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Visible Care: Nan Goldin and Andres Serrano's Post-mortem Photography

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Humanities and Cultural Studies
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Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

November 2014

Declaration

I certify that this thesis is the result of my own investigations and, except for quotations, all of which have been clearly identified, was written entirely by me.

Lauren J. Summersgill

October 2014

Abstract

This thesis investigates artistic post-mortem photography in the context of shifting social relationship with death in the 1980s and 1990s. Analyzing Nan Goldin's *Cookie in Her Casket* and Andres Serrano's *The Morgue*, I argue that artists engaging in post-mortem photography demonstrate care for the deceased. Further, that demonstrable care in photographing the dead responds to a crisis of the late 1980s and early 1990s in America. At the time, death returned to social and political discourse with the visibility of AIDS and cancer and the euthanasia debates, spurring on photographic engagement with the corpse.

Nan Goldin's 1989 post-mortem portrait of her friend, *Cookie in Her Casket*, was first presented within *The Cookie Portfolio*. The memorial portfolio traced the friendship between Cookie and Goldin over fourteen years. The work relies on a personal narrative, framing the works within a familial gaze. I argue that Goldin creates the sense of family to encourage empathy in the viewer for Cookie's loss. Further, Goldin's generic and beautified post-mortem image of Cookie is a way of offering Cookie respect and dignity in death.

Andres Serrano's 1992 *The Morgue* is a series of large-scale cropped, and detailed photographs capturing indiscriminate bodies from within an unidentified morgue. I assert that Serrano intentionally presents these corpses as objects, outside of life. His stark lighting, emphasis on texture and the rich colours of Cibachrome print beautify and lavish aesthetic care on the corpse-objects. I propose a reading of *The Morgue* through Serrano's deliberate use of beauty to transform the corpses into icons, and read the entire series as a visualisation of the sublime within the abject.

Goldin and Serrano have fundamentally different approaches to post-mortem photography. Goldin's work follows an artistic and historical tradition of memorial portraits taken of the deceased by friends or family; whereas Serrano follows from a forensic framework appropriated by artists who photograph within a morgue. Previous discourse separated memorial and forensic post-mortem photography in order to better appreciate the historical trajectory of each field. In the context of a time where death was moving from near invisibility into the mainstream, comparing Goldin and Serrano offers insight into the changes in America's visual relationship with death.

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In loving memory of Jim and Alison.

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Introduction

Photography and death is an area of study that has never ceased to fascinate. In Laura Mulvey's *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, a chapter is dedicated to 'Life and Death in the Photograph', comparing the relationship between death and the indexicality of the photograph as it is explored in Andre Bazin's 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' (1945) and Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980). These two canonical texts, written almost forty years apart, share an explanation of the photograph as an uncanny material signifier of death and its resurrection. The alignment of death and photography, Mulvey points out, has been present since photography's origins, where photographs flourished in a culture of bereavement and acceptance of death.¹ Over the decades this association has been explored, but the works of Bazin and Barthes are pillars of the canon for anyone exploring these themes today, including myself.

Although Bazin's 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' was consciously centred on film, he engaged with the supposed indexicality of the photograph to form the argument that cinema was a more objective representation of an object than a photograph because the photograph removed the object from time. Bazin likened the photograph to a form of embalming, a comparison that I will address in later chapters, highlighting the haunting effect of the physical similarity between the photograph and its signified object while lacking any other real connection. The photograph was, as he described, an imprint of something now gone.

This doubling of death is echoed in Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, a seminal text in photographic theory, which presented a similar photographic relationship.² *Camera Lucida* was Barthes' only book on photography, although in the 1950s he did write essays referencing photography.³ He was primarily a literary critic and philosopher, and as such it is not surprising that *Camera Lucida* does not take an historical or sociological consideration of photography. The book was inspired, Barthes informs the reader, by his own experience of looking at images of his mother after her death. The

¹ Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), p. 60. Mulvey does not make reference to post-mortem portraiture, instead alluding to photographs as memorial tools and the notion of capturing spirits or ghosts in photographs. She notes that the fascination with death and the afterlife at the suited the photograph's haunting nature.

² *Camera Lucida* is one of the key texts when discussing photography and death, and has been referenced regularly in art history since its publication in 1980. Geoffrey Batchen remarked in *Photography Degree Zero*, his analysis and compilation of essays on *Camera Lucida*, that Barthes' text has had a profound influence on the past thirty years of photographic theory.

