BERENICE ABBOTT, AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHER

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in Photography and Cinema

by

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1981

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my daughter, Emilie, who has endured with me the hardships of balancing home responsibilities with career and academic commitments. At the time for her advanced education, it is hoped these accomplishments will be an inspiration to her.
Berenice Abbott and Bruno Poulin, By Mary Ann Anderson
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest gratitude goes to Berenice Abbott for her cooperation on this work and whose accomplishments are an inspiration to me.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to investigate the ideas and photographs of the American photographer, Berenice Abbott and to direct the attention of the academic world to Berenice Abbott as an important 20th Century artist.

A thorough search of the literature about Berenice Abbott revealed that no theses or dissertations have been written specifically about her to date, although she has published many times during her career. The Ohio State University Libraries, including the services of the Interlibrary Loan Department, The Columbus Public Library, and the State of Ohio Public Library were invaluable in this study and provided over 100 articles by and about Berenice Abbott for this research project. All of Abbott's books, with the exception of A Portrait of Maine, are owned by Ohio libraries and provided much information also. However, much of the biographical information about Abbott was related to me in a personal interview with Miss Abbott at her home in Maine in April, 1981. Some of the biographical material was extracted from the Oral History Project Interview conducted with Berenice Abbott by David Tate and James McQuaid of the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester, New York.
The Oral History Project Berenice Abbott Interview transcript totals 664 pages of biographical information on tape related to David Tate and Jim McQuaid. The material is classified "open for reading; permission required to cite or quote." The Oral History Interview was conducted in March, 1975, and became available for research late in 1977.

While limited by copyright in the use of Abbott's images in this writing, photo copies from her published books are included for easy reference during their discussion in the following chapters of this thesis. Such use of photo copies is permissible under the regulations of the Graduate School and current copyright laws governing reasonable use for scholarly writing. Further, written permission has been granted by the artist for use of her biographical information in this thesis.

Perceptions are filtered by experience, and it would be easy to say that Berenice Abbott was influenced by the work of Man Ray, Eugene Atget, and other artists with whom she associated when she began to practice photography. Here, an important distinction must be made. Berenice Abbott had already experienced many artforms and expressions before embarking on a career in photography. Therefore, this thesis explores several important things about Abbott. First, she came to Man Ray's studio with a broad background of expertise in the arts (drawing, painting, sculpture, performing arts). This fact is important because of parallels that have been drawn by critics between Abbott's and Ray's work. This distinction must be made to clarify Abbott's position as an individualist in photography.
While a study of perceptions that form an artist's vision are beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to recognize that life experience—study, interaction with contemporaries, and self-development—are factors that comprise one's perceptions of life. Berenice Abbott's life experience was rich in contacts with important contemporary artists who had an impact on her career as she impacted their lives and art.

Second, she describes herself as a "single-track" photographer, one whose photography has been consistently devoted to making use of the camera's inherent function to transcribe images from reality to paper.

Third, her work is of the quality of the work of the great American photographers, Sullivan, Brady, and Hine.

Fourth, she is a unique example of one of the earlier American photographers of stature.

Because of Berenice Abbott's individualism and adherence to documentary photography, she has become an authority and an important figure in the history of photography. Since she is still an active artist, a complete analysis of her work cannot be made at this time. However, some analysis is important to make during her lifetime, since there is no specific body of analytical information about her work in print today. When her work is reassessed at some time in the future, it is hoped this thesis will be of value to other scholars of photography.
When this study of the life and career of Berenice Abbott began, it seemed important to record as complete a biography of her life as could be written, because of her important position in the history of photography. Following a trip to Maine to discuss this thesis with Abbott, however, ideas for this thesis changed. For, in Miss Abbott's words, "It would take a Boswell to write a complete biography of my life." Because of the essential truth of this statement, this writing is focused on biographical facts directly related to the development of Berenice Abbott's professional development and career.
CHAPTER 1
THE EARLY YEARS

Berenice Abbott, photographer, was born in Springfield, Ohio, July 17, 1898,\(^2\) the youngest of the six children of Alice Bunn and Charles E. Abbott.\(^3\) Her mother was a housewife, and her father was a traveling salesman.\(^4\) Abbott's youth was spent in Springfield, Columbus, Chillicothe, and Cleveland, Ohio, where she also received her primary and secondary education. In Cleveland, she attended Lincoln High School,\(^5\) referring to her education there as "classical and general, with a curriculum focused on math, Latin, and history."\(^6\) At this time, Abbott had no interest in science or art, but thought she wanted to be a journalist.\(^7\)

Following graduation from Lincoln High School in 1917,\(^8\) She enrolled at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, and attended classes there for two terms. Beginning in February, 1917, she took required courses at Ohio State but nothing related to art or science. Concerning her college education, Abbott said, "I was a pretty undisciplined kid.\(^9\) I really wanted an education, but on my own terms.\(^10\)

The two terms Abbott spent at Ohio State proved to be a turning point in her life, however, because of the people she met and associated with socially while there. She said, "What happened to me at Ohio State was meeting up with Sue Jenkins and James Light and Louis Lozowick and changing my life...You learn from all the people
who are trying to better themselves, equip themselves for today's life." Abbott met Sue Jenkins and James Light, who came to Ohio State from Pittsburgh, in her classes. At that time, Jenkins and Light were involved in the publishing of The Sansculotte, a literary magazine produced at Ohio State. Louis Lozowick was a painter who also wrote for The Sansculotte.

In 1918, after two terms of general study, living off-campus, and supporting herself by doing odd jobs, Abbott left Ohio for New York City. Her friends, Sue Jenkins and James Light, had left Ohio State for New York one term earlier. Jenkins had become an office worker and Light had become associated with the Provincetown Playhouse at 137 MacDougald Street, where they also lived. Light and Jenkins escorted Abbott to the Provincetown Playhouse and got her a room there until they all moved to 86 Greenwich Avenue, where they shared a large apartment.

Greenwich Village in those years was a stronghold of artistic talent. All around were specific interest groups (writers, illustrators, painters, playwrights) who congregated in each other's homes or occasionally in a cafe for intellectual exchange. Prior to 1914, some artists of the Ashcan School (John Sloan, William Glackens, George Bellows, et al.) had located in the Village. The once fine housing of what was a former resort area was, in 1917, being converted to rooming houses rented to artists. The Village was also known as a "stronghold of feminism," because militant suffragists such as Inez Milholland, Peggy Johns, and Katharine Anthony lived there, as well as many outspoken women writers. Matthew Josephson, in his Life Among
the Surrealists, described inhabitants of Greenwich Village as different from the way most people would imagine, however. In retrospect, we tend to forget that all famous art personalities were once neophytes. Josephson referred to residents of Greenwich Village as "...People who had rebelled against their middle-class background and family and 'escaped' from their home towns, large or small, to New York, then found their way to the quarter south of Fourteenth Street. Many of them were single women, the New Women, college-educated or of the flapper type, and usually came from the hinterland that is west of the Hudson River." No other words could have described Berenice Abbott more accurately at that time.

When Abbott moved into 86 Greenwich Avenue, she met Matthew Josephson and the writers Djuna Barnes, Kenneth Burke, and Malcolm Cowley, who also resided at that address. Abbott was not greatly satisfied with life there, however, and described it as "a little too Bohemian and too raucus..." Rather, she was a quiet, private person.

Abbott had intended to study journalism while in New York, but found herself among the theatre crowd and became involved in the performing arts. She took a part in one of Eugene O'Neill's plays, *Moon of the Caribes*, which was being performed at the Provincetown Playhouse at the time, and also performed in a movie based on an O'Henry story, *Philistine Among Bohemians*, in 1920. Young and bashful, she thought performing would enable her to overcome shyness.

Abbott overcame her social timidity through interaction with her new friends in New York, however. There was a bar at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Fourth Street in New York City, called "The Hell
Hole," where literary people (artist groups and writers) met to socialize. There, Abbott met Hippolyte Hovel (an anarchist depicted in O'Neill's play, The Ice Man Cometh), Terry Carlin (an anarchist), Sadakichi Hartman, Norma and Edna Millay, and many others, who remained her friends for many years. Abbott said of herself, "I was a kid exploring life--meeting it head on."  

Abbott left 86 Greenwich Avenue in 1920, during the Spanish influenza epidemic, when she almost died. She recuperated at Dobbs Ferry, New York, but never returned to her former address, a decision which separated her completely from the theatre crowd.  

Following her experience of living among the artists, Abbott became interested in sculpture and studied independently. She remarked, "Sculpture was very therapeutic for me at the time...and gave me an anchor..." She lived on West 10th Street at first but then moved to Christopher Street. She described the sculptures she produced then as "a lady in a hoop skirt, a head of Poe, and some andirons (with devils coming out of fire)." Later, when Abbott relocated in Paris, American sculptor, John Storrs, bought Abbott's "lady in a hoop skirt."  

Marcel Duchamp, a friend of Abbott's at the time, gave her chess pieces to cast for him. She worked on projects such as this to support her studio, but she also did odd jobs such as cutting out clippings for a clipping bureau and collecting delinquent debts.  

In 1921, Abbott became disenchanted with such pragmatic employment and with her life in the United States in general. She said,
"How was I going to earn a living here? I wasn't trained. I wasn't going to be a stenographer and the things open [sic] to girls. I didn't want to be a teacher..." She had also become interested in what artists were doing in Europe (i.e., Paris, Berlin) and decided to leave the United States to live and study among other expatriate artists there.
FOOTNOTES

Chapter 1

1. Interview with Berenice Abbott by Mary Ann Anderson, April, 1981.
4. Ibid., p. 4.
5. Ibid., p. 11.
9. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p. 346.
14. Ibid., p. 35.
15. Ibid., p. 31.
16. Ibid., p. 40.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., p. 42.
20. Ibid., p. 43.
22. Ibid., p. 46.
23. Ibid., p. 60.
24. Ibid., p. 46.
25. Ibid., p. 43-44.
26. Interview with Berenice Abbott by Mary Ann Anderson, April, 1981.
27. Ibid., p. 46-48.
28. Ibid., p. 54.
29. Ibid., p. 55.
30. Ibid., p. 54.
31. Ibid., p. 122.
32. Ibid., p. 55.
33. Ibid., p. 58.
34. Ibid., p. 204.
CHAPTER II
LIFE IN PARIS

On March 21, 1921, Berenice Abbott left New York for Paris on the Liner Rochechambeau. Aboard the Rochechambeau, she met John Storrs, who found her a small studio in Paris at the Rue Edgar-Quinet, a section Abbott described as a "working class area." Again, she characterized herself as "eccentric without knowing it," a "nonconformist." Abbott remained in Paris because it was a world art center and because she would be in the midst of the most contemporary practicing artists. There, she knew she would have more opportunity as an artist to learn and practice.

Abbott began studying drawing at La Grande Chaumière and took a class for approximately one month with Emile Bourdelle in 1921. Her contact with Bourdelle was limited, since she studied there only a few weeks, and she described the sessions as five to ten-minute drawing periods where you would take a ticket for admittance to sketch nude models.

Following her experience in Bourdelle's drawing classes, Abbott became interested in the work of German Expressionist artists and decided to study drawing in Germany. She sublet her apartment at the Rue Edgar-Quinet for a profit so she could go to Berlin. She enrolled at the Kuntschule in der Kanstrasse in Berlin to study drawing but dropped out shortly afterward because she
couldn't find a job there to support herself at that time. Because she liked Berlin better than Paris but could find work easier in Paris, she shuttled between the two cities when she had the funds to do so and studied intermittently.  

Man Ray

It was in Paris in 1923 that Berenice Abbott first ventured into photography vocationally. She had met Man Ray, an old friend from New York, who was looking for an assistant to work in his photography studio, located at the Rue Campagne Premier, in 1923, where he made portraits of Paris celebrities. He hired Abbott to work in his darkroom.

Abbott became interested in photography immediately when she began working with Ray but knew nothing about it. She began by doing darkroom work. Abbott described the work she did in Ray's studio in the following:

...I was developing the films. He took the picture and I...developed the negatives, made the proofs, and composed them in the enlarger.

I made the prints, hung them up, straightened them out, spotted them and mounted them.

In 1923, Ray was photographing his artist friends Joseph Stella, Marcel Duchamp, Pablo Picasso, and Sinclair Lewis, to name but a few. Many of his friends were unremunerative, so Ray supported his studio by photographing the artwork of other artists to supplement the proceeds from his portraiture. This commercial photography enabled him to develop his own interests, at that time, Dada and Rayograms.
Abbott was looking for security when she began working for Man Ray. She thought her background in sculpture helped her to succeed in learning photography and said, "Man was amazed at my aptitude for photography. I was more amazed than he, of course." When Ray suggested she take a few pictures on her own because he was unable to compensate her enough for the many hours she worked for him, Abbott began utilizing his facilities to explore her own talent. Concerning this, Elizabeth McCausland, referring to Abbott’s darkroom experience in Ray's studio, wrote:

She never saw Man Ray take a picture. Rather, she is a self-taught photographer who learned to take pictures the hard way, by trial and error.

Abbott's earlier statements concerning the type of work she did for Ray (darkroom work) supports the notion that she participated only in the production of his prints and not in the creative design of his photographs.

Abbott left Man Ray in 1926 and began her own studio, even though she had never planned to go into photography professionally. Her first studio was located in the elegant, high rent district, at 44 Rue du Bac, but she later moved it to 18 Rue Servandoni. Because of the reputation Abbott had earned while working in Man Ray's studio, her own studio was an immediate success. She entered some of her work in a photographic exhibition at the Gallerie au Sacre du Printemps in 1926. This exhibition included her Paris portraits of celebrities such as Andre Gide, Jean Cocteau, and James Joyce. Later, in 1928, there was a photographic exhibition at the Salon des Independents in which Abbott was represented. At this time, Abbott received reviews by the French
Press praising "the emphasis she laid on human values and of the sense of character she created" in her portraits. A French magazine, Nouvelles Litteraires, also wrote: "...In her portraits, she had given an absolutely new significance to interpretations of the objective world, in this case, the human face and figure, posed informally and spontaneously." This early success was the result of Abbott's life experience in the arts, expressed uniquely in her photography.

Although it is significant that Berenice Abbott's initial interest in photography was aroused during the years she spent working with Man Ray, it is also significant that it was during her years in Ray's studio that she met Eugene Atget—the photographer who had the greatest impact on her career in photography.

