know how to connect" (Segal 2). Perhaps Arbus felt that these people were connected through this characteristic, and that the "ceremonies" she captured on film were both a connecting factor and attempt to connect to one another.
Arbus initially worked as a photojournalist using a 35mm camera. By the 1960s, Arbus had started to use the same camera that I used to complete this project, the Rolleiflex medium format twin-lens reflex. Arbus’ work, like mine, is largely about the relationship between photographer and subject, and the exploration of a subject through photography. She would actually speak to her subjects, and in the majority of cases they were aware of her presence.

Diane Arbus’s [sic] personal and distinctive photographic work is rooted in her sophisticated understanding of the relationship between photographer and subject. In a manner unique among her contemporaries, Arbus rendered the interaction between these two parties as a self-conscious and collaborative meeting (Phillips 50).

Although I do not speak to my subjects as Arbus does, my work is often about this interaction between photographer and subject. Although my subjects are not posing for my camera, in many cases they see the camera and are aware, if only for a brief instant, that a photograph is being taken.

Photographer Stephen Shore describes, “As an object, a photograph has its own life in the world. It can be saved in a shoebox or in an album or in a museum. It can be reproduced as information or as an advertisement. It can be
bought and sold. It may be regarded as a utilitarian object or as a work of art. The context in which a photograph is seen affects the meanings a viewer draws from it" (Shore 10). The images captured *Within the Happy Crowd* were transformed into objects, framed and matted, and placed behind glass in a gallery setting, a setting that demands a kind of specific attention from an audience.

I decided to print my images rather small, specifically 9x9 inches. I did not want the work to forcefully confront the viewer, but for a viewer to move towards the work (figure 10). The images were presented side-by-side on a wall, with a considerable amount of space separating them (figure 11). I wanted the viewer to pause at each particular moment as they walked through the gallery, but to also consider the work as a whole. I felt that these decisions reflected the way that I photographed. When photographing, I would isolate a single individual out of an array of activity. The subject did not confront me, but I quietly pursued the subject with my camera. The images represent small instances within a vast environment and single individuals within a large crowd.

The images were presented with a simple white mat and black frame. I wanted the entire emphasis to be placed on the image, and did not want presentation to distract from what was occurring within it. At the same time I wanted to use presentation in order to point out that this photograph, the
representation of this particular individual at this particular time, is important. The moment is privileged through the act of photography, but I wanted to emphasize this even further by displaying the image with extreme care.

I decided to title my images by simply describing what I was looking at when I took it. The title often offers a glimpse into why I took the image or into what I find interesting within the image, or points to a tiny detail that is of extreme importance within the image. For example, the message on a man’s hat in Money is the Root of All Evil (figure 12).

Within the Happy Crowd began as one walked through the gallery door with Amusement Park Landscape (figure 13). The image was taken inside of Paramount’s King’s Island. I had photographer Diane Arbus in mind when I created the image. Although the photographs Arbus exhibited mainly represented people, she would occasionally include a photograph that did not represent a person. The images are still about this group of people, but instead of representing the actual individuals, they represent odd situations or environments. For example, the image Castle Disneyland (figure 14) represents a fictitious, dreamlike, utopian environment, a reflection of the fact that Americans tend to construct hyper-real environments in order to enjoy themselves.
After seeing Arbus’ work, I began to try and create similar breaks within my imagery. I would make a conscious effort to photograph the structures and objects within the spaces I was photographing. Amusement Park Landscape alludes to fact that Americans are compelled to transform ordinary objects into something spectacular in order to create a more enjoyable atmosphere. In this case, a fence has been painted with bright green dots in order to signify “fun.”

I decided to keep Amusement Park Landscape on the wall facing away from the rest of the work because it represents the edge of the park, the separation between utopian, fantasy environment and the exterior reality. I wanted to remind the audience that by viewing Within the Happy Crowd, they are entering a self-contained environment that was, in a sense, constructed as a way to escape the characteristics of the outside world.

Beneath the title of the exhibition and beside my artist’s statement I placed Yelling Boy (figure 2). If I had to choose one image to represent the entire body of work, it would be Yelling Boy. I believe that the young boy in the image is a perfect metaphor for the group of people I am photographing, completely bombarded by bright, happy things, moving from object to object in an attempt to become fulfilled, but ultimately dissatisfied.

On the wall adjacent to Yelling Boy I placed Big Boy (figure 5). The two “boys” are similar in appearance, both white and have brown hair in a similar cut.
But while *Yelling Boy* is a real overweight, or "big" boy, *Big Boy* is a simulation of a similar type of boy, a simulation that is ironically intended to promote a fast food company which sells the type of unhealthy food that *Yelling Boy* probably consumes in order to look the way that he does.

Also on the adjacent wall to *Yelling Boy* is *Money is the Root of All Evil* (figure 3). Along with *Big Boy* this image introduces the notion that money is what creates these particular places and the objects within them. The desire of the public to experience happiness causes them to consume a particular product, whether that product is an Oscar Meyer Weiner, or a trip to an amusement park. This man, like the majority of Americans, seems aware of the negative features of a society fueled by commodity but is an active participant in society.

I placed the remaining 17 images inside of the gallery. I arranged the images so that that the first and last photographs seen, depending on where one would begin looking at the series, were either *Boy Scout* or *Girl Scout*. (figure 15) I encountered the children represented in *Boy Scout* and *Girl Scout* during parade line-ups on two separate occasions at the Ohio State Fair. *Girl Scout* represents a young, chubby girl who inelegantly holds an American flag while smiling back at my camera. *Boy Scout* depicts a young boy who holds an American flag in front of a Funnel Cake stand and frowns back towards my camera. Because of the decision to flank the body of work with the scouts, there
is no definite beginning or end. Instead, the body of work is presented to the viewer by the scouts.