³ Included in Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, 1957 (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).

tone throughout his text is sentimental, as well as philosophical and unquestioningly personal. Looking through the images of his deceased mother, Barthes was dismayed at what he found: ‘I could not even say that I loved them [...] I was sorting them, but none seemed to me really “right”’: neither as a photographic performance nor as a living resurrection of the beloved face.’⁴ The ‘right’ photograph is later described as ‘the Winter Garden Photograph’, an image of his mother taken in her youth that provides Barthes, reflecting back on the photograph, with a form of ‘photographic performance’ after her death that is not of *her*, but of his *relationship* with her.

Barthes does not reproduce the photograph (he explains that the reader will not see in it what he does) and as such it is not only the source of a haunting for Barthes, but it haunts the text and the reader.⁵ In *Death 24x a Second*, Mulvey highlights Barthes’ description as uncanny – the reproduction of a familiar relationship in a photograph that is at once not a representation of Barthes’s mother as he knew her, and an image of a moment and subject that have died. The layers of death in both Bazin and Barthes will re-emerge within my essay, and yet neither address the practice of post-mortem photography. Considering that at the beginning of the twentieth century photographs of the dead in their coffins were commonplace, and that the birth of photography led to a profitable market for death portraits, the study of post-mortem photography has remained underdeveloped. It certainly has a place in the discussion of the uncanny – an issue that I address in Part I of this dissertation with respect to a particular artistic photograph – but it also deserves space for consideration in its own right. Only recently has this field of study come into its own, and this dissertation exists within the framework made possible by the recent development of study into post-mortem photography. **Footnote listing the key contributors in the field**

My dissertation addresses the existing gaps in research on post-mortem photography as it relates to artistic practice. I will consider the work of two contemporary artists who produced photographs of the dead: Nan Goldin and Andres Serrano. Goldin’s image of her deceased friend Cookie Mueller, entitled *Cookie in Her Casket*, was part of a memorial portfolio of photographs taken from 1976-1989 and

⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1981), p. 64.

⁵ Diana Knight argued that if *Camera Lucida* recounts the ‘true story’ of Barthes re-finding his mother in a photo of her as a child, then the photo must be the photograph *The Stock (La Souche)*. Diana Knight, ‘The Woman Without a Shadow’, in *Writing the Image After Barthes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), p. 138. Margaret Olin has pointed out that despite Knight’s argument ‘few readers were willing to follow [... Knight’s suggested] twist of the plot’. Margaret Olin, ‘Touching Photographs: Roland Barthes’s “Mistaken” Identification’, *Representations* 80.1 (Fall 2002), p. 110. Olin, while agreeing with Knight that *La Souche* could be the closest representation of the Winter Garden Photograph, suggests that ‘most likely there was no Winter Garden Photograph’ (p. 108) and its absence suggests that it does not matter what was in front of the camera: ‘What matters is displaced’ (p. 112).

exhibited in 1990, three years before Serrano's photographs from an unidentified morgue, entitled *The Morgue* (1992), were exhibited in the same area of Manhattan. Both exhibitions occurred at a volatile time in New York's history, when the relationship with death was undergoing a dramatic shift as a result of AIDS epidemic, cancer and the changing face of hospital care. At the time, art critic Viki Goldberg commented that 'The specter of death [...] turns up often these days where photography makes its bid for an art audience' whereas 'a decade ago, galleries seldom exhibited images of death'.⁶ It was a time when death was taking focus in both the social and the artistic spheres. By considering these artists as case studies within this volatile time, and by framing their work within the study of post-mortem photography, I will argue that Serrano and Goldin were demonstrating care for the dead through their photographs and giving them a place of dignity.

To understand how my work relates to previous gaps in the analysis of post-mortem photography, I must first give a brief overview of what those gaps are and what research exists. First, the practice of taking post-mortem portraits extends back to before photography, but the medium made so-called death portraits popular across the middle class. In 1839 Samuel Morse introduced the daguerreotype to the United States. Shortly after, bereaved families began to commission post-mortem portraits to commemorate their lost loved ones.⁷ The late nineteenth century saw a peak in the popularity of post-mortem portraiture, but it was not until the practice had become private and difficult to trace that scholars took an interest, and even then, research and analysis have been sparing. The works of collector Stanley Burns and anthropologist Jay Ruby are crucial within the canon of historical research into American post-mortem photography, and yet their studies are relatively recent. In 1990 Burns published an analysis of his personal collection of post-mortem images entitled *Sleeping Beauty: Memorial Photography in America*. Perhaps indicating his motivation for the book, in his preface Burns notes that despite the prevalence of post-mortem photography in the nineteenth century, 'Today there is no culturally normative response to post-mortem photographs.'⁸ Burns's comment highlights the gradually decreasing desire to depict the deceased over the past century. The shift in discourse on post-mortem photographs moved from practice to connoisseurship in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, when post-mortem portraits

⁶ Viki Goldberg, 'Photography View: Death Is Resurrected as an Art Form', *New York Times*, 2 May 1993.