Eugene Atget

Berenice Abbott met Eugene Atget in 1925. She first saw his prints in Man Ray's studio and then went to Atget's own studio to purchase some of his prints. From that time on, Eugene Atget and his work were second only to her own work in Berenice Abbott's career. In describing Atget's prints, she said:

Their impact was immediate and tremendous. There was a sudden flash of recognition—the shock of realism unadorned. The subjects were not sensational, but nevertheless shocking in their very familiarity. The real world, seen with wonderment and surprise, was mirrored in each print. Whatever means Atget used to project the image did not intrude between subject and observer.
After their initial meeting, Abbott and Atget became good friends. She went to his studio often and eventually persuaded him to sit for a portrait at her studio. He was usually seen in patched work clothes, but came for his portrait in a new overcoat. Abbott made two striking portraits of Atget in 1927, which he never saw. When she finished the prints and took them to his studio for inspection, she learned he had died in the interim, less than two years from their first meeting. Both portraits are sympathetic views of Atget and his condition as a photographer. He had lived a strenuous life with a poor diet consisting of bread, milk, and bits of sugar for twenty years, and Madame Atget's death, one year prior to his own, had robbed him of what little strength he had left to pursue his profession.

Following Atget's death, Abbott located Andre Calmette, Atget's closest friend, to whom Atget had bequeathed his negatives and prints. Calmette and Atget had been actors together, and Calmette had an executive position in the Municipal Theater in Strassburg at the time Abbott contacted him. After a great deal of correspondence with Calmette concerning the Atget Collection, Calmette sold the entire collection (less what had already been purchased by Les Monuments Historiques, an historical agency of the French Government) to Berenice Abbott in 1928. The collection consisted of approximately 2,000 negatives and 10,000 prints. Abbott thinks Calmette realized that a young person such as herself would have more time in her life to do something for Atget than an older person, such as Florent Fels (critic and writer for L'arts Vivants, who also wanted to buy Atget's work at that time,
She also felt that Calmette knew how much she loved Atget and that this also influenced his decision in her favor. It is doubtful that Calmette knew how valuable the Atget Collection was, since he disposed of many of Atget's early paintings along with the household goods at the time he settled Atget's estate.

In retrospect, it seems odd that Abbott would be able to acquire such a valuable collection and remove it from France, especially since the French National Museum had an interest in the Atget materials. However, as she noted in 1976, "In the same way that New Yorkers didn't particularly want to see New York, the French...didn't care so much about Atget, because they were so familiar with what he photographed. Because of her inherent ability to recognize valuable artistic expression and her tenacity in accomplishing goals, Abbott saved for the art world the genius of Atget's vision. She spent months printing his negatives, storing them, and putting his collection in order. Atget had lacquered and varnished some of the negatives, which resulted in cracked emulsion in some during storage, but Abbott kept them nonetheless.

As mentioned earlier, Abbott's first notice of Atget and her subsequent interest in him as an artist occurred while she was employed as assistant to Man Ray. Ray thought Atget was a primitive. In Abbott's opinion, however, Atget's work is "the innocence of an unhampered vision, uncluttered by conventional trappings..." and not "a naive simpleton, unaware of the value of his work."

In the February, 1975, issue of Camera Magazine, Ray stated that he had "discovered" Atget (in the sense that he had discovered his
work). Abbott refutes this saying, "He didn't discover the Atgets. In the first place, a lot of people bought them, and the Surrealists used them." In a comparison of Abbott's work to Atget's, the naive quality in Atget's prints of which Man Ray complains, is not found in Abbott's work. However, it is no small wonder that the scope of Abbott's own work changed dramatically following her involvement with Atget, as can be seen by studying the images in Chapter V! of this thesis, the Analysis of Berenice Abbott's work. This is but another example of Berenice Abbott's individualism in photography.

Building on her darkroom experience in Ray's studio and her own work in portraiture, Abbott became aware of another kind of portraiture when she met Atget—the environmental portrait. The fascination for Paris and nostalgia so evident in Atget's work impressed Abbott and caused her to care for his work and to show it to the world. If it had not been for Abbott's arduous promotion of Atget, the world would have no knowledge of this artist today.
FOOTNOTES

Chapter 11

1. Interview with Berenice Abbott by Mary Ann Anderson, April, 1981.
3. Interview with Berenice Abbott by Mary Ann Anderson, April, 1981.
5. Interview with Berenice Abbott by Mary Ann Anderson, April, 1981.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p. 142.
12. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
16. Ibid., p. 139.
17. Elizabeth McCausland, "Berenice Abbott...Realist," Photo Arts, Spring, 1948, p. 50.
18. Ibid.
20. Ibid., p. 154.

23. Ibid.


26. Ibid., p. 656.


29. Ibid., p. 206.

30. Ibid., p. 223.

31. Ibid., p. 222.


   Ibid., 238.
CHAPTER III
RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES

When Berenice Abbott returned to the United States from Europe in May, 1929 (during the Depression), it was difficult for her to find work because, as she puts it, "photography was not taken seriously as an art in this country."¹ She took an apartment in Orange, New Jersey, with a friend, Julia Reiner, until she found an apartment of her own at 101 West 67th Street, New York City—the Hotel des Artistes.² Her apartment had no running water and very little circulating air. She turned the bedroom into a darkroom.³ She had no furniture at this time, since she had traded it to Max Ernst for some of his work before she left Paris.⁴ She lived simply and frugally, supporting herself by doing portraits and commercial photography.⁵ People came to be photographed by Abbott because of her reputation as a photographer, which had followed her from Europe. When the stock market crashed in 1929, Abbott moved her studio to a loft at 50 Commerce Street, which she described as "inexpensive but chic."⁶ Some of her clients at that time were Ballantine Brewing, Red River Lumber, and Miles Laboratories, for whom she did advertisements.⁷

Shortly after this, Abbott went to visit Margaret Bourke-White, who was stationed in Cleveland, Ohio, at that time, working with Fortune Magazine.⁸ With Bourke-White's help and because of her now established reputation as a photographer in this country, Abbott became
a freelance photographer for *Fortune* and accepted a pre-publication commission in 1929 to photograph businessmen in New York City.\(^9\)

Following her portrait project of New York businessmen, but during the time she was freelancing for *Fortune*, Abbott photographed the work of architectural historian, Henry Russell Hitchcock, Jr., for his architectural exhibition, *American Cities Before the Civil War: The Urban Vernacular of the Thirties, Forties, and Fifties*.\(^10\) The exhibition circulated to the campuses of Yale, Dartmouth, Smith, and Princeton Universities. For this job, Abbott traveled to Boston, Baltimore, Charleston, and Philadelphia, to name but a few places, and gained valuable experience doing architectural photography. She also produced the photographs for Hitchcock's book on the American architect, H.H. Richardson and for the Richardson Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1936.\(^11\) This experience proved to be invaluable to her career and particularly to the work for which she is best known in the United States---*Changing New York*.

**Federal Arts Project**

As mentioned earlier, Abbott had been moved artistically to record New York City photographically immediately upon her return to the United States from Europe in 1929. She said:

"New York excited me very much... It was a sort of a sorry thing, coming back before the Depression... but I felt an extremely strong pull... The American scene, it just fascinated me. I was like a stranger... When you are fresh, impressionable, sensitive, and you see this whole strange land and it is your own... it fascinates you [sic].\(^12\)"
When the Depression struck, Abbott couldn't find support to photograph New York City; therefore, she developed her idea independently. She took commercial photography jobs to pay her living expenses but set aside Wednesday afternoon of each week for her own personal photography projects. This practice heightened Abbott's interest in recording New York during a period of rapid change and prepared her for the work ahead.

In 1932, Abbott produced a photomontage of New York City that "attempted to capture the many aspects of New York City." Titled "New York" (Plate I), Abbott said the montage was probably her least favorite picture. Made for the Museum of Modern Art's Mural and Photo-Mural Exhibition in 1932, the large image depicted "fragments of antiquity breaking through the city's steel frame." The mural, which uses steel beams in the photograph to section and divide various scenes in the montage, is dynamic and impressive. It accomplishes its purpose beautifully, but it is in contrast to Abbott's then developing philosophy in photography. At the time she produced this image, she said she had not yet "come to grips with the grave problem of documenting the city." As a result, this manipulation of images formed by a lens was explained by Abbott as "...psychological montage."

She said:

"Essentially this is photography; to see a rapid succession of pictures, to fuse them in the mind and memory, to reinforce each separate image with the strength and meaning of all the others."

This quote about the photomontage could also describe Abbott's photo essay, Changing New York.
In 1935, the United States Government initiated the Federal Arts Project as part of the Works Progress Administration's effort to subsidize American artists due to a lack of private patronage for art and artists during the Depression. Abbott took her idea to document New York City using the photographic medium to the Federal Arts Project, describing her idea to the directors as follows:

My project is to record, by camera, the fast disappearing vestiges of early New York as time goes on in increase in interest and historical value. Thus I hope to present a coherent idea of this great uncrystallized city, the truest phenomenon of the twentieth century, which in its present form combine so dramatically the old with the evolving new. There does not exist a similar interpretation of New York City made with vision and unity of design...This project seems to those who have considered it carefully to have enormous potentiality and is of supreme importance to those who love New York City.19

Abbott was appointed Director of the Changing New York Project and supervised a staff of eight assistants who aided in the production of her photographs.20 She worked on the New York Project full time for three years and did all the photography herself.21 As artist and director, she set the criteria for the project as 'what appealed to her in visual terms.'22

In 1935, Abbott began to exhibit her Changing New York photographs at the Museum of the City of New York. She supported the Museum during its struggling years and loaned four prints for its opening exhibit in 1932.23
The New School for Social Research

In 1935, The New School for Social Research asked Berenice Abbott to join the teaching staff there. Abbott took this job happily, because it meant she would be paid regularly, enabling her to do other creative things in photography that were of interest to her. She taught there one evening a week until 1958, and was paid according to the number of students she had. In a letter from Kady van Deurs, a former student of Abbott's at the New School, Abbott's photography classes were described as "informal." That is, Abbott would lead discussions on the mechanics of picture-taking as her class stood camera-ready in a circle around an object to be photographed. Concerning her teaching career, she said, "Teaching was the hardest thing I ever did in my life. I was always very quiet, so this was very good training in a way, doing a thing you didn't want to do."  

Berenice Abbott has undertaken every project and set every goal for her career with a singleness of mind and as an individual. She did not join organizations such as the Photo League and has never involved with the Stieglitz entourage in New York early in her career. However, she has always been actively involved in many projects while pursuing her profession as a photographer, always trying new things in photography and art. This persistence enabled her to succeed in a difficult profession and later in inventing and patenting photographic equipment, a creative area that requires both talent and strong initiative.
In the 1940s, Berenice Abbott founded a small corporation which she called the House of Photography. Officers included Muriel Rukeyser, Vice President, and Hudson D. Walker, Treasurer. Abbott, of course, was President. The purpose of the corporation was, in her words, "...to improve some of the things we worked with...". Cameras aren't simple enough. They try to do too many things, and they won't. You need different cameras for different things: simple cameras that do one thing well." However, the corporation was unsuccessful, and the small amount of money raised was used to pay patent attorneys, patent fees, and to pay for some model making.

One of Abbott's inventions for the House of Photography was a fixed-focus box camera, with a 5 x 5 film format and no viewfinder. Instead of a viewfinder, Abbott had devised a system of framing that utilized a photographer's thumb. As she explains, "You use your thumb to aim, because the first two segments or bones of it cause a perfect aim, and you click as you look." Another device Abbott invented in the 1940s and patented in 1947 was a composition cropping guide, used to crop a negative while in a camera. For use primarily in commercial photography, Abbott explains its function when used in magazine layouts. She said, "...If you are working for something in a column of a magazine, and you want to compose your picture for that space, you can get the exact format of the column and the dimensions and everything." While many of these inventions were never produced or marketed, they are worthy of consideration in terms of basic photographic
processes and techniques. Abbott still has many of these inventions with her photography equipment in Maine. She constantly strives to find materials and methods to improve the quality of photographic equipment and processes.
FOOTNOTES

Chapter III

1. Interview with Berenice Abbott by Mary Ann Anderson, April, 1981.
3. Ibid., p. 18.
6. Ibid., p. 251.
7. Ibid., p. 259.
8. Ibid., p. 21.
13. Interview with Berenice Abbott by Mary Ann Anderson, April, 1981.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
24. Ibid., p. 310.
27. Ibid., p. 267.
28. Ibid., p. 565.
29. Ibid., p. 288.
30. Ibid., p. 576.
32. Ibid., p. 92.
33. Ibid., p. 90.
34. Ibid., p. 92.
35. Ibid., p. 94.
36. Ibid., p. 89.
CHAPTER IV
THE PERIPATETIC PHOTOGRAPHER

The Physical Science Study Committee

Following the Changing New York Project, Abbott began searching for another project for herself. She had been interested in documenting science experiments photographically since 1939 but could get no one else interested in a project.¹ Her interest in educating others through photographic depictions of scientific experiments (e.g. laws of physics), took her to the Carnegie Institute to enlist support, but her contacts there did not believe scientific principles could be photographed successfully and therefore would not back her.² Consequently, in 1940, Abbott began an experimental photography project on her own, photographing electricity. Her interest in the electricity project led to an interest in chemistry in science. In 1943, she enrolled in a chemistry course at New York University to learn more about the chemical elements³ and also began attending scientific meetings in order to meet scientists and others interested in science.⁴

She met Robert C. Cooke, Editor of Genetics Magazine and publisher of Science Illustrated. In 1939, Abbott became Photo Editor of Science Illustrated and held this position for one year.
Describing this phase of her scientific work, Abbott said, "My idea was to popularize science. I think there should be all kinds of activities going on there, and not just for students, but for the layman as well. There is no way of learning a thing better than through the visual sense, instead of translating through the mind and coming back and imagining them."  

The Science Illustrated project had a very low budget. Abbott read the articles and tried to do something photographic to illustrate them. She also tried to get existing pictures from the photographic departments of institutions (Standard Oil, for example) to use in the publication.  

Following the Science Illustrated project, Abbott took her ideas to document principles of science to Harvard and met I. Bernard Cohen, who taught the history of science there. Cohen was extremely encouraging about her ideas and made it possible for her to borrow equipment from Harvard to work on her projects independently. She continued her science projects at her own expense while looking for sources of funding.  