I wanted the next images in the series to disturb the iconic symbol of the flag and innocence and naivety the scouts represent. I decided to place Don’t Ask me 4 Shit (figure 16) next to Boy Scout. The photograph Don’t Ask me 4 Shit depicts a middle-aged man holding a cane in one hand and a power-aid in the other. He is directly confronting the camera in a confused daze. His green shirt has stains on it, and he wears a hat that says, “Don’t Ask me 4 Shit.” His hat’s message reflects the attitude in the society of commanded enjoyment. Instead of each individual acting in order to support and help his fellow man, that person is encouraged to take care of him or herself, to spend the majority of time and energy in order to better one’s situation, not to improve the society as a whole. This is a stark contrast to the symbol of American citizenship and leadership that a boy scout might represent.

Float (figure 17) is the image that I decided to place next to Girl Scout. 

Float was taken inside of a water park, and represents adults and children floating in inner tubes down an artificial river. People can literally “float” and allow the construction of the environment to dictate where they go. This alludes to the idea that one may literally “float” through life in a consumer society, as life can be largely dictated by a greater force.
Boy in Crowd and Girl in Crowd (figure 18) were the next two images in the sequence, and faced each other across the gallery. I found that while sequencing my images, it became interesting to repeatedly contrast adults with children. The adults in my images typically seem naïve and aloof which creates an interesting dialog with the children, who typically seem critical, dissatisfied, confused, or even angry. These particular images represent young children lost within the activity of the Ohio State Fair grounds. Girl in Crowd wears pig tails, a pink striped shirt and glasses. While other people are distracted by the sights and sounds that surround them, the girl holds her mother’s hand and looks critically back at the viewer. The young boy angrily looks up from the shadow of the crowd, the only dark character facing the camera out of the array of people and bright colors that surround him.

The other 11 prints in the series were placed along a long wall, a collection of moments from my time Within the Happy Crowd (figure 19). As the audience moved throughout the exhibition, they encountered various children and adults, sights, interactions, and instances. A woman wears a crooked, toothy grin that mimics a giant cartoon starfish monument positioned behind her. A young boy operates a bumper car, expressing a violent anger as he races through the frame. Two State Troopers protect a crowd of people who have gathered to watch a parade. Distrustfully glaring at the viewer, a chubby girl
holds a corndog and sips from a giant container holding bright, red liquid. A group of fair patrons walk in front of a kiosk begging them to purchase a variety of fried foods. A band member wearing a red, white, and blue outfit marches through the frame, beating a drum while staring angrily back at the viewer. An excited, obese child races in front of a cluster of people and attractions to the front of a roller coaster ride line. Two frowning children stick their heads through cartoon cutouts to pose for a mother's snapshot. The photographs depict peculiar individuals against the colorful, fantastical environment and moments that are occasionally funny, but always a bit disturbing.

I decided to place A Touch of Class (figure 20) in the center of the long wall of photographs. While photographing at The Ohio State Fair, I came across a photo booth, where patrons could pay to have their portrait taken with a background of their choice. Outside of the photo booth was a wall of photographs, examples of images that past customer’s had purchased. The images on the wall include a father and son posing in front of a Nascar racing car, two teenaged boys posing in front of $100 bills and a giant gold watch, and teenaged girl posing in front of a Playboy bunny.

At the bottom of the image, there is a photograph if a young couple and two young children. Behind the family is a large drawing of two wine glasses in a toast and a label "A touch of class." I decided that this phrase should be the title.
of the image. How much money one has affects what one might be able to afford in order to quench desire. The people I photograph are able to afford the admission fee to the fair or amusement park for entertainment. These people are choosing to represent themselves as something else, to place themselves next to sought-after, yet perhaps unattainable, items. I have chosen to represent these people in particular way through my photographs. In this central image, the same individuals have chosen to place themselves in a photograph, and have decided how they would like to be represented.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

My interest in photography grew out of an appreciation of the photograph’s ability to transform my familiar, moving world into a strange, still, and unexpected scene. Moments and interactions that seemed fleeting become dramatized while ordinary individuals transform into important characters. The photograph causes me to think differently about my environment, to question what I have grown used to, and allows me to explore the world in which I have found myself situated.

Each time I view the photographic representation of my experience *Within the Happy Crowd*, I become fascinated by the results. Individuals that quickly passed before me become frozen within a single image containing an indefinite amount of stories. Adults and children that had briefly made eye contact with my camera became fixed in a permanent, unforgettable gaze. The camera gave me the ability to slow down this place and to investigate the environment and the characters I encountered within it.

*Within the Happy Crowd* deals with the notion of desire, and how that desire might be capitalized on in contemporary society. The individuals in my photographs are engaged in a pursuit for happiness, a desperate search that
fueils the society in which they exist. This society continually reinforces a sense of lack in each individual, causing them to seek possessions, or experiences, in order to fill that deficiency. The places in my photographs are attractive because they offer an escape from the outside world, an opportunity to enter a miniature utopia filled with joy. Yet, even in an environment in which people are entirely inundated by happy things, the photograph shows us disturbing moments. Within these instances we see that the happy crowd is ultimately unfulfilled.

I am a member of the happy crowd. Although my visits to these places might begin with different intentions than my subjects, I find that through photographing I am attempting to close some sort of gap, to quench a desire to connect, to better understand the society in which I am positioned. Instead of cotton candy or the Ferris wheel, instead of snapshots to place within a family album or the stuffed animal prize from a ring toss game, my objects of desire became the characters within these places, *Within the Happy Crowd.*
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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