⁷ The earliest post-mortem portraits were thought to be British, although American companies such as Southworth and Hawes of Boston advertised post-mortem portraits in 1840. Audrey Linkman, *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits* (London: Tauris Parke Books, 1993).

⁸ Stanley Burns, *Sleeping Beauty: Memorial Photography in America* (Altadena, CA: Twelvetrees Press, 1990), ii.

ceased being mentioned in trade journals.⁹ Only decades after post-mortem daguerreotypes were introduced, writing about the practice in American trade journals dissipated, with the final instance of a trade discussion being published in 1891.¹⁰ In his 1995 *Secure the Shadow: Death Photography in America*, Ruby proposed that this reflected a fledgling interest in the profession, and argued that thereafter the practice was continued in American households only as a personal and hidden practice. However the subsequent work of Audrey Linkman and my own research into the Thanatos Archive, both of which I will expand upon further, reveal that the professional practice continued into the interwar period.

Ruby's observation instead emphasises an increase in the privacy of post-mortem portraiture, which subsequently quieted historical or analytical interest.¹¹ The discussion remained mute until nineteenth-century photographs became of interest to collectors. While post-mortem images of presidents or other prominent figures were created for public collections, generally post-mortem portraits were kept within the family.¹² Gradually, they made their way into the hands of collectors, often as part of a larger collection of Victorian photographs. By the 1940s, connoisseurs began to write guides on Victorian photography, though for the most part post-mortem photographs were not part of these.¹³ A growing preoccupation with the history of early photography resulted in Beaumont Newhall's 1961 *The Daguerreotype in America*, the first in-depth historical overview of early American photography. Interestingly, Newhall did not discuss the practice of post-mortem photography, though some of the studios he included, such as Southworth and Hawes of Boston, were leaders in the field.¹⁴ Twenty years later, Floyd and Marion Rinhart's comprehensive survey *The American Daguerreotype* (1983) presented a detailed history of the practice, briefly mentioning post-mortem photography but focusing on living portraiture.¹⁵ Growing interest in Victorian photography included minor analyses of post-mortem photography, but it was not until Burns's and Ruby's publications in the 1990s that research into American

⁹ See, for example, N.G. Burgess, 'Taking Portraits After Death', *The Photographic and Fine-Art Journal* 8 (1855), p. 80.

¹⁰ The last professional article was 'Post-mortem Photography', *American Journal of Photography* 12 (August 1891), p. 350.

¹¹ Jay Ruby, *Secure the Shadow: Death and Photography in America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), p. 55.

¹² See Audrey Linkman, *Photography and Death* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011); Jay Ruby, *Secure the Shadow: Death and Photography in America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995); Stanley Burns, *Sleeping Beauty: Memorial Photography in America* (Altadena, CA: Twelvetreets Press, 1990).

¹³ Specifics on the identification of daguerreotypes and their cases were included in Katharine Morrison McClinton, *A Handbook of Popular Antiques* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1946), pp. 229–33. Additionally, manuals on Victorian photography were produced in both England and America, including: Bernard Edward Charles Howarth-Loomes, *Victorian Photography: A Collector's Guide* (London: Ward Lock Limited, 1874); Richard Blodgett, *Photographs: A Collector's Guide* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1979).

¹⁴ Beaumont Newhall, *The Daguerreotype in America* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1976).

¹⁵ Floyd and Marion Rinhart, *The American Daguerreotype* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1983).

post-mortem photography became a consideration in its own right.¹⁶

Burns's interest in the cultural history of mourning combined with his personal photography collection resulted in two books on the history of post-mortem photography in America.¹⁷ While primarily focused on displaying his collected photographs, both of his texts included introductions and appendices that discussed the poses of the deceased and the responsibilities and potential desires of the bereft revealed in the image.¹⁸ Burns was not primarily interested in analysing the images so much as finding a public space for them in contemporary society.¹⁹ His books reflected and supported a growing interest in contrasting the nineteenth-century intimacy with death with the contemporary American uncertainty in imaging the dead.