Abbott also maintained professional contact with many publishers during her years in New York working with science. By the time she worked for Science Illustrated, she had also written a manifesto on photography, but it was never published. One of her students at the New School for Social Research was Julia Scribner, of Scribner Publishers. She tried to help Abbott with her science projects by taking her to publishers she knew, but at that time the publishers were not particularly interested in science for publications.  

Robert Cooke
also took her to see publishers at Doubleday, to get them interested in her work. The publishers at Doubleday wrote to Dr. E.P. Little of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who was Director of the Physical Science Study Committee, concerning Abbott's work. He hired her to do photography for use in the publications of the Physical Science Study Committee. The Committee later separated from MIT and was then supported by the National Science Foundation.\textsuperscript{10}

At the time Abbott accepted her job with the Physical Science Study Committee, she was sixty years of age. She considered this to be her first steady job and said, "I loved having a job with a definite income."\textsuperscript{11}

Abbott's photographic equipment inventory on the science project was something less than ideal. Budgets were small for equipment, which meant that Abbott and her assistants had to build their own props and needed equipment.\textsuperscript{12} She had to use homemade lights left by the previous photographer, and electric power was inadequate for her requirements. The project was therefore moved to Watertown, Massachusetts, where more power could be provided.\textsuperscript{13} An old supermarket provided a spacious studio with high ceilings for photographing from high angles.\textsuperscript{14}

The end result of Abbott's work with the Physical Science Study Committee was a high school textbook, produced in association with some of the foremost physicists, teachers, and communication specialists in the United States. The book was titled \textit{Physics}, text by D.C. Heath.\textsuperscript{15} Following publication of this book, The Physical
Science Study Committee and the Smithsonian Institution circulated
the prints in an exhibition under the title "The Image of Physics,"
in 1961.16 Abbott's science photographs became well known in
scientific as well as artistic circles and were followed by several
books based on scientific imagery. Abbott did the experiments and
the photography, and Valens supplied the text for the books Magneto (1964), Motion (1965), and The Attractive Universe (1969), published
by the World Publishing Company, New York.17

The Aspen Institute Conference on Photography

In 1951, Abbott participated in the Aspen Institute Conference on
Photography in Aspen, Colorado. Sponsored by Container Corporation, the
Aspen Conference was a continued Conference on Photography, a Schweitzer
Celebration, and Goethe Festival. The Conference on Photography
consisted of a panel of photographers who discussed the different modes
of photography. Panel members included Abbott, Herbert Bayer, Minor
White, and Frederick Sommer. Abbott and Bayer challenged the others on
the issue of communication in photography (objectivity) versus self-
expression (subjectivity).18 Abbott told the Conference panelists,
"Maybe if you explore the world outside a little bit, you might find
yourself there....You can't go on exploring yourself forever."19

Abbott also talked about Henry Peach Robinson and the practice of
pictorialism, one of her favorite subjects, since she totally opposes
it. Referring to Robinson as the embodiment of a "terrible plague,
imported from England..."20 Abbott said:
He became the shining light of photography, charged large prices, took ribbon after ribbon. He lifted composition bodily from painting, but the ones he chose were probably some of the worst examples in history. Greatest disaster of all, he wrote a book in 1869 entitled "Pictorial Photography." His system was to flatter everything. He sought to correct what the camera saw. The inherent genius and dignity of the human subject was denied.

Further, pictorialism, according to Abbott, is "the making of pleasant, pretty artificial pictures in the superficial spirit of certain minor painters." In defense of photography's documentary nature, she stated:

Photography throughout its existence has been photographic. It has made pictures, but it is not pictorial. The pictures made by photography can, and very often do, possess great beauty, but their beauty is not the beauty of painting. Despite flaws of technical performance in early daguerreotypes and calotypes, and despite personal whims such as Julia Margaret Cameron's preference for a slightly out-of-focus lens, the photographs which have come down to us from the past century as masterpieces are remarkable for characteristics which can only be described as photographic: precision in the rendering and definition of detail and materials, surfaces and textures; instantaneity of observation; acute and faithful presentation of what existed in the external world at a particular time and place. Brady's Civil War photographs could not make the intense emotional appeal they do if we had the idea when looking at them that they are faked.

Understanding this philosophy, one might wonder whether Abbott considers photo-realism in painting, then, to be pretty, artificial pictures done in the superficial spirit of photographers!
Maine

In 1966, Abbott went abroad for a short visit to Paris. Upon her return to the United States, she moved to Maine permanently.

When Abbott studied at Harvard while working for the Physical Science Study Committee, she had met Margaret Bennett, who worked in the Physics Department photography laboratory. In 1956, Abbott purchased a derelict Victorian inn in Blanchard, Maine, which Margaret Bennett helped her to find. The inn was untenable at the time of its purchase, but it has since been restored.

Following her move to Maine, Abbott sold the Atget collection to the Museum of Modern Art. The only Atget materials Abbott now keeps are some of his glass negatives that have been damaged by age and accident.

In 1954, Abbott photographed what she called the Route One Project. Living and working in a travel trailer, Abbott documented U.S. Route One, beginning in Calais, Maine, ending in Key West, Florida. This unpublished, personally-funded project was produced with one assistant photographer—Damon Gadd. Although unpublished, the photographs in this project were part of an exhibition which circulated in the Midwest in 1981.

At this writing, Abbott lives in the small town of Monson, Maine, where she has established a comfortable home in the solitude and fresh air of the Maine woods. She occasionally hires photographers to assist her in printing her negatives, but complains that she cannot find good help at a reasonable rate today. She continues to print her
Changing New York negatives, and has also begun to print some negatives never before printed.

Honors

Over the years, Berenice Abbott has been honored for her excellence in the field of photography in exhibitions, some of which are listed in Appendix A. In addition, she has had several honors deserving of special recognition in this thesis.

1. In 1969, the Smithsonian Institute held a retrospective exhibition of Abbott's work in the National Museum of History and Technology. This exhibition was the third in a series entitled "Women, Cameras, and Images." The exhibition included prints from the important phases of her earlier career in photography, many of which are included in the following chapter of this thesis.

2. In 1970, Abbott was chosen for the Woman-of-the-Year Award by Harper's Bazaar.

3. In 1971, she was granted an Honorary Doctorate Degree from the University of Maine.

4. In 1973, she was granted an Honorary Doctorate Degree from Smith College for excellence in the art of photography.

5. In 19 , she received an award from the Mayor of the City of New York for her dedication to the City of New York shown in her photographic projects.
FOOTNOTES

Chapter IV


2. Ibid., p. 114.

3. Ibid., p. 103.

4. Ibid., p. 501.

5. Ibid., p. 504-505.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., p. 507.

8. Ibid., p. 512.

9. Ibid., p. 510.


11. Ibid., p. 519.

12. Ibid., p. 523.

13. Ibid., p. 515.


19. Ibid., p. 618.

21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., p. 56.
25. Ibid., p. 473.
27. Ibid., p. 470.
28. Ibid., p. 354.
33. Interview with Berenice Abbott by Mary Ann Anderson, April, 1981.
CHAPTER V

PUBLISHING

It is important to note that during the course of Berenice Abbott's career, she not only exhibited her photographs but also published them. Her talent as a writer is unsurpassed on the topic of photography.

Abbott began her publishing career with a book about Atget, using many of the prints she produced from his negatives. The book was entitled Atget, Photographies de Paris, with a preface by Pierre McOrlan, published in Paris in 1930 by Henri Jomquiere.

While working for the Federal Arts Project in 1935, Abbott met the writer and art critic Elizabeth McCausland. McCausland worked for the Federal Arts Project as a writer and wrote the text for Abbott's book, Changing New York, the result of Abbott's Changing New York Project.

During the years Abbott worked for the New School for Social Research, she published several books. The first book was written for amateur photographers. Entitled A Guide to Better Photography, it was published in 1941 by Crown Publishers in New York. In 1953, A Guide to Better Photography was updated and published again by Crown under a new title, New Guide to Better Photography. These two books contain Abbott's personal philosophy on photography, which has remained unchanged over the years. Both books eloquently express
Abbott's views that the camera's inherent function and the medium of photography should be used to document life as the photographer meets it "head-on."¹

One of the courses Abbott taught at the New School dealt with the view camera, which resulted in her book, *The View Camera Made Simple*, published in 1948 by Ziff-Davis. This technical book describes in detail the essentials of view camera operation to enable students of photography and amateur photographers to experience and produce quality negatives in large format.


In 1956, she returned to Atget—this time to print some of the negatives she had brought back with her from Paris in 1929. This body of work was *The Eugene Atget Portfolio, Twenty Photographic Prints from His Original Glass Negatives*. Abbott editioned 100 portfolios of these prints and wrote a brief introduction.² Following the printing of the Atget portfolios, Abbott published again. She paired Atget's images with quotations from *Remembrance of Things Past*, by Marcel Proust. The book, entitled *A Vision of Paris*, was edited by Arthur D. Trottenburg and was published by the MacMillan Company in 1963.

In 1964, Abbott also published her book, *The World of Atget*, for which she wrote and edited the text and produced the photographs. This book is biographical but also contains much of Abbott's philosophy
about photography, which remains unchanged. This eloquent book gave the world the genius of Atget's vision. Although Abbott feels that she devoted too much of her life to promoting Atget's work when she could have been promoting her own work, the endeavor was of certain benefit to her and to the history of photography, since Atget's work would probably have been lost had Abbott not taken him up as a project for so many years.

Also in 1964, Abbott published one book in a series of three done in conjunction with the author E.G. Valens. Titled Magnet, Valens supplied the text and Abbott produced the photographs depicting scientific principles related to magnetism. In 1965, Valens and Abbott published the book Motion, and in 1969, the book The Attractive Universe, which are similar in purpose and presentation to Magnet. These three books were published while Abbott was employed by the Physical Science Study Committee and under their auspices.


In 1970, Abbott also published her book, Berenice Abbott Photographs, a sampling of photographs from each important phase of her career, coinciding with the photographs exhibited at her retrospective exhibition at the Smithsonian Institute in 1969. Published by Horizon
Press, the book contains a foreword by Muriel Rukeyser and an introduction by David Vestal.

After settling in Maine, Abbott began working on another book, *A Portrait of Maine*. The Macmillan Company of New York City approached Abbott with the idea for the book, and she chose Chenoweth Hall, a writer and painter on the faculty of the University of Maine, to write the text. The publisher gave Abbott a $5,000 advance to begin the project, the purpose of which was to record things that were typical of Maine at the time. Abbott described *A Portrait of Maine* as 'essentially a picture book.' While the photographs are interesting because of their "picture book" quality, they are also valuable documents, due to the changing nature of architecture and landscape over time.

Over the years, Berenice Abbott has been the author of many articles about photography. She is a talented, eloquent writer, although she prefers to do photography and leave writing to others. Her most recent published writing is an introduction to a book of Lisette Model's photographs.
FOOTNOTES

Chapter V

1. Interview with Berenice Abbott by Mary Ann Anderson, April, 1981.


3. Ibid., p. 653.

4. Ibid., p. 477.

5. Ibid., p. 481.

6. Ibid., p. 2.

CHAPTER VI
AN ANALYSIS OF THE WORK OF BERENICE ABBOTT

Berenice Abbott emerged as a realist amidst the post-impressionist styles in painting and photography of the early Twentieth Century. Abbott has given a personal description of her photography in the following paragraph:

The challenge for me (in photography) is to see things as they are. I have tried to be, in other words, objective. What I mean by objectivity is the objectivity not of a machine but of a sensible human being, with the mystery of personal selection at the heart of it. The second challenge has been to impose order on the things seen and to supply the visual context and the intellectual framework. That to me is the art of photography.

While it is true that Abbott's photographs are objective, the "visual context" and "intellectual framework" she supplies and through which her work is presented is definitely referenced in the subjective. Since no photograph is entirely objective, because of choices the producing artist makes, it can be said that her work is "selectively objective."

A passage written by Elizabeth McCausland, art critic and longtime friend of Abbott's, which was first published in 1935 in Trend Magazine, describes Abbott's style. She wrote:

...One of the most appealing qualities of Berenice Abbott's work, whether her New York City scenes or her Paris portraits, is the tenderness with which she regards her subject. This tenderness would seem not to be a sentimental softness but a deeply sincere effort to present the essential truth of her subject, whether her subject is the Chrysler Building.
or James Joyce. There is no psychical montage by which the personality of the artist is superimposed on the personality of her subject. Perhaps, however, one may be permitted to think of the subject as having been filtered through the personality of the artist and thereby having taken an added value and significance because some subtle apprehension of the artist has caught what a less sensitive mind and eye could not.

Abbott has stated that she is interested in photography because it is a "union of the personal and the impersonal." Nothing could be more appropriate than this statement, then, when applied to her work as an entity. She uses the camera to record something she cannot change (something already existing physically) and yet, "it is by choice and special treatment that the subject matter is personal. The camera's limits, coupled with the conscious choices of the photographer, lead the photographer into the subjective...for he cannot help equating the objective world with his self."3

The following writing is a critical analysis of Abbott's photography. The criteria for the choices of the photographs selected for discussion were determined by 1) the approximate date of each photograph or body of work, 2) influencing forces, 3) subject matter or major theme of documentation, 4) specific interest at that time in her career.

Portraiture

The first body of work for which Berenice Abbott became known as a photographer was completed after she left Man Ray's studio in 1926. Abbott's ability to portray the complex personalities of those she photographed was tested successfully, since she began to be
recognized as an artist for her excellent portraiture at this time. It should be remembered when viewing these portraits that at this time in the history of photography, Abbott's objectivity was rather avant garde for portraiture in general. While most photographers at the time still portrayed their subjects in a painterly way (that is, very subjectively), Berenice Abbott allowed chance to enter her work. Abbott's selection of the moment to trigger her shutter to capture her sitters objectively made each portrait a personal expression by sitter and artist alike. Abbott maintained this quality in her work although she interacted with other artists who did not ascribe to this style.