As Burns and Ruby post-mortem images were reintroduced to the public eye in the 1990s, their analysis also became an area of interest. The sparse analysis in existence forms the background for this dissertation. In 1993 Barbara Norfleet compiled an exhibition of post-mortem photographs entitled *Looking at Death* for the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts at Harvard University. Her research into the photographic collections of Harvard University and Radcliffe College resulted in this landmark exhibition, which included post-mortem portraits, medical photography, crime-scene photographs and media images of corpses. Contemporary with Norfleet's work was that of Ruby, who took an anthropological approach to the study of post-mortem photography, bringing to light the continued existence of the practice. Ruby's work examined the social function of post-mortem portraits in America, which included an argument establishing key styles of post-mortem photography as reflections of cultural attitudes toward death.²⁰ Ruby's study focused on the display of the deceased, styles that he related to wider cultural responses to death. For example, Ruby suggested that the dominance of the 'Last Sleep' pose until the 1880s, in which the deceased was photographed with eyes closed as though in repose, reflected the American desire

¹⁶ Burns's *Sleeping Beauty: Memorial Photography in America* is widely accepted as the first publication centred on American post-mortem photography. I have been unable to find a book concerned solely with American post-mortem photography published prior to 1990.

¹⁷ Burns; Stanley Burns and Elizabeth Burns, *Sleeping Beauty II: Grief, Bereavement and the Family in Memorial Photography* (New York: Burns Archive Press, 2002).

¹⁸ Burns, n. 8. See also n. 16 and n. 18.

¹⁹ Burns began collecting Victorian photographs in 1975, and his rapidly growing collection was highlighted three years later by *Time-Life* in their *Encyclopedia of Collectables*. 'History', *The Burns Archive*, <www.burnsarchive.com/about/history.html> [accessed, 24 June 2013]. The archive and information about its establishment is on the website and is referenced in Burns and Burns and Burns.

²⁰ Ruby was a cited source for texts such as *Beyond the Body: Death and Social Identity*, ed. Hallam Elizabeth, Jenny Hockey and Glennys Howarth (London: Routledge, 1999); Clifton D. Bryant, *Handbook of Death and Dying*, Vol. 1 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage 2003); and Chris Townsend, *Art and Death* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008).

strongly to associate death with sleep.²¹ (The ‘Last Sleep’ style will be revisited in Chapters 2 and 3 with respect to Goldin’s *Cookie in Her Casket*.) However, in pursuit of his research, Ruby was able to find only limited information from the turn of the twentieth century until the late 1960s, and incorrectly concluded that the advent of personal cameras turned post-mortem photography into a personal endeavour.²² Until Linkman’s work, no one challenged Ruby’s assertion.

In 1993, the same year that *Looking at Death* opened, Linkman published *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits* in Britain, which included a section on post-mortem and memorial portraiture, indicating that renewed interest in post-mortem photography in the 1990s was not limited to America.²³ Eight years later, Linkman published *Photography and Death*, an overarching history of post-mortem photography in Europe and America, which filled in some of the historical gaps left by Ruby. Linkman’s *Photography and Death* is the most thorough historical survey of post-mortem mourning portraiture to date. It includes information on professional post-mortem photographers in the twentieth century from across Europe as well as the United States. Drawing on the archive of images belonging to African American photographer James Van Der Zee, whose studio was open from 1917 to the 1940s in Harlem, New York, Linkman further developed the history of the practice in the interwar period.²⁴ Her focus on ethnic communities brought to light images that lay outside of the parameters of Ruby’s anthropological study, however it also limited her discussion of mid-twentieth-century images specifically to cultural and racial minorities within large cities.²⁵ Linkman related her shift in focus to Norfleet’s comment in the introduction to *Looking at Death* that post-mortem photographs remained common until World War II, ‘at least among rural and urban working-and middle-class families [in ethnic minorities]’.²⁶ While Norfleet’s and Linkman’s work offers an insight into the practice in large cities of Eastern America, my research in the Thanatos Archive of Washington State, a collection of photographs from across America, shows that in addition to ethnic and racial minorities, white Americans in the upper-middle and middle classes in small and

²¹ Ruby, p. 63. Ruby calls on the work of Kenneth Ames to support his assertion that death was associated with sleep in America in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

²² Ruby does acknowledge the resurgence in the 1930s of mourning tableaux, but does not consider that this was part of an ongoing practice (Ruby, p. 134). He further argues that the introduction of flash allowed the practice to become privatised in the early 1900s (p. 83). His study was limited to the white middle class in urban areas, resulting in a limited history of post-mortem photography.