Abbott's selectively objective style in portraiture is characterized by the fact that she does not obscure the personalities of her subjects by intruding into their personal spaces. That is to say, most of her portraits were taken from a camera distance of at least five feet, and there are few very close portraits. There is eye contact between the subject and the viewer (camera) in many cases, and the subjects are very aware of the camera and the photographer's intent. In some of Abbott's portraits, the sitters are very composed, prepared for the shutter's action. In others, the subjects appear to have been in various stages of readiness for the camera and some even have a snapshot quality. That is, the subjects are gesturing, talking, or laughing as the photograph is taken.

Some of Abbott's early portraits resemble portraits made by Man Ray. Since Ray was Abbott's earliest teacher (she knew nothing about photography when she began work in his studio), it is often suggested that her objective style can be traced to his portraiture.
Gene Thornton of the *New York Times* was one of the first art critics to recognize the similarities between Abbott's style in portraiture and Man Ray's style, and this realization was made in the early 1970s. In an article entitled "Berenice Abbott, She is Decisive," in *The New York Times*, September 16, 1973, Thornton observed that Abbott's style followed that of Man Ray rather than a more journalistic approach. This statement was very insightful, since Abbott has been referred to as a journalist because of her association with Atget. Thornton stated:

> Her sitters are lighted and placed in the picture frame with a renaissance clarity and economy, and they gaze out at you with a mask-like gravity that is deeply suggestive of unrevealed private lives.⁵

A.D. Coleman of *The New York Times*, in referring to Abbott's portraiture, also wrote:

> Her subjects seem to be neither sitting for their pictures nor interacting with the photographer, but rather, in some eerie limbo, to be in direct confrontation with their maker. Look at their gestures, their faces, and particularly their eyes; they react to Abbott's camera as one would expect them to stand before the bench on judgment day.⁶

A description of Man Ray's style in portraiture by Roland Penrose, who wrote a biography of Man Ray, indicates striking similarities in Ray's and Abbott's work. He said:

> The excellence of these portraits does not depend on dramatic lighting effects, nor on carefully arranged settings. It comes from an acute understanding of the way that character resides in the shape of a head and the manner in which the events of a life are engraved on a face. The prints are not the winning choice selected from hundreds of snapshots but individual studies carefully planned with patience and experience, into which nevertheless an element of chance is always allowed to enter.⁷
Arturo Schwarz, who also wrote a biography of Man Ray, made the following observation about Ray's work which also applies to Abbott's work.

For Man Ray, a successful photograph is also the outcome of a rendezvous, this time with an additional participant, a rendezvous between the artist, the subject, and the camera.

This statement is also very characteristic of Abbott's portraiture and in keeping with her style of portraying a personality objectively. In this description, Abbott's selective objectivity is her rendezvous with the sitter.

Abbott's portraits of celebrities such as Jean Cocteau, James Joyce, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and other art and literary personalities residing in Paris in the 1920s comprise the first phase of her professional career. At this time in the history of photography, most photographers attempted to portray their subjects according to the "solid, representational look of painted portraits." There were no 35 mm cameras at that time, films and cameras were slow, and candid portraits as we know them today were unknown unless made with prisms and false barrels attached to cameras. Due to the expense of materials and awkward equipment, photographers were usually obliged to capture a sitter's character in one shot.

Gerritt Henry of *Art News* called Abbott's portraits "penetrating statements of greatness mingled with humanity..." Berenice Abbott enjoyed making portraits and said, "Portraiture absorbed me. Each person was extremely important to me. I wasn't trying to make a still life of them, but a person. It's kind of an exchange between people—it has to be—and I enjoyed it."
To make a still life of her sitters would have meant photographing in a totally subjective way, allowing no interaction between the sitter and the environment. Therefore, it can be said that early in her career, Abbott had a preference for objectivity in her work. Although portraiture is somewhat subjective by nature of its visual content, the strength of Abbott's own artistic vision prevailed over the style of "still life" subjectivity and pictorial portraiture prevalent early in the Twentieth Century. Also, drawing on all the means by which technology would allow her to produce objectivity with her camera, her style was neither stilted nor journalistic. Her portraiture proves her statement, mentioned earlier, that the camera's limits, coupled with the conscious choices of the photographer, "lead the photographer into the subjective...for he cannot help equating the objective world with his self."12 Therefore, at a time when it was thought that portraiture had to be classical and formal in presentation, Abbott's more casual yet sophisticated style brought favorable reviews from the critics, and she became well known as a portrait photographer.

While parallels may be drawn between the work of Berenice and Man Ray, it must be stated here that Abbott claims no influence from having worked with Ray's negatives. That is, her vision is unique, as it is in all of us. While perceptions are formed by everything with which one comes in contact (including life experience and influential personalities), Abbott objects to the idea that she was influenced by Man Ray's perception in photography through working with his negatives.13 While some of Abbott's and Ray's work may be similar in style, that is where any similarity ends, because one
artist's vision cannot be filtered by another's experience. In the pages that follow, a comparison between the work of Ray and Abbott will be made in order to show both similarities and differences in their styles. They were both part of a movement in art experienced by many artists during this time period and therefore no different in that respect than many others. It must be emphasized, however, that while there are similarities in style, the two artists had diverging ideas about their work, which proves that neither was especially "influenced" by the other. In short, while Abbott has practiced an objective, documentary style in photography throughout her career, Ray delved into Surrealism and the abstract.

When examining and comparing the portraiture of Ray and Abbott, most of Ray's formal portraits were taken against void backgrounds as most of Abbott's were also. In his portrait of Constantin Brancusi, 1930, Plate 2, and Andre Derain, 1930, Plate 3, Ray presented his subjects in the way Abbott presented her subjects; that is, straightforward eye contact, with one or both hands folded and crossed in the lower foreground. Man Ray also utilized specific characteristics in his subjects to make his portraits more dynamic. For example, in his portrait of the Surrealist, Yves Tanguy, 1929, Plate 4. Man Ray photographed Tanguy with his hair in a state of disarray. Tanguy's thin smile, penetrating stare, and bizarre hairdo seem to be a surreal view of the artist, making this photograph not only a work of art in itself, but revealing the artist's character also.
Man Ray's portraits of Henri Matisse, 1926, Plate 5, and Gertrude Stein, 1928, Plate 6, are close poses without being close-up portraits, characteristic of Abbott's work also. Simply seated, both sitters reveal staid personalities. Gertrude Stein is as stern and severe in her portrait by Man Ray as her biographers have depicted her.

Man Ray also used dynamic objects in his backgrounds to enliven his portraits. For example, his portrait of Sinclair Lewis, 1925, Plate 7, has a large dominating corkscrew in the background, which leads one's eye to Sinclair Lewis, clutching his garment in the lower foreground. This object is as distracting and as interesting to the portrait as the masks on the top hat worn by Janet Flanner, photographed by Berenice Abbott, 1926-29, Plate 8.

Man Ray positioned his models sensitively as did Abbott. In fact, Abbott's portrait of James Joyce, 1926-29, Plate 9, is extremely close to that of Man Ray's version, 1923, Plate 10. Both poses have Joyce positioned in profile, eyes closed, supporting his head with his hand as though deeply concentrating. Abbott's portrait is the more sensitively executed of the two, however, since more of Joyce's character is revealed in his facial expression in her photograph. Abbott's background is also more visually stimulating, containing a tapestry chair and squares of curtains and wall. Ray's portrait projects a figure-ground relationship, where Joyce is a light figure against a textured wall covering with not more than four value changes. Abbott's portrait, on the other hand, makes use of the decor in the background, more characteristic of a document.
Ray's portrait of Ernest Hemingway, 1923, Plate 11, is a romantic portrayal of the writer. Blurred and dark, the photograph is almost mystical and quite atypical compared to Ray's other portraits. A strange circle surrounds Hemingway's head, possibly a wide-brimmed hat, further drawing attention to the young man's beauty and sensitivity.

The same sensitivity can be found in Abbott's portrait of André Gide, 1926-29, Plate 12. Gide confronts the camera with a cold, menacing stare, his lips pursed as though from a pause in his oratory. He folds his glasses as though waiting for the photographer's action, before continuing in the completion of some point.

Abbott's portrait of James Joyce, 1926-29, Plate 13, was obviously posed for the camera. He glances nonchalantly to the side with his hat positioned slightly off-center on his head. Emphasis is on his hands, one garnished with two rings and the other resting on his knee to support a walking cane. The items included in his portrait are indications of his prosperity and social station. His small, round eyeglasses and the emphasis on his hands are clues to his literary profession, and the positioning of his hat hints at his character. A.D. Coleman of The New York Times, said of this portrait, "Joyce, who attempted to recreate the universe, seems abashed at his own effrontery and cannot face the camera's objective eye."14 The reason for Joyce's position, however, was that his eyesight was so bad, his eyes so sensitive to light at that time, that he could not look directly into the camera.15
Another striking portrait by Abbott is the poet Edna St. Vincent Millay, 1926-29, Plate 14. Dressed in a black tailored suit, Millay is positioned against a black backdrop. Attention is drawn to the sensitive features of Millay's face, her eyes and mouth in particular. Her white collar and man's tie lead the viewer's eyes to her folded hands and a knee protruding from the hemline of her skirt. Berenice Abbott always used a large format camera in the studio, which enabled her to achieve much detail and depth of field. The tonal ranges apparent in this particular print are impressive and show great control over a difficult medium.

Lucia, the daughter of James Joyce, Plate 15, 1926-29, was photographed while dancing. Her dance movements appear to be very spontaneous, her hands and face out of focus due to her movement. The photograph was previsualized by Abbott for the particular dance position Lucia took. Abbott released the shutter just as Lucia stepped out of the picture plane, but the photograph has a snapshot quality because of its spontaneity and because it is out of focus.

A portrait of Peggy Guggenheim, Plate 16, 1926-29, is an example of how chance entered into Abbott's portraiture. Guggenheim's face was very composed although she was clutching her dog, over whom she obviously had little or no control. Her earrings were set in motion as a result of the dog's wriggling, and are out of focus, giving the portrait a snapshot quality. The portrait is a strange combination of a subjective view (the composure and eye contact of Guggenheim's face) and an objective view (the wriggling dog), which often occur accidentally in the snapshots of amateur photographers.
The difference between Abbott's photographs and amateur snapshots is that Abbott planned her photographs. Her trained eye and artistic sensitivity allowed her to previsualize many of her subjects and therefore resulted in an appearance of spontaneity, which was actually selective objectivity. That is, she also chose the moment to photograph. Amateur photographers often succeed in producing this interesting spontaneity, but not with any regularity and not through knowledgeable intent.

Berenice Abbott produced three extraordinary photographs of the Surrealist, Jean Cocteau. In Plate 17, 1926-29, Cocteau was obviously role-playing as he faced the camera, positioned his thumb and index finger as though discharging a gun, and squinted one eye to take aim. His overcoat was buttoned tightly around his neck and the shadow of his tilted hat obscured one eye from view. The grimace of his mouth reinforced his actions and heightened the tension already emphasized by the aforementioned props and gestures as he peered down the barrel of his gun (his finger). This is an highly unusual and complex piece of work by both artists involved. The subject, Cocteau, reproduces an irrational circumstance wherein he threatens us, as viewers, with a gun. Abbott, in photographing the scene, captured his fantasy on film, thereby making us his victims, relying on our knowledge of surrealism for the intellectual result.
In Plate 18, 1926-29, Cocteau's elegant tapering hands rest on a hat, an expression of remorse for his attack on us.

In Plate 19, 1926-29, Cocteau again play-acts. This time viewers find him in a bed of white sheets next to a white mannequin head. This print is highly surrealist in subject matter. The visual elements comprising the picture are very strange in their juxtapositions. The two faces of entirely different substances appear to be his conscious self (a mask) and his unconscious self (himself asleep). The prints in this series are a portrait of Cocteau's surrealist intellect and, in part, his character. They are direct and demanding when viewed together or separately, and stand out among Berenice Abbott's portraits. While they might be interpreted to be surrealist in composition and interpretation, such an idea is in error. These portraits could be viewed as surrealistic without a thorough understanding of Abbott's philosophy of photography as the medium of realism. In this case, she was merely recording the surrealist, Jean Cocteau. The fact that the photographs are visually successful in portraying Cocteau because of choices in selection of angle, framing, and moment to photograph further emphasize Abbott's artistic sensitivity and her importance as a translator of realism.

Sensitivity and her importance as an interpreter in terms of realism.

Berenice Abbott produced a profile of Eugene Atget, Plate 20, 1927, that indicated his bent condition from years of carrying a heavy camera through the streets of Paris. She also produced a frontal portrait of Atget, Plate 21, 1927, which is characteristic of her earlier portraiture. Atget's hands were prominently placed on his knees, one
holding his eyeglasses. This is an extremely sad portrait of Atget, his health gone, and despair apparent in his eyes. His hands are slightly out of focus in the portrait, which pushes attention back to his face. The three important elements of the photograph (face and two hands) form a satisfying triangle against the black background of his overcoat.

The major similarities in style in Abbott's and Ray's portraits are in the positioning of sitters—a sensitive turn of the head (Iris Tree, Plate 22, 1923, by Ray; Margaret Anderson, Plate 23, 1926-29, by Abbott; and Princess Marthe Bibesco, Plate 24, 1926-29, by Abbott), a meaningful gaze (Tristan Tzara, Plate 25, 1924, by Ray; Erik Satie, Plate 26, 1924, by Ray; Max Jacob, Plate 27, 1922, by Ray; and Andre Gide, Plate 12, 1926-29, by Abbott), an artistic expression (Robert Desnos, Plate 28, 1928, by Ray; Jean Cocteau, Plate 19, 1926-29, by Abbott).

Abbott's portraits of Paul Morand, Plate 29, 1926-29; Elliot Paul, Plate 30, 1926-29; and Andre Maurios, Plate 31, 1926-29 are especially parallel in style to Ray's portraits of Tristan Tzara Plate 25, 1924, and Henri Matisse, Plate 5, 1926.

Man Ray's portraits of Constantin Brancusi, Plate 2, 1930, Andre Derain, Plate 3, 1930, and George Braque, Plate 32, 1930, are representative of his constant style in portraiture. At the time he made these portraits, Abbott had already returned to the United States, Following an introduction to the work of such great documentary photographers as Mathew Brady, Timothy O'Sullivan, William H. Jackson, Alexander Gardner, Lewis Hine, and Eugene Atget, while
working with Man Ray, Abbott was stimulated to pursue photography in a different way from Ray, however. While she continued to practice selective objectivity in her photography, she moved away from studio portraiture into the larger spectrum of the environmental portrait. As a result, she had to move even further from her subject to reveal the context in which she found it—its environment. The resulting distance and divergence in photographic interests produced a pronounced difference in style between Abbott and Ray.

**Changing New York**

Berenice Abbott's environmental portraiture and documentary photography after 1929 is stylistically analogous to Eugene Atget's work. In fact, many comparisons may be made to Atget's work in both the subjects Abbott photographed and their compositions. It was primarily Atget's work that focused Abbott's interest in the environmental portrait, although she was already familiar with the work of other documentary photographers.

Eugene Atget was a documentary photographer. His photographs suggest that he was with the vision of a surrealist at times, but he was a realist. In fact, the Surrealists in Paris bought Atget's work and used it as a reference for their own work. He was more interested in visually preserving the history of Paris and its people, however, and in collecting everything he could see from life in Paris, into a record. His own views portrayed the dignity of the people of Paris through a sympathetic approach. To him, the world was a stage and he was a recorder of what happened there. The structure and
composition of his work were prescribed by the subject matter.\textsuperscript{17} As a result of her brief association with Atget--he died in August, 1927--Berenice Abbott no longer attempted to compose her subjects in a studio. She went out into the world around her and recorded what she found there with the selective objectivity she used in her Paris photography.

Abbott believes that photographers see the world more accurately, with intelligence as well as sensuous insight.\textsuperscript{18} The quality of pre-visualization that appears in the work of many of the early realists was also apparent in the work of the French photographer, Eugene Atget. Concerning this, Abbott said:

\begin{quote}
[The photographer] often sees swiftly an entire scene that most people would pass unnoticed. His vision is objective, primarily. His focus is on the world, the scene, the subject, the detail. As he scans his subject, he sees as the lens sees, which differs from human vision. Simultaneously he sees the end result, which is to say he sees photographically.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

A careful study of Abbott's photographs in comparison to Atget's reveals the insights and viewpoints they shared. Although their friendship was a brief one, he inspired Abbott to work in a more objective style in photography. Atget wanted to capture the spirit of Paris, its people, and its distinctive character. Abbott's aspirations in documenting New York were to depict "not so much beauty and tradition as native fantasia emerging from accelerated greed."\textsuperscript{20} While Atget's pictures showed 19th Century Paris in a nostalgic way, Abbott's work shows the modern, technological triumph of man over nature."\textsuperscript{21}
The major advantage Abbott had at the beginning of her colossal project in New York was the benefit of having known Atget. She became aware of his poetic photographic vision through printing his negatives and by visiting the places he photographed. Therefore, as art critic Gene Thornton stated, "She started with a grander conception than perhaps he had had at first."22 Also, by the time she began her Changing New York Photographs, Abbott had had the experience of working with the American architectural historian, Henry Russell Hitchcock, and had traveled to many major cities in the United States to photograph buildings for his book on the American architect, H.H. Richardson.

Abbott planned her Changing New York Photographs carefully, to include the following criteria.

1. Such a photograph should truthfully record significant aspects of our material culture or environment, the development of such culture or environment, or any individual, incident, or scene of possible historic value. 2. The photograph should be properly documented. That is, the pictorial record should be accompanied by a suitable contemporary description or caption of the subject photographed, the name of the photographer should be given, and the date of recording should be given or established, so that collectively there is sufficient information to establish without question the authenticity of the photograph.23

With the above criteria realized in each of the Changing New York photographs, each photograph was located in both time and space, their values lying, 'not on technical or external photographic performance in the spirit of art for art's sake, but on content,'24 according to Abbott.
The Changing New York Photographs resulted in a book by the same title, with text by Elizabeth McCausland. Singularly, the photographs have a very objective, but previsualized, quality. However, when viewed as an entity, they become an important document of New York City in the early decades of this century. The photographs have become increasingly valuable because more than half the buildings Abbott recorded have now been demolished. Her photographs, in many cases, are the only record of buildings of historical importance to scholars of architecture and of the history of New York City.

When Abbott first began documenting the city, she had only a 6.5 x 9 cm camera, which she used solely to make photographic notes on the city. Following this, she purchased a Century Universal 8 x 10 view camera which she still uses. She studied her photo notes for the appropriate time of day for light conditions and the corresponding shapes caused by shadows she wanted in her compositions, Then, and only then, did she take out the view camera for her final portrayal.

Abbott's documentary photographs were composed carefully before she photographed. That is, at times she arranged articles to complement her idea, and when important to the overall composition, she would wait for both pedestrian and vehicular traffic to clear before photographing. However, because photography is a humanistic medium, she often included people in her street scenes. She said, "We live in a world of human beings. Through daguerreotypes, calotypes, tintypes, family albums, and all, photography always recognized this fact. In news photography, the medium's liveliest and most immediate application, the fact is never forgotten."
At this point, some interesting comparisons between the Paris work of Eugene Atget's work and Berenice Abbott's Changing New York photographs can be made that indicate they had a relative understanding of the successful environmental portrait. Unlike the Paris of Atget's lifetime, which was orderly and composed, however, New York was immense, with a superhuman scale and no visible order.27 The following critiques will show the similarities in Abbott's and Atget's styles and will also exhibit Abbott's growth as a photographer through documenting New York City. This section contains both comparisons to Atget's work and critiques of individual prints than stand out in the document as striking examples of Abbott's vision.

Both Abbott and Atget photographed the marketplace. For example, "Chicken Market," Plate 33, 1937, by Abbott, and Plate 34, ca. 1890, by Atget, are both views of a butcher's shop, made from approximately the same low angle. The shopkeeper watches from inside in both photographs. The major difference between the two except for time and location, is that Abbott's view is made looking into the shop from outside a front window, while Atget's view is from inside the shop. In Abbott's photograph, the window glass allowed a safe distance through which she photographed a woman without having to interact with her socially.

In "Roast Corn Man," Plate 35, 1938, by Abbott, "Hot Dog Stand," Plate 36, 1936, by Abbott, and "Traveling Tin Shop," Plate 37, 1936, by Abbott, the peddlers seem to be extensions of their pushcarts. In these totally objective photographs, none of these proprietors acknowledged Abbott's camera. In 1938, according to the text in Changing New
PLATE 33
York, 14,000 of these peddlers and their carts were corralled into enclosed markets. Abbott, however, felt it important to show them in the streets, part of changing New York.\textsuperscript{28} "Hot Dog Stand" is especially revelatory of the changes that took place in New York City at the time. Abbott purposely did not stop the motion of passing vehicular traffic, which is a direct contrast to the hand-pushed cart of the peddler. Also typical of Abbott's view of New York, the skyscraper is ever present in the background, overshadowing the era of the street peddler.

Abbott is more objective in her photographs of street vendors than Atget, whose subjects waited impatiently for him to finish his camera act. Atget worked with a large format camera that was heavy and required considerable time to set up. As a result, his subjects often waited as he prepared his equipment. (See Plates 38 and 39, ca. 1990, by Atget.) He took most of his photographs in the early hours, which allowed him to "avoid people who were antagonistic and stupid," as Abbott points out, and to avoid "moving objects encountered later in the day."\textsuperscript{29} In Plate 40, ca. 1990, by Atget, he intruded on a group of people on the street who looked directly at the camera in a momentary reaction of apparent disgust.

As mentioned earlier, Berenice Abbott also worked with a large format camera. However, technology by that time allowed her more options than it had offered Atget. She was, therefore, able to be more objective due to the time element involved in setting up her equipment and because of somewhat faster films which had been developed by that time. Consequently, it became a matter of choice rather than necessity
PLATE 40
whether or not to stop action or to show movement in a photograph. Eugene Atget's photographs were often haunted by ghosts—wispy figures of people moving through his scenes—undoubtedly people who did not wish to be photographed and who fled at the sight of his camera.

Unlike the streets of Paris, which had remained relatively unchanged over the years, comparatively speaking, the face of New York City changed rapidly after World War I. Skyscrapers grew in place of the not-so-formidable structures of previous years, and the pace of city life seemed to increase with the new age of automation. Berenice Abbott, along with the realists in painting, photography, and other graphic arts, realized these changes and attempted to portray the changing pace of American cities, and what better place for Abbott to begin than in the most American of cities—New York.

The remaining photographs of Abbott's Changing New York Project that are analyzed in this section may also be compared to Eugene Atget's work, generally speaking. The aforementioned similarities between Atget's and Abbott's photography should be kept in mind while reviewing the following Changing New York photographs,
Abbott's photograph, "The Shelter on the Waterfront," Plate 41, 1938, is an extremely realistic view of the waterfront and its characters. Abbott's position (that is, the camera's view) is highly credible, since none of the subjects seem to be aware of the presence of the camera; attention is drawn to a scuffle between two men.

This photograph describes for a viewer the many facets of life in New York City in that it shows teeming skyscrapers juxtaposed to a derelict-surrounded shanty. Because of Abbott's low camera angle, the shanty's own masts and stacks as well as those of nearby watercraft, mimic the spiring skyscrapers. The shanty, with its awning framed window, is a watchman's home. Built from scraps of lumber and metal, the awning is a curious touch of humanity in a rather industrial setting.

"St. Mark's Church with Skywriting," Plate 42, 1936, by Abbott was photographed from a low camera angle. The obelisk-like steeple is the only portion of the architecture given any emphasis. Its centrality also indicates its importance in the photograph, while the rest of the structure falls off the lower picture plane. The central placement of the steeple against a cloudless sky and the way it obscures the skywriting is reminiscent of the instantaneousity of snapshots. The photograph has an overall gray quality with no strong highlights and few shadows. Abbott, as well as Atget, often produced photographs with blank, cloudless skies in the background. While Atget's blank skies
were possibly due to his use of orthochromatic film, Abbott used panchromatic film with filters to produce the same effect. She also used filters when photographing white buildings to distinguish between the building and the blank sky. "St. Mark's Church with Skywriting" is an understatement of the caption written by Elizabeth McCausland because of its informal quality. McCausland wrote:

St. Mark's-in-the-Bouwerie [sic], second oldest church building standing in New York City, occupies the oldest site of continuous religious worship in Manhattan. Here once stood the chapel built by Petrus Stuyvesant, last of the Dutch governors. Behind its steeple a skywriter pumps 250,000 cubic feet of smoke a second into advertising slogans.

Abbott might argue, however, that the important steeple represents the essence of the structure in this scene, thus justifying its importance to the overall document.

Although Abbott disavows nostalgia in her photographs, it is difficult not to suspect her motives in her photograph of the Provincetown Playhouse, taken in 1936 under the Changing New York Project (see Plate 43). As mentioned earlier, Abbott first went to McDougald Street when she arrived in New York City in 1917. There she joined her friends Sue Jenkins and James Light, then affiliated with the Provincetown Playhouse. The feelings of nostalgia are aroused from the architecture of the structure, however. The architecture alone is very romantic in its simple roughness. The old doors, which seem almost barn-like, are capped with an ornate cornice and surrounded by signs, indicating the building's purpose. Abbott included all these important elements to describe the building as the Provincetown Playhouse, which
would otherwise probably be dismissed as a warehouse. The two men
in the doorway add interest and give scale to the building but
do not detract from the purpose of the photograph. Although shadows
obscure the printing on the signs, it is still discernable. The
strong shadows cast in the scene from the signs nicely balance the
dark areas in the lower left and right corners of the scene, stimu-
lating triangular visual movement. The choice of time of day to
photograph was important to Abbott, and the shadows cast on the dentil
blocks of the cornice, as well as those cast by the signs, emphasize
the many squares and rectangles that compose the building.

This photograph is not revelatory of texture with just a passing
glance, but upon close observation, wire covered windows and various
painted materials appear. The attention Abbott gave to such fine
detail through careful exposure was quite an accomplishment, consider-
ing the problems of lighting in narrow streets, as well as slower
lenses and films at that time.

Abbott's photograph of the 'Civic Repertory Theater,' Plate 44,
1936, on the other hand, is photographed with all the dignity its
facade commands. Unlike the unadorned building of the Provincetown
Theatre, the Civic Repertory Building is encrusted with ornament like
the Greek and Roman architecture of antiquity. There is much detail
realized in this photograph, from faces atop windows and doors to rich
textures of peeling paint on masonry. Abbott carefully planned this
photograph to fill the picture plane almost completely with the
building facade, since she knew its fine detail would soon meet the
wrecking ball. The man sitting next to the pillar may have been positioned there as a reference point for the scale of the building. The strong morning light Abbott so often sought and the empty streets she waited for to decrease the complications of photographing in traffic are both apparent in this photograph.

"Queensboro Bridge: 11," Plate 45, 1937, is viewed from a pier looking toward the heart of the city. Abbott planned the photograph to include the many elements of New York City that invigorate its landscape, such as the vast panorama of activity that surrounds the docks, the bridges, and the skyscrapers. The many skyscrapers, masts and lines create a staccato pattern across the picture plane. Space is well defined by the planning of this photograph through the photographer's position; that is, elements which produce the angles by which the eye is led from foreground to midground to background were carefully selected and included in the photograph. The dock in the immediate foreground parallels a distant shoreline and cityscape, while Queensboro Bridge separates the two.

Small areas of interest in the photograph enhance the legibility of the photograph. The eye, beginning at the left, for example, first rests upon the mini-cityscape framed by Queensboro Bridge and the masts of two boats at the dock. It then moves to the next small area of interest, the letters and numbers "L.V.R.R.64" in the middle foreground, and the word, "ILLIINOIS." The viewer's eye is drawn to the edge of the picture plane as punctuation to end the many movements created by the artist's careful selections.
Berenice Abbott's photograph, "Court of the First Model Tenement in New York City," Plate 46, 1936, is one of the most striking photographs in the Project on several levels. Abbott's keen ability to recognize and record artistically the patterns and movement found in life situations is again notable in this picture. Characteristic of her style and Atget's, Abbott's sky is a void, stark background for the vertical elements found in this scene. Boldly, Abbott positioned a pole exactly in the middle of the picture plane, extending it edge to edge, creating an illusion of continuing space. This black pole accentuates the verticality of the tenement houses and acts as a mooring for an hundred clotheslines, which radiate from it and continue off the picture plane. The clothes, which seem frozen, are comical elements in a somber scene and create interesting patterns across the picture plane in many values. Their freedom is in direct contrast to the prison-like courtyard that encases and dwarfs the humans therein. The tenement windows, reflecting a bleak sky, reinforce the pattern created by the frozen clothing that dances whimsically across the picture plane. The photograph has very shallow depth of field. The foreground is out of focus and the clothing appears to be pasted on a dark ground. Repetitive shapes are always key elements in Abbott's New York photographs, and this is a good example.