²³ Linkman, *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits* (London: Tauris Parke Books, 1993).

²⁴ For a selection of photographs see James Van Der Zee, Owen Dodson and Camille Billops, *The Harlem Book of the Dead* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Morgan and Morgan, 1978).

²⁵ Audrey Linkman, *Photography and Death* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), p. 69.

²⁶ Barbara Norfleet, *Looking at Death* (Boston, MA: David R. Godine, 1993), p. 13. Linkman acknowledged Norfleet’s 18 years experience researching the files of studio photographers, giving weight to her discovery; see: Linkman, *Photography and Death*, p. 69.

medium-sized towns maintained the practice.²⁷

I wish to demonstrate with this brief overview of the research into post-mortem photography that Serrano and Goldin, as artists, followed from a tradition of photographing the dead that originated with the birth of photography. Firstly, the practice of post-mortem portraiture has a long history and still exists as a private practice. Goldin's work follows the tropes and expectations of this tradition. The details of this relationship are discussed in Chapter 3, though there is a visible stylistic consistency. Serrano's similar relationship to medical and forensic images is addressed in Chapter 5. Secondly, the above historiography demonstrates the split between scholarly work on the medical history of post-mortem images and personal post-mortem portraiture. While work on the history of both exists, even the medically trained Burns has not directly compared the two practices. Both points inform my research because I draw on the connection between the historical practice of post-mortem photography and Goldin and Serrano's artistic production of post-mortem photographs.

Connecting art practice to the tradition of post-mortem photography is not an entirely new idea. My work stands on the shoulders of Audrey Linkman and Chris Townsend, who have laid the foundations for my research with their ground-breaking explorations of artistic post-mortem photography. In relation to my chosen artists, Goldin's work was connected to broader post-mortem photography by Audrey Linkman in her 2011 book *Photography and Death*. This book connected the social practice of post-mortem photography and its artistic counterpart, offering a brief survey on the artistic practice of post-mortem photography from the 1970s through to the 1990s. Linkman's work follows the trajectory of post-mortem portraiture, and as such she focuses on those artists who photographed their loved ones dying and in death. Linkman analyses Goldin's work with respect to other artists photographing friends and family diagnosed with AIDS or cancer. My work will similarly draw on the importance of a constructed family relationship in examining Goldin's work. While Linkman's work informs my own, I will compare the portrayal of the dead in this style of photography with the portrayal of anonymous bodies in a morgue, a more impersonal approach that Linkman only briefly mentions. In focusing specifically on Goldin, I will offer a more in-depth analysis of the effect of what Hirsch would describe as 'family looking' in the

²⁷ Based in Woodinville, Washington, the Thanatos Archive was established in 1999 when vintage American photography collector and dealer Jack Mord opened his private collection of photographs to the public. In 2002 it was developed into the first online archive of solely post-mortem, mourning and memorial photography. The archive houses post-mortem, memorial and mourning photographs from 1840 to the 1920s in America, with some images from Europe and Mexico.

first two chapters, and then argue that Goldin's familial framework is an element in her demonstration of care for her dead friend in Chapter 3.²⁸

My work also draws on the potential opened up by Linkman's historical survey. When discussing the recent artistic engagement with post-mortem photography, Linkman argues that from the 1970s onwards 'death became a legitimate subject for photographers whose outlet was the exhibition gallery or the published monograph. For the first time on any significant scale, art photographers in the West began to focus on death.'²⁹ As to why the subject was legitimate, Linkman's response is vague. She notes that the 1970s was a time when there was an increasing awareness of life and death, citing the Vietnam War, the beginnings of the euthanasia debate and the call for doctors to inform their dying patients of terminal prognoses as a result of multiple studies, but spurred on by a seminal work by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross. My frustrations with Linkman's explanation are two-fold: firstly, she does not address what made the 1970s unique in legitimising the *artistic* focus on death, and secondly her historical focal point of the 1970s saw only one major Western artist turn his camera on the dead.