An interesting parallel may be drawn between this photograph and a photograph by Man Ray of similar subject matter. Ray also photographed clothing dancing in the wind from a clothesline.
However, Plate 47 is but a detail, compared to Abbott's comprehensive view. This 1920 photograph by Ray also illuminates a difference between the styles of the two photographers. Where Ray was abstract and photographed very close in order to detail objects and to remove them from their natural context, Abbott stood back far enough to reveal the natural context of objects as she found them.

"Country Store Interior," Plate 48, 1935, by Abbott, is reminiscent of many Works Progress Administration photographs taken during the Depression but not characteristic of what many people would associate with life in New York City at any time. The photograph is interesting because of the objects it portrays, and the main emphasis in Elizabeth McCausland's text is on the description, prices, and dating of these objects. However, Abbott has produced a beautiful still life of objects. Repetition of size is apparent in the objects in the picture as well as in the floor boards and wainscoting on the walls and ceiling of the room. Abbott selected visually in this scene those same items she often chose for exterior photographs; that is, graphics in the form of advertisements, labels, sentences, and numbers. Even the shapes of the wire chairs recall the lacy quality of the clothing in her tenement photograph mentioned earlier. The stove pipe is a strong vertical element mimicking masts, smoke stacks, bridge supports, and skyscraper shapes found in other photographs. The strong pattern of sunlight upon the floor aids in drawing attention to the foreground, which would otherwise be void. Its own shape contradicts and therefore breaks the
monotony of the repetitious floor boards, since the lines in the sun pattern are perpendicular to those of the floor boards.

"Abe's Plaza Gas Station," Plate 49, 1936, by Abbott, is a clear, concise photograph that demands the attention of even the sleepiest of viewers. Its many shapes and values guide a viewer's eyes around the picture plane over and over, each time with new information revealed that was previously overlooked. The crispness of the photographic rendering of these objects leaves a viewer with a feeling for the texture of chrome, for colors such as red, white and blue, and even for the sensation of a sunny morning. Again, tanks, poles, circles, and squares are selected repetitive shapes to carry a viewer's eyes around the picture plane. Numbers and words are used graphically, causing one's eyes to touch on each plane briefly in interest while moving around the elements that make up the composition. The contrast in the picture is balanced compositionally as figure and ground. For example, the sky and foreground are virtually void, while the shapes and graphics mentioned earlier burst forth with great energy through the middle ground of the picture plane in a panoramic presentation of black-on-white and white-on-black that enhances movement overall.

"Tri-Borough Bridge," Plate 50, 1937, by Abbott, is an important landmark to Abbott for the Changing New York Project because it linked the boroughs of the Bronx, Manhattan, and Queens. The photograph itself is striking in its contrasts and revelation of strength of materials. The strong design of the photograph through repetitive shapes and elements attests the quality Abbott seeks in visually
selecting a scene. The bulbous, black, v-shaped cavity created by the roadway in the lower left corner of the photograph demands a viewer's full attention and grabs that attention at first glance. It both points to the bridge like an arrow, while pushing attention to the black shape of a steamship just above it in the picture. The lines of the bridge supports do not break up the mass of the black shape, but point in repetitious fashion to the stacks of the ship above them. The road to the bridge surrounds the cavity with a stimulating wavy shape, accentuating the bridge. The bridge itself sits like a crown atop the scene and balances the sculpturesque shape created by the cavity under the bridge in the lower left corner. The fancy Art Deco Era ironwork on the bridge is like a pattern of dark lace on a white cloth as one looks through it transparently to the sky. The sweeping movement of the amorphous shapes of the road and the cavity are in contrast to the geometric shapes of the bridge, but the two are complementary through balance; that is, neither shape overpowers the other, but a flowing motion is created that is punctuated at its end with a final triangle and arch. The eyes of a viewer, then, move from lower left to upper right and upper left to lower right in crisscross fashion, the movement dictated by the shapes selected by Abbott's vision of the bridge and its surrounds. Choice of time of day to photograph, which was always important to Abbott because of the difficulties of photographing in traffic, was obviously chosen carefully here. There is little traffic to obscure the structure of the bridge from view. The sun's position supports the revelation of strength of materials in the scene by revealing the texture of the steel pylons
beneath the bridge. Each rivet shows in this high contrast photograph that finds its balance in contrasts of forms.

Another photograph which exhibits the same contrast is "Hell Gate Bridge," Plate 51, 1937, by Abbott. The bridge looms like a huge sculpture into the picture plane. Its dinosaur shape is silhouetted against a light sky with puffs of clouds that defy the strength, stability, and stationary position of the bridge. Another contradiction of form in the photograph in graphic terms is the tree in the center of the picture, as well as the foliage at the bottom and on the side. The dynamic form of the bridge with its strong geometry not only dwarfs the trees but scoffs at their delicate nature as well. Its huge mass separates the picture plane into thirds and the bridge reads more as a sculpture than a bridge simply through its importance in the photograph. It overshadows and frames a smaller bridge in the background, but this in itself reinforces the message that the overpowering sculptural form in the photograph is, in fact, Hell Gate Bridge, as described in the text.

Berenice Abbott's Changing New York series is packed with comparative and contrasting ideas and imagery. For example, in "Gunsmith and Police Department," Plate 52, 1937, Abbott sets imagery in contrast by seemingly superimposing a large gun on the front of a building. Of course, she would never "superimpose" one image on another, considering her views on realism and photography. Through reading the text, however, we learn that she has photographed two establishments having in common guns or the use of guns. The building in the background is the Police Department. The gun is merely a sign for Frank Lava, Gunsmith. The
image supports the idea, however. The gun is pointed toward the Police Department, wherein there are many guns. To one looking for hidden messages, this photograph, taken from a low camera angle, is dynamic and cleverly composed by Abbott and carries with it a multiplicity of messages as well as expressing Abbott's purpose—to document the address.

Berenice Abbott made several photographs of the city looking down from skyscrapers. Examples in Changing New York include the following: "Broadway to the Battery," Plate 53, 1938; "Wall Street, Showing East River," Plate 54, 1938; "City Arabesque," Plate 55, 1938; "Fortieth Street Between Sixth and Seventh Avenues," Plate 56, 1938; "Daily News Building, Plate 57, 1935; and "Rockefeller Center: From 444 Madison Avenue," Plate 58, 1937.

These photographs are similar to Abbott's "Court of the First Model Tenement in New York City," mentioned earlier, in that they are very tapestry-like. The varied shapes and forms of the skyscrapers covered with small dots and squares which are windows, fill their picture planes in such a way that the entire panorama of the city seems drawn tightly together in a small space. Depth of field is crucially important in these high-angle photographs, since everything from the tops of the buildings to the streets below must be focused to reveal height and distance. A viewer's eyes skip from building to building across the page, darting in and out of each form's tiny square shapes. These tiny shapes invigorate the buildings on which they seem pasted and also aid in depicting distance.
"El Station Interior, Sixth and Ninth Avenue Lines, Downtown Side," Plate 59, 1936, is one of Abbott's most intriguing photographs. The photograph is composed as though a play is in progress, for the scene is set with the sparse furnishings of a stage set, complete with routes of entrance and egress and playactors. The dark-clad and mysterious performers seem to be isolated from one another and absorbed in thought. Each stares menacingly at the audience. Tension heightens in the audience as the first act opens. We await the entrance of a young starlet through the turnstile, predicted by the sinister gazes of the actors, already on stage. In this instance, Abbott again photographed human subjects without revealing them personally. However, she used her human subjects to reinforce the mood of her photograph, which in retrospect reveals the mood of the 1930s. The old Elevated Station, with its Art Deco Era ornamental motifs and furnishings, is somber in the shadows of a cold, damp day. It is curious to note the facial expressions of the playactors in this photograph, as they seem to express the tension of the times. This is purely speculation, however, since Abbott's coolly objective manner of photographing does not support the notion that she tried to create this mood.

Abbott again utilized repetition of shape and use of graphics in this photograph to move a viewer's eyes across the picture plane and to otherwise draw attention through uninteresting areas in the photograph. For example, the large word, "Entrance," on the turnstile in the center foreground defines that space and invigorates an otherwise boring area. It directs attention to the right, leading into a pattern that then returns from right to left to the background in zigzag fashion. In
blocking out the word "Entrance" in the foreground, then, the photograph has no clearly defined graphic direction of movement across the picture plane.

The long windows in the swinging doors of the station counter-balance the overpowering word "Entrance" in the immediate foreground. They direct attention from left to right and right to left, almost in a holding pattern of interest in the midground. Barely visible cloaked figures beyond the doors add mystery to the photograph. The doors also divide the photograph in half and lead one intellectually to the street and world outside the station.

"Lebanon Restaurant," Plate 60, 1936, indicates commerce in the Lebanese District of New York City. Abbott carefully depicted both the English and Arabic letters that reveal the contents of the building. The lacy quality of the Arabic letters respond to similar lines found in fancy iron stair banisters before the restaurant, just the sort of thing Abbott recognized instantly—the unique amidst the ordinary.

"Tri-Boro Barber School," Plate 61, 1935, is a panoply of light on graphics. Again, Abbott selected a scene with small shapes in repetition—this time, stripes—and light formed shapes from another structure to reinforce her found objects. This photograph is especially revelatory of texture in that the structure of the elevated station overhead is similar in texture visually to the columns and stripes of the barber school. The graphics, of course, also add to the carnival character under the 'el needed to attract attention to the dying establishments found there.
"Chicken Market," Plate 33, 1937, is composed visually by Abbott with foreign graphics, this time in Yiddish. The elements that compose this photograph are comical and even cartoon like. The Yiddish letters are close in character to the shapes created by the chicken legs and feet suspended in the store window in both size and shape—while the cartoon-like pictures of a chicken and a duck reinforce the store's function.

Both "Cheese Store" and "Bread Store," Plate 62, 1937, and Plate 63, 1937, respectively, are made up of the same objects, each depicting the purpose of their corresponding establishments. In each, Abbott characteristically used the alphabet and numerical systems to balance light and shadow in a figure/ground relationship to other objects. Abbott also used reflection to add interest to her Bread Store and Cheese Store photographs. The reflections of buildings from across the street fill the otherwise small void areas in the photograph. The condensation around the amorphous shapes of the bread in the window of the bread store is in character with the mysterious quality of the reflection on the window, since it also operates in a figure/ground relationship in this picture. The woman in the window stares curiously at Abbott and draws the viewer's attention through the window simply through her presence.

"Rothman's Pawnshop," Plate 64, 1938, is a photograph depicting a location, but artistically speaking, the photograph is also concerned with a balance and juxtaposition of shape and form. Abbott perceived this scene in three levels, each containing its own hierarchy of elements relating to each other as figure and ground. The entire photo-
graph is satisfyingly balanced by a dark band at the bottom and a smaller dark band at the top. Operating inside each of these bands are graphics and/or merchandise that enliven the scene. The middle band grabs a viewer's attention almost immediately through a symbol that is in the exact center of the photograph. The size and shape of this symbol is so satisfying to view within the context of this otherwise busy scene that it is difficult to move away from visually. However, the fact that it is a white figure on a middle tone ground does lead the eye from left to right in order to pick up surrounding graphics and objects. This photograph is similar in character to Abbott's "Gasoline Station," mentioned earlier, in that it evokes a feeling of the vivid colors and shiny, slick textures so characteristic of the era.

Abbott's preoccupation with the depiction of small objects is never so obvious as in her photograph of a newsstand, Plate 65, 1935. On a newsstand can be found a panorama of faces, letters, and numbers stacked together in a large, flat tapestry of tone. Abbott was intrigued also by the band of entertainment posters in her photograph, "Fourth Avenue, No. 154," Plate 66, 1936, wherein she depicted an "old law" tenement in a state of ruin. The band of posters on the lower floor, simply by way of their horizontal presentation, draw attention to the structure and reinforce the repetitive shapes of the boarded-in tenement windows that present in rhythmic fashion above. The point of the turret from Abbott's camera angle acts as punctuation in the photograph, since it visually ends the subject. It is interesting to note that a viewer's eyes involuntarily investigate the void shape of the
sky above the turret simply because of its location on the picture plane in relationship to the architecture and its orientation.

As mentioned earlier, Abbott used architectural elements on buildings to create interest in her photographs. A series of open doors or windows such as those found in her "Warehouse," Plate 67, 1936, operate in conjunction with shadow to create repetitious shapes on the larger form of the building. The rounded, yet pointed shapes of the windows are reminiscent of Gothic structures. The arched openings perforate the fortress, destroying the Yuban Coffee supergraphic, which, in itself, becomes more interesting as a result.

Perspective in this print is important, since Abbott utilized lines of structures to sculpture nature. That is, she formed a shape by enclosing a bit of sky with the lines of the buildings in the scene. This shape functions as its own entity in the photograph, counterbalancing the similar and repetitious shape of the street below.

"Third Avenue Car Barns," Plate 68, 1936, is another example of Abbott's spectacular vision in utilizing shapes to produce larger forms. The car barns, made up of intricately sculptured architectural elements, "read" in the photograph as continuous form across the picture plane. Against a blank sky, so characteristic of Abbott's photography, peaks and valleys of the building's mansard roof, as well as other structural elements, cause the sky to become a sculptured form and therefore integral to the composition. In fact, clouds or other objects in the sky would break up its form and diminish the integrity of the structure below. Also, by including a piece of elevated structure in the fore-
ground, Abbott repeated and therefore reinforced the intricacies of the architectural elements on the building's facade. Intricate design against stark simplicity is the key to the design of this photograph and expresses Abbott's ability to envision shape and form, juxtaposing the two compositionally successfully.

"Canyon, Broadway and Exchange Place," Plate 69, 1936, is another example of Abbott's ability to create sculpturesque form from existing forms in juxtaposition. In this photograph, Abbott positioned herself in such a way so to portray the sky as intruding into the darkness of the urban scene in the same way lights break the stillness of a rural landscape. Her low camera angle heightens and accentuates the energy of this scene because of the strength of materials and distance revealed. Depth of field is great in this photograph, and Abbott's superb ability to control the processes of photographic printing are manifest in this exquisite portrayal of the strength inherent in structures that dwarf mankind physically.