Jeffrey Silverthorne's series *Morgue Work* (1972, exhibited in New York in 1973) is considered the first recognised artistic post-mortem photography.³⁰ As Linkman points out, Silverthorne's photographs of cadavers in the morgue were conceived as a response to the Vietnam War. Linkman bases her argument for the 'legitimation' of post-mortem art photography entirely on Silverthorne. While 1970s America saw the end of the Vietnam War and a call for medical practitioners to inform their terminal patients of their prognosis, life and death were culturally present before this time. In the 1940s, the American public witnessed the evidence of genocide and liberation for the Nazi concentration camps, along with significant military losses over the course of the Second World War, through the media and documentary photography. However, art photographers of the 1940s and 1950s turned their focus away from the terrifying reality of death, with some of the most iconic American photographers of the time capturing landscapes. The Cold War, the Korean War and the beginning of the Vietnam War marked the 1950s, keeping death at the forefront of the media. Moreover, most of the texts that Linkman references with relation to medical practice of non-disclosure to terminal patients were from the 1960s, which was also saw the protests against the Vietnam War. In this context her argument for the legitimisation of post-

²⁸ Marianne Hirsch, 'The Familial Gaze' *Familial Looking* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1996), pp. xi–xxiv (xi). 'Familial looking' will be fully described in Chapter 2.

²⁹ Linkman, *Photography and Death*, p. 154.

³⁰ Referenced in Linkman, *Photography and Death*; Chris Townsend, *Art and Death* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008).

mortem art photography in the 1970s appears arbitrary. By pointing out this failing, I do not mean to say that Linkman is entirely wrong. In the sense that legitimisation equates to a form of authorisation, Silverthorne marked the beginning of artistic post-mortem photography because he was the first major photographer to exhibit and produce a book of post-mortem photographs. What I am trying to illustrate, however, is that Silverthorne's work did not mark a sudden 'legitimisation' of the subject, in the sense that post-mortem photography was not brought into significant practice in the 1970s. Furthermore, within Linkman's text the (chronologically) next artist she mentions who photographed the dead was working a decade later.³¹ Silverthorne may have opened the gates, but the flood did not come until the 1980s.

After Silverthorne, a lull occurred in artistic post-mortem photography that was reignited in the late 1980s in the America and Europe. Linkman does not address this break, though it is clear in her work, and my further research has not revealed any major photographers who exhibited post-mortem images in the 1970s. As Linkman's book is the authoritative work in this field, this decade-long lull in post-mortem photography leaves open a window for a great many researchers in addition to myself. For this dissertation, I have taken this lull as an opportunity to investigate not the first practice of artistic post-mortem photography, but the time when it bloomed – the late 1980s and early 1990s. This was the time when post-mortem art photography grew into a genre and defined itself and its future. Goldin and Serrano were artists within this surge, and as such, examining their work offers insight into the general practice of post-mortem photography at the height of its flurry in New York. By considering Goldin and Serrano as artists working within the tradition of post-mortem photography, it becomes clear that *The Morgue* and *Cookie in Her Casket* need to be understood as part of an historical moment that witnessed a surge in photographing the dead.

Beyond the historical approach of Linkman, contemporary art historian and media arts specialist Chris Townsend analysed *Cookie in Her Casket* and *The Cookie Portfolio* in his 2008 book *Art and Death*, which aimed to reconsider the work of contemporary artists who respond to death in their work. The text drew from a range of contemporary artists, examining sculptors and video artists as well as photographers like Goldin.³² Townsend eschewed the previous insistence on linking death with the

³¹ Chronologically, the next artist referenced by Linkman is Swiss photographer Hans Danuser, whose *In Vivo* project – which included two series, *Medical I* and *Medical II*, consisting of gelatin silver prints taken in American and European morgues – was photographed from 1980 to 1989 and not exhibited until 1989. The earliest in terms of public circulation were the images in Dorothea Lynch and Eugene Richards's 1986 book *Exploding into Life*, which follows Lynch in her struggle with breast cancer.

³² His work also considers Ralph Meatyard's photographs. Townsend, *Art and Death*, pp.79-132.

spectacle, instead considering the social and personal relationships with death within the artwork, and the resultant social impact.³³ This insight has informed my own approach, though I will focus solely on photographers, and within that, only those working in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Because of the broader consideration of artistic engagement with death and dying in *Art and Death*, I am able to focus on a particular time period without losing a broader context. Focusing on Goldin and Serrano, I will be able to consider how these artists represented the deceased and why they represented them this way, and can question how Serrano and Goldin's works respond to – for as I argue, they are a response – the crisis occurring in the relationship America had with death at the time.

My pursuit of these questions is inspired by Townsend's Channel 4 series *Vile Bodies: The Dead* and the companion book *Vile Bodies: Photography and the Crisis of Looking* (both 1998).³⁴ His work went beyond that of Linkman in considering artists who photographed the dead outside of the memorial framework. Townsend argued that the works of Serrano, Nick Wapping and Sue Fox highlight the personal and the human within death. He saw these artists as encouraging a personal connection, in order to bring the taboo of death into a social space. By focusing in *Vile Bodies* on a more forensic approach to photographing the dead (Serrano's and Sue Fox's images were taken in a morgue, and Nick Wapping recreates suicides), and on memorial works in his 2008 book *Art and Death*, Townsend has created an opportunity to consider both styles of post-mortem contemporary art photography together. Both Linkman and Townsend's work opened up the discussion of photography and the dead, and in doing so raised questions about the relationship between these forms of post-mortem photography, and if, in an art context, they should be considered together.

The methodology of my dissertation will ultimately demonstrate the value of considering the two strands of post-mortem photography together, at least in an art context. I consider the work of Serrano and Goldin in line with post-mortem portraiture, while acknowledging the different gazes that each artist takes on. In fact, the contrast of a familial gaze used by Goldin and the assumed forensic framework of Serrano make them ideal case studies. Rather than examining only personal representations of the dead, or only the impersonal space of the morgue, I will examine both approaches with the aim of comparing Goldin and Serrano's work and drawing out their similarities. I

³³ As I discuss in Chapter 3, Townsend specifically argues that Goldin offers death a place in social discourse. Townsend, *Art and Death*, p. 70.

³⁴ In addition to the dead, the *Vile Bodies* series addressed photographs of 'kids' and 'naked' and 'damaged' bodies. Chris Townsend, *Vile Bodies: Photography and the Crisis of Looking* (New York: Prestel, 1998); James Kent, *Vile Bodies: The Dead* (London: Channel 4, 1998).

will demonstrate that despite different approaches, both artists use beauty and the medium of photography to demonstrate care for the dead and present dignity in death. This approach combines with my unique focus on the 1980s and 1990s in America to produce both a new reading of Serrano's *The Morgue* and Goldin's *Cookie in Her Casket*, and an analysis of how these works respond to and fit within a wider debate surrounding the space and rights of the dead occurring in New York City.

A Time to Live, A Time to Die: 1980s and 1990s New York City

Considering the historical context of *Cookie in Her Casket* and *The Morgue* opens up an analysis of both artists' work to questions of how and why they represented the dead. Moreover, examining Serrano and Goldin as case studies within this time period allowed me to consider if these works reflected a crisis of looking and imaging the material reality of death, or whether they are a suggested answer to this crisis. It also allows me to consider what the artistic interpretation and circulation of such images adds to our understanding of imaging the material reality of death. These central questions of my thesis rely on a general understanding of what the crisis of the time was. Essentially, why were photographs of the dead flooding the art galleries during this time?

In 1980, Phillippe Airès published *The Hour of Our Death*, an historical survey of Western attitudes and practices related to death and dying leading up to the 1970s. As a result of his work, Airès concluded that at the time of publication death had become 'invisible'.³⁵ He insisted that over the course of the twentieth century, death had been banished from society, left to those who were trained to encounter it. This meant that any encounter with death, even speaking of it, was discouraged as a way of managing the frightening reality of dying.³⁶ This exercise in control, however, fell apart. Ten years after *The Hour of Our Death* was published, photographs of corpses appeared in the art galleries of New York City. Included in these exhibitions of the late 1980s and early 1990s were Goldin and Serrano's exhibitions of post-mortem art photographs. The previously referenced Goldberg article highlighted a multitude of exhibitions opening within the six months spanning December 1992 to May 1993, including Serrano's *The Morgue*, Joel-Peter Witkin's *The Glassman* (discussed in Part II) and Norfleet's

³⁵ Phillippe Airès, *The Hour of Our Death*, ed. H. Weaver (Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 611.

³⁶ Airès, *The Hour of Our Death*, p. 585. See also John Anothony Tercier, *The Contemporary Deathbed: The Ultimate Rush* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Barbara Norfleet, *Looking at Death* (Boston, MA: David R. Godine, 1993); Phillippe Airès, 'The Reversal of Death: Changes in Attitudes Toward Death in Western Societies', *Death in America*, ed. David E. Stannard (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975); James J. Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980).

Looking At Death. Rather than a gradual change, ten years saw a sudden spark lit in New York City, and across America, in which people were actively questioning and redefining their relationship with death. The redefinition targeted a perceived lack of respect in the treatment of the dead and the dying, and a lack of dignity in death. I argue that in line with these concerns, Goldin and Serrano use different artistic techniques to ‘care for’ the dead in the creation of the photograph, and offer a dignity in death through the presentation and circulation of their work.