This photograph gives a viewer a very different idea of how an enormous structure might be photographed at close range. By photographing this location from a low camera angle, Abbott turned a documentary idea into a work of art. The fact that little is revealed about the facade of the Exchange Court Building to the left, due to strong shadows caused by early morning photographing, is unimportant in the overall composition. Consequently, Exchange Court Building acts as a framing form for the Adams Building in the center, as does the North American Building on the right.
In Abbott's photograph "Fifth Avenue, Nos. 4, 6, 8," Plate 70, 1936, the same eerie, mysterious light quality is found in the paintings of Edward Hopper, who also worked in the 1930s, particularly in his "Early Sunday Morning," 1930. The morning light bathes the building, moving across it from left to right. The street is practically void of traffic, whereas Hopper's scene was completely empty of people and vehicles. The strange emptiness of the windows in Abbott's photograph creates a somber mood in this scene, since most of the windows are closed and shaded. Even the perspective is analogous to painters' depictions of similar scenes. Abbott shoots from a point directly opposite the corner of the building. Her building occupies the central portion of the picture plane, while Hopper's building "bleeds" off the edge of the picture plane. Both views are straightforward, demanding attention. Vision is consequently focused on the buildings, while the streets, in shadow, and the empty sky, surrounds and encloses the structures.

Abbott claims never to have been influenced by Hopper, although she likes his work.32 Any similarity, then, is purely coincidental and should be attributed only to a similar reaction in each artist to such scenes.

Other Abbott photographs exhibit the same mysterious mood and peculiar empty quality as this photograph, even though a multiplicity of structures is involved. One such photograph is "Fortieth Street Between Sixth and Seventh Avenue," Plate 56, 1938. The stepped skyscrapers allow light and shadow to dictate form as light dances down
the sides of the buildings into the streets below. During the early Twentieth Century, by city ordinance, skyscrapers were stepped back to prevent their obscuring light from smaller structures. The sculptur-esque form of the stepped skyscraper became the symbol of a teeming megalopolis. Again, Abbott's careful study of light and when to photograph certain structures is evident in this picture. Abbott always planned her photographs one day, by observing a scene's surroundings and quality of light at specific times during the day, and returned to photograph that scene later.³³ This accounts for continuity of quality and consistency of character in the photography of this project.

The Changing New York photographs revolve around those structures, landmarks, and objects in New York from that city's antiquity, those items that someday would no longer exist in the city or in their present form. Indeed, today one can only imagine the elegance lost to the wrecking ball since the time of these photographs. Abbott's love of craft and quality is obvious in the items she chose to record. It comes as no surprise that she included some curious antiques in her project photographs. In "Snuff Shop," Plate 71, 1938, she portrays Sandy, the "Scotch Indian," a wooden figure rescued from the city dump and sold to a collector. Characteristic of many of her other New York photographs, the picture plane is filled with small objects and graphics that describe the location. The Yiddish lettering indicates Abbott's location in the City also.

An interesting comparison to the above mentioned photographs is Plate 72, by Atget. Atget portrayed a mannequin display in the open air outside a shop, in a similar position to Abbott's wooden Indian.
Both totems are part of the past now and can be found only in antique shops. Although Abbott was not nostalgic in her photographic pursuit of New York City, Gene Thornton of the *New York Times* commented that her photographs are "acquiring a kind of fictitious picturesque charm."\(^3\) However, the pure documentation of the City at that specific time in history is a more accurate description of Abbott's goal.

**Science**

As stated in Chapter 1, Berenice Abbott became interested in photographing scientific experiments when she finished the *Changing New York* Project and began some scientific experiments on her own. The experiments were a dynamic change from the type of work she had done previously. It is in this body of work that Abbott's photographic vision is often confused with that of a Surrealist, in much the same way that Atget was misinterpreted. Further, critics of photography often try to link these photographs stylistically to Man Ray.

Man Ray's work was primarily abstract and subjective; he was a Surrealist. Atget's work was coolly objective, yet not journalistic: he was a realist. After careful consideration of the similarities and differences in style and ideas among these three artists, it can be seen that Abbott's expression is indeed that of an independent.

Because surrealism is a subjective concept, opposed to the objectivity of realism, serious attention must be given to the concepts of both surrealism and realism to understand the following
analysis, which shows that Abbott's work has been misinterpreted as surreal in the same way that Atget's work was misinterpreted. Emphasis is set upon the sophistication of Abbott's vision and craft in presenting objectively photographic images of scientific principles that are subjectively beautiful.

In Abbott's book, *New Guide to Better Photography*, 1953, she states, "Photography is...drawing with light....It is modeling or sculpturing with light to reproduce the plastic form of natural objects....It is painting with light to create the subtle tones of colors in nature." Man Ray also considered his "Rayograms" drawing with light. He placed objects on top of glass negatives over photographic paper and called the resulting photograms "Rayograms." Some interesting parallels between the Rayograms and Abbott's science photographs can be noticed by viewing Plate 73, "Integral Photograph and One Hundred PerCent Automatic," 1936; Plate 74, "Cerveau bien ordonne, 1936-7; and Plate 75, "Fashion Photography 'Winter Collection'," 1936-7; and Plate 76, "Cover of a Note-Book Purchased from a Beggar," 1936-7, all by Man Ray. These photographs are similar in practice, though not in principle to Abbott's "Penicillln Mold," Plate 77, 1958-61. Abbott photographed at close range to show every minute detail of the growing mold. She included the outer periphery of the mold to provide a context in which to clarify her description for viewers. Just the reverse of this is true in Man Ray, however. In the above mentioned photographs, Ray "abstracted" objects, providing no confining context through which to describe his objects. Further, he shrouded their descriptions by giving each subjective, surreal titles.
Two examples of Abbott's work that are also reminiscent of Rayogram technology are Plates 78 and 79, 1958-61, circular waves caused by water drops in a tank of water by using a small point-source light (a flashlight at arm's length) and photographic paper under a ripple tank. She described these as "photograms in motion."

Curiously, Ray's "La voie lactée, IV," Plate 80, 1973, recalls Abbott's photographs of iron filings and magnetism, Plates 81, 82, and 83, 1939. Again, Ray "abstracted" his subject through its presentation. There is no boundary in the picture plane except the edges of the page itself. This context is of no importance to Ray, whereas it is of utmost importance in Abbott's descriptions.


The predominant effect in the Rayograph is of a total lack of gravity: the Rayograph landscape is a lunar one, the images are the traces left in the positions vacated by insignificant objects. The assemblage is disconcerting for in spite of the fact that they have an apparent meaning the images arrange themselves in strange lines as if following invisible currents. There is neither plan nor calculation: still, there is always a rhythmic or geometric pattern in the arrangement of these traces. In the Rayograph the typical feature of the image is instability; and the nature of the image as such can only be preserved through this movement and change. In
each Rayograph therefore there is seriality and rhythm. The image we perceive is only one of an infinite number of possibilities. The natural evolution of the Rayograph is the film sequence.37

In Abbott's time exposure illustrating Newton's First Law of Motion, Plate 84, 1958-61, a wrench is utilized to show the "uniform motion of the center of mass."38 The idea of a rather banal object taken out of its usual context and hurled through the air makes both a stimulating visual pattern and a clearer presentation of Newton's First Law than a verbal or written explanation might provide. Abbott's purpose in this photograph was simply to show that the center of mass moves in a straight line. However, the simplicity of the image and the seemingly "invisible current" that moves the wrench along in a "rhythmic or geometric pattern" reminds a viewer of a film sequence. This photograph strongly reveals Abbott's thorough knowledge of her subject and craft. She has drawn upon her ability to previsualize a three-dimensional object in space and to transcribe it to the two-dimensional medium of the plastic image. These successful translations, as mentioned earlier, are directly related to Abbott's early experience in sculpture, where she experienced forming three dimensional objects from live references and two-dimensional drawings.

Another photograph in Abbott's series of time exposures is her "multiple exposure showing the path of a moving ball ejected vertically from a moving object," or a multiple exposure of a toy train and moving ball, Plate 85, 1958-61. This strange image was intended to be just as it was captioned; a strict example of an experience in science.
Out of context, however, it is a beautiful and poetic rhythmic serial. Abbott has drawn upon several sources, then, to produce a visually stimulating photograph of a scientific principle. Her experience, intellect, and vision combined give a viewer interesting objects presented sensitively and artistically to illustrate principles which would otherwise be difficult to understand.

The above mentioned photographs illustrate the difference between Abbott's and Ray's work, although they each contain seriality and rhythm. Within each photograph, film sequences may be visualized. The major difference between the Rayographs and Abbott's work is that the "typical feature of the image (in the Rayographs) is instability," which is as opposite Abbott's intention in her photography as the concepts of subjectivity and objectivity. Man Ray made the following statement concerning his Rayographs, which illuminates the difference.

Like the undisturbed ashes of an object consumed by flames, these images are oxidized residues, fixed by light and chemical elements, of an experience, an adventure, not an experiment. They are the result of curiosity, inspiration, and these works do not pretend to convey any information.

It is obvious that Abbott followed the photographic tradition of realism in depicting the laws of physics in her work. In the following statement, she disavows any reference to surrealism in her work, although many have interpreted it as unintentionally surrealistic.

Indeed, the more clearly the photographer expresses the scientific truth involved, sometimes in its most unesthetic facet or most attractive homeliness, the better he succeeds in his mission and the nearer he approaches the goal of communication and, perhaps, art. A simple statement of science in visual terms should not be confused with the idea of a mere abstract design.
The final photograph discussed in this section of Abbott's work stands out curiously from her other science photographs. It is a photograph of a human eye reflected in pieces of glass attached to a convex core, all of which is mounted on a freestanding base, Plate 86, 1958-61. This photograph, with its strange components, has often been misinterpreted as surrealistic but perhaps a better description is a statement by Douglas Davis, writing in Newsweek. He described Abbott's photography as "bringing 'documentary' photography to the edge of surrealism." 42 Probably the first object in this photograph one looking for surrealism in Abbott's work would recognize is the eye. Its expression is frightful, almost demonic, and its repetition on the strange machine-like object to which it is attached seems to imply surrealism.

The eye, as well as lips and other singular body parts, were taken out of context and used in the works of many surrealist artists in the 1920s and 1930s. In this photograph, the human eye takes the form of a nonsensical ambiguity and adds interest to an otherwise banal photograph illustrating a law of physics. However, the eye in this image was chosen by Abbott's employers for depiction in this experiment. The creative inanimate object with 100 eyes assumes the status of a model. By including the entire object and not abstracting any portions of it, Abbott made an objective view of a rather subjective object. The object itself is subjective, because it is presented as in a portrait and its performance is controlled by the photographer through selection of time, angle and position to photograph. This photograph
more than any other illustrates Abbott's point in the following statement:

The camera's limits, coupled with the conscious choices of the photographer lead the photographer into the subjective... for he cannot help equating the objective world with his self.43

Maine

As mentioned earlier, Abbott said the desire to photograph the city was knocked out of her when she finished Changing New York. The science projects were a welcomed change for her. Following her science projects, however, she returned to environmental portraiture, this time in Maine.

Her objectives in photographing in Maine were the same as they were in New York—to show the individual components which, in totality, describe that state. Abbott's Maine photographs are reminiscent in style to the cool objectivity found in Atget's work. Also, her Portrait of Maine comes closer to the snapshot document than in any of her previous work. This statement is not meant to underrate her intent but rather to suggest that the photographs follow the photographic tradition so purely that upon an initial observation, some of them almost appear naive. For example, Plate 87, 1968, a dog urinating in the brush by the side of a road, has no reference to Maine at all. Plate 88, 1968, a rock formation, has a very interesting composition and cannot be related to Maine simply by itself. Abbott's camp photograph, Plate 89, 1968, could be found in any state in the country. There is nothing, save Chenoweth Halli's text, to indicate that it is a scene in rural Maine. A boy harvesting potatoes, Plate 90, 1968,
reveals little about the potato commerce in Maine or about those people who work the fields. In fact, most of the photographs of commerce are cursorily descriptive and do not offer insights; they are simply representative of Maine commerce (e.g., Plate 91, 1968, "Harvesting Blueberries;" Plate 92, 1968, "Potato Farming;" Plate 93, 1968, "A Catch of Herring;" Plate 94, 1968, "Surrounding a school of fish with a purse seine;" Plate 95, 1968, "Logs en route to the paper mill;" Plate 96, 1968, "The trailer tractor can carry up to eight cords of wood out of the wilderness;" Plate 97, 1968, "Lobster fisherman rowing out for his boat before dawn;" and and Plate 98, 1968, "Granite quarry at Stonington").

In Plate 99, 1968, a close view of a woman in a mitten-knitting contest, the woman smiles sheepishly but stares intently at her knitting project as Abbott photographs her. The same sheepishness can be found in snapshots. In a wider view of the knitting contest, Plate 100, 1968, all the women seem to exhibit the same bashfulness; but, they are in a store window with spectators all around. Therefore, it wasn't only Abbott's camera that intimidated them but the fact that their competition was on display.

Many of Abbott's Maine portraits of people are as poignant as her early work in Paris. For example, Plate 101, 1968, a young woodsman in hardhat and a sawdust covered plaid shirt, is photographed against
a tree-filled background. Plate 102, 1968, a deep sea fisherman "drawing in a purse seine," is a very strong portrait designed to maximize a feeling of strength in both the fisherman and his equipment. The strong diagonals created by the net and craft are reinforced visually by the fisherman's position. The composition fills the picture plane in a most satisfying way, so much so that the truncated body of another fisherman is hardly noticeable at all.

"Lobster Fisherman," Plate 103, 1968, is perhaps the most beautiful of the portraits in this publication. The background for this portrait is a roughly hewn plank wall on which hangs a raincoat. The fisherman, in his small hat and hand-knitted sweater, gazes up and out of the picture plane. The portrait has an almost romantic feeling to it because of its soft-focus quality.

"Aroostook County Potato Farmers," Plate 104, 1968, is another excellent example of Abbott's portraiture reminiscent of her Paris work. The three farmers are aware of the camera, since all three look directly at the photographer. The man farthest from the camera shades his eyes with his hand in order to see the photographer more easily. While Abbott stood close enough to interact with her subjects, she did not interfere in their personal spaces. It is often through the interaction between artist and subject that objectivity becomes apparent. This objectivity is easily noticed here, as well as in the snapshots of amateur photographers.

Abbott's "Inside a Lobster Shack," Plate 105, 1968, has the same romantic quality found in her portrait of a lobster fisherman. The
light diffused through the window softens the shadows and reveals the roughness of the room. The dog resting by an empty chair and a lunch pail suggest melancholic waiting for a master's return.

The photography of Maine architecture Abbott produced is very similar to her New York compositions, although not as dynamic. As usual, the photographer portrays her architectural subject in the most revealing way possible, but also backs up far enough to describe the environment in which the architecture exists. For example, Plate 106, 1968, "A fisherman's home in Jonesport," was photographed during the winter. The snow covered ground reveals little detail but accentuates the form of the houses. Abbott also located the house by photographing from an angle to include the street marker, which is almost in the center of the photograph. The marker is not a distraction, however, because there is no contrast difference between it and the snow covered ground. To describe the environment in which the house is found, Abbott included in the photograph the small neighboring houses built much later than the Victorian Era house of the fisherman.

The print of the fisherman's house also has an overall quality of high contrast. There is little detail in the snow covered foreground or in the sky, which is blank. The background houses are too far away to reveal detail. These rather "burned out" elements, however, draw attention to the main subject, the fisherman's house, which looms from the landscape like a mountain from a plain.

Abbott also photographed homes of artists in Maine. For example, Plate 107, 1968, the home of Longfellow and Hawthorne, respectively, is located at 76 Federal Street in Brunswick. Abbott is careful to
include descriptions of addresses and dates occupied by artists after each photograph to describe each one in time and place. The Longfellow-Hawthorne House is not a dynamic photograph, since the house is nearly covered with shrubbery that obscures it from view. Also, one shutter has fallen from a window on the front of the building and lies horizontally atop the entry. There is no great detail in the photograph, which seems out of focus. The importance of the photograph, however, is not so much its technical success, because much detail is lost in the printing process in publishing, but that the building is documented. Therefore, a record has been made for the future and will survive the building, should it be destroyed by some act of mankind or nature.

Abbott's photograph of the 'Harriet Beecher Stowe House,' Plate 108, 1968, is much more interesting than the Longfellow-Hawthorne House. Compositionally, it occupies the major portion of the picture plane and is framed with the thick boughs of surrounding trees. Abbott's choice to photograph when the trees were bare is important to the success of this photograph, as such a choice is in architectural photography, when foliage would otherwise obscure the subject matter. A late model automobile in the picture alludes to the decade in which the photograph was taken.

Berenice Abbott knew Marsden Hartley, American painter of the early Twentieth Century, who worked in Maine. Hartley occupied a churchhouse studio for several years in Corea, Maine, and there produced some of his most famous expressionist paintings. Abbott photo-
graphed the church in Corea, Plate 109, 1968, because of its significant relationship to Hartley. While Abbott's photograph is compositionally pleasing, it is lacking in fine detail, possibly due to the graininess of the film she used. The window frames of the church are barely detectable, and the roofing material is undeterminable. The small steeple top fades into the sky, and it is impossible to determine the figure atop the steeple. The church is painted white and is photographed against a blank white sky. The ground is covered with snow. The whiteness of everything in the photograph attracts attention to the dark areas in the photograph, the church bell, the windows and chimney, and the fuel logs stacked in front of the building. The fuel logs are also high contrast and contain very little detail. The fact that this is a high contrast photograph does not detract from the composition, however, and it should be realized that the print is high contrast for two reasons—first, because of the weather conditions (snow); second, because some detail is always lost in the printing process during publication. There is nothing in this body of Abbott's work to suggest she manipulated the print through high-contrast films or papers.

Abbott's close photograph of the Nickels-Sortwell House, Plate 110, 1968, is analogically similar to her New York work and also to Atget's work. See Plates 111, 'Gramercy Park West, Nos. 3 and 4, 1935, and Plate 112, ca. 1890, by Atget. Abbott made no attempt to photograph this building with vertical and horizontal lines straight. Her attempt was to show the facade of this building with as much detail as she could include. Since she did not use a wide angle lens, the
picture plane is filled with the facade of the building and is, therefore, descriptive but incomplete.

When viewing A Portrait of Maine, it is important to remember that the photographs are parts of a whole. When viewed collectively, the body of work entitled A Portrait of Maine is a document. If the photographs appear to be snapshot-like, that too, is an indication of a translation of realism in photography. In Berenice Abbott's point of view, they can, therefore, stand on their own as viable art forms.

In the entire Portrait of Maine, the text is very important to the understanding of the document as a whole. Without the text, the photographs would have no unifying factor as did, for example, Changing New York. It should be remembered when viewing A Portrait of Maine in comparison to Abbott's other projects, that the scope of her project in Maine was much larger than in Paris, New York, or in her science work. In Paris, her chief concern was portraiture; in New York, architecture; in science, documentation of experiments. In Maine, however, Abbott had to photograph the many characterizing aspects of Maine and pull them together with a unifying factor. This is the function of Chenowith Hall's text. Abbott photographed Maine to reproduce its essence in pictures. What she found to photograph was not the dynamic structures of the skyscrapers in New York City, and not the beautifully simple subjects of her science photographs. A Portrait of Maine well represents all aspects of Maine's countryside. While it is not a tour guide in function, it is very informative and
interesting in general. After a careful study of these images as a whole, the inherent beauty of the Maine countryside and Abbott's genius for depicting people, places and things emerges successfully.
FOOTNOTES

Chapter VI


2. Elizabeth McCausland, Marlborough Gallery Brochure, 19.


8. Ibid.


13. Interview with Berenice Abbott by Mary Ann Anderson, April, 1981.


16. Ibid., p. 229.


18. Ibid., p. xvi.
19. Ibid., p. xvii.
24. Ibid.
33. Ibid., p. 399.
40. Roland Penrose, Man Ray, p. 82.
41. Ibid.


CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

The difference between viewing Abbott's photography before an intense study of her ideas and after is enormous. Indeed, one cannot understand the work fully without such an investigation. Further, an investigation of an artist's background and the forces that affected him or her during the formative years while struggling to find a career must also be taken into consideration. In this investigation of the career of Berenice Abbott, I have suggested the biographical experiences that formed the basis of her creativity as well as their effects upon her work.

Because Berenice Abbott separated from her family while still quite young and was never attached to anyone matrally nor maternally throughout her life, maintenance was secondary in her life to intellectual exploration and fulfillment. This early and sustained independence gave Abbott the self-confidence to interact with the most affluent and internationally famous circles of artists in New York City, Paris, and Berlin. Although she was younger than many of her contemporaries when she began her career, she was well liked and accepted socially by artists who respected her talent, intellect, and gifted vision. Knowledge of the progression of events in Abbott's life is critical to the understanding of her style in photography, but more important, beyond this, is a critical analysis of her work, such as
the one presented in Chapter VI of this thesis.

While much investigation has gone into the study of perception formation by art educators and art historians alike, such a revelation is beyond the scope of this thesis and therefore has not been presented herein. Since perception is formed by every experience affecting a life, it is a dangerous thing to say that one artist's perception was formed by another's experience. The fact that many comparisons have been made between the work of Eugene Atget, Man Ray, and others with whom Abbott came in contact does not necessarily prove that she was influenced by them or that her perceptions in photography are descendent from their styles. Her foundation in the arts (drawing, sculpture, journalism) provided a solid base for the development of her perception and photographic seeing. These experiences were instrumental in her early success in the photographic medium. Her artistic vision is unique from the vision of those she worked with and knew professionally. She has always exhibited qualities of being an individualist. She has been a "single-track" photographer, one who worked only as a photographer after her introduction to that medium. Following her discovery of photography, the most meaningful observation in terms of her own work was that human beings live in reality, that content is the vital ingredient in all successful works of art, and that for her, the camera is the proper tool through which to depict reality. She said:
...I believe content to be the raison d'être of photography, as of all methods of communication. The importance of content is demonstrated by the fact that the photographs which have survived from the past and which increase in value and prestige are those endowed with content and documentary interest as well as beauty.

The potentiality of the camera for communication of content is almost unlimited. The photograph, full of detail and objective, visual facts, speaks to all people. Where language barriers impede the flow of spoken or written ideas, the photograph is not handicapped; the eye knows no nation. Indeed, photography may be said to be another form of transportation, because it bridges oceans and continents, brings faraway lands close and shows us countries and peoples inaccessible to travel. With this important objective in mind, we ask: "What is it that photography is to communicate? What content shall it state?" The answer is implicit in what has been stated before. Photography is to communicate the realities of life, the facts which are to be seen everywhere about us, the beauties, the absurdities, the achievements, and the waste of contemporary civilization.

Photography is a humanistic medium. When used responsibly to achieve the objectives stated above, no other medium, save the written word, communicates as clearly the facts of life within the time reference presented. Abbott's work is clearly that of a intellectually aware, responsible transmitter of reality images, whose perceptions are implemented by the camera.

With this in mind, the differences between Man Ray's work and Berenice Abbott's work becomes obvious. Where Ray is abstract and close-up, Abbott backs up to reveal the context in which her subject exists. More importantly, Abbott developed her objective style independently of Man Ray, although she learned the process of producing photographs from him.
In defense of the camera's function as a tool to depict reality, Abbott has said, "...If a medium is representational by nature of the realistic image formed by a lens, I see no reason why we should stand on our heads to distort that function. On the contrary, I think you should take hold of that very quality, make use of it, and explore it to the fullest."  

When Abbott met Eugene Atget, she became intensely interested in the photograph as a document of historical importance. In his *History of Photography*, Beaumont Newhall defines documentary photography as "...essentially a desire to communicate, to tell about people, to record without intrusion, to inform honestly, accurately, and above all convincingly. Subject is paramount. The final print is usually not the end product, but the intermediate step toward the picture on the printed page." This definition is certainly true of Abbott's work, then, when considering her published documents.

It was not until Abbott became interested in documenting scientific experiments, however, that the influences affecting her career filtered her perceptions and matured her style. The level of sophistication of these photographs both technically and intellectually are evidence of a mature perception and unique style. According to Newhall, these photographs may also be described as "straight" photography. He said, "...The ability of the camera to record exact images with rich texture and great detail is used to interpret nature and man, never losing contact with reality. The final image is
characteristically previsualized. Technique is the realization of the image without alteration...the fine print is presented as an experience in itself."4

Abbott considers her work to be documentary in nature and defends the inherent function of the camera in those terms. She says, "Good photographs are documentary--they can't escape it....This word 'documentary' has been bandied about out of all proportion and meaning. It's a foolish cliche if it's used to imply the commonplace and drab or the opposite of 'creative.'"5 "The photograph may be presented as finely and artistically as possible, but to merit serious consideration, it must be directly connected with the world we live in. Ultimately, you see, the photograph is a document of the now, and documentary pictures include every subject in the world--good, bad, and indifferent."6

Berenice Abbott is only briefly mentioned in the history books of photography. She feels that caring for Eugene Atget's work interfered somewhat with her own work, since she was responsible for it until 1968. While this is the work for which she is most widely recognized in the United States, this trend is, fortunately, changing as she continues to work and produce photographs into the 1980s. The fact that she saved Atget's work is a great credit to Abbott as an artist and historian; however, the fact that her own career has suffered because so much of her time was devoted to the saving of the Atget Collection cannot be denied. Following a careful study of Atget's images in relationship to Abbott's images, it can be easily seen that her work is equal to his in quality and even surpasses it in
versatility, due to the many empirical influences that formed Abbott's perception.

Berenice Abbott's exhibitions and books have been reviewed over the years in the New York Times, and articles have been written by and about her in such publications as Camera, Art in America, Creative Art, Art News, and Parnassus. It is interesting to note that Current Biography has not updated its biographical information on Berenice Abbott since, 1941, the last volume in which she was included. There is no mention of her in Who's Who in America, although she has been exhibiting and publishing her own work since the beginning of her career. The most current and inclusive published biography written about Berenice Abbott is contained in The Woman's Eye, by Anne Tucker. It is, in fact, only in the recent past that Abbott's work has been reassessed by scholars of photography. She has been actively sought for magazine interviews; short biographical sketches accompany her work in monographs about women photographers; and her name has been included as an outstanding photographer of this century within short paragraphs in books concerning the history of photography, such as Robert Doty's Photography in America and Beaumont Newhall's History of Photography.

While much time and writing could be spent speculating on the reasons for Abbott's low visibility during her late career, it is of greater importance for scholars of photography to concentrate on understanding her work as an independent with a unique vision, especially since an interest in women artists has been aroused in
students of art and art historians across the United States during the 1970s. However, it may be that the work of Berenice Abbott and its significance in the history of art and architecture can only be assessed meaningfully at some time in the distant future. The exploration of Berenice Abbott as a total artist is too broad for the scope of this thesis. However, the recording of a definitive biography of her life and relationships with other art and literary people should be recorded while she is still working. The Berenice Abbott Oral History Project, which was completed in 1975, is an incomplete and cursory historical document. It includes no analyses of Abbott's work and no in-depth investigation of Abbott's relationships with other artists and groups of photographers.

A further study of Berenice Abbott's career might include a critical comparison of her work to the work accomplished by her contemporaries and her students to investigate her influence on them. Also, Abbott's Route #1 Project has never been published and is a document that should be evaluated in terms of its artistic merit as well as its historical and sociological importance.

At this writing, Berenice Abbott is in her eighth decade of life and is still a practicing photographer. Some artists work all their lives for recognition and are never recognized. Berenice Abbott has received much recognition during her career, but because of a lack of scholarly investigation, there is a serious void in the history of photography. Abbott stands out as one of the outstanding photographers of the Twentieth Century. She is unique in the respect that she is also a writer and a publisher on her subject. She has proceeded
through her career as a photographer with the perception of a realist, following that tradition in all her photography. Yet, she expresses herself individually within the discipline of photography through the selective objectivity of her vision. It is hoped that through this thesis, more attention might be focused on Abbott's significant career as it continues today, particularly in academic communities, where histories of such important artists are most often pursued.
FOOTNOTES

Chapter VII


4. Ibid., p. 196.


6. Ibid., p. 80.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A

List of Photographic Plates

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# LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHIC PLATES

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