Dignity and care were of such importance at the time in part because death had once again become visible in the form of AIDS and cancer. Neither disease led to a swift or painless death, and at the time the medical community’s treatment of AIDS, HIV and cancer patients was seen as deficient. To understand the significance and nature of this lack of good care, one must first understand the role of the medical community in death and dying. Airès’ argument that death had become ‘invisible’ hinged on the medicalization of death and the movement of handling and interacting with the dead from the social space into the hands of specialists.³⁷ The medicalization of death is visible today, as the majority of people die in a hospice or hospital. Dr. John Tercier discussed the medical dominion over death in his 2008 text *The Contemporary Deathbed*, which examined the violence of technology in dying within the medical community. The central concern of his thesis was the contemporary disparity between the (rarely realised) idea of a ‘good death’ and the reality of a “‘hi-tech death” – the breathless, chest-pumping, electricity-sparking explosion of resuscitative activity that occurs on city streets and in hospital ERs.’³⁸ As both Airès and Tercier described, death was no longer a fact of life, but a failure of medicine.³⁹

Tercier’s work describes a schism between the reality of medical death and the imagined contemporary conception of a ‘good death’ as a ‘death with dignity, aspiring to the “naturalness” of the traditional deathbed and shaped by the dying person’.⁴⁰ This dichotomy expresses a change where death is imagined as a visible encounter. Tercier explained that ‘death with dignity’ dominated Western culture, though the practice had come under scrutiny in the past fifty years.⁴¹ He argued that as medicine slowly began

³⁷ Airès, *The Hour of Our Death*, pp. 560–601.

³⁸ Tercier, p. 10.

³⁹ Airès, *The Hour of Our Death*, pp. 584–86.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 18. In relation to the ‘hi-tech death’ I intend to focus on the clinical and detached nature of a medical death, rather than the use of machines that was of interest to Tercier.

⁴¹ This imagined ‘death with dignity’, Tercier argued, alters to meet the cultural expectations and needs of the society. For centuries, death with dignity included a deathbed scene, in which the dying, surrounded by their family, are at peace, having accepted death from the comfort of their bed. For an art historical examination of how the scene evolved, refer to Nigel Llewellyn, *The Art of Death* (London: Reaktion Books in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1991).

to conquer disease, the concept of a ‘death with dignity’ radically changed, moving toward Airès’ ‘invisible death’, which held the expectation that one died quietly and out of sight.⁴² AIDS and cancer challenged this invisibility, which made obvious the ‘hi-tech’ medical death while shattering the notion of dying out of sight. Additionally, these terminal diseases and their drastic treatments challenged the medical superiority over death and disease; in some cases the treatment could be more debilitating than the disease.

This fissure between the promise of medicine and its harsh reality was described by Norfleet as the reason that the 1990s was an ideal time for her exhibition on post-mortem photographs. In the catalogue to the exhibition, Norfleet argued that after the elimination of smallpox in the 1970s, death became viewed as a failure of medicine, but that by the 1990s ‘death is no longer a taboo subject’.⁴³ I agree with Norfleet that the late 1980s and early 1990s saw a particularly radical and fast-paced change in the visibility of death. What Norfleet does not mention, however, is that this change was not concerned with a face-to-face encounter with the reality of debilitating diseases, but rather a need to restore dignity to those that medicine was failing. Airès and Tercier both argued that dignity in death should be the central issue, and both felt this required a confrontation or a real interaction with death.⁴⁴ Norfleet perhaps did not address dignity because her work was taking an historical approach, however her writing is not without a dignified representation of the deceased. If there is one singular theme that holds together this tumultuous time it is the idea of a dignity in death.

The emphasis on dignity in death was particularly powerful in New York City, which saw an outcry of artists and activists against the lack of governmental response to the suffering of AIDS patients.⁴⁵ These protesters criticised the lack of political awareness and response to the AIDS crisis. At the same time that the idea of ‘invisible death’ was being challenged by terminal illness and the very public AIDS crisis, control over one’s own death was increasingly in the political eye with the attempt to legalise euthanasia. In 1980, the World Federation of Right to Die Societies (which included representatives from the United States) was formed through an international meeting in

⁴² Tercier notes that invisible death has given way to a return to the deathbed scene as well as more extreme conceptions such as revivalism, which gained traction in the 1990s. In revivalism, the idea of a ‘natural’ death, that is one that is similar to death and burial in other animals and has minimal impact on the earth, becomes a central component to any ‘death with dignity’. Tony Walter has a more detailed description of revivalism in *The Revival of Death* (London: Routledge, 1994). Revivalism has not taken a strong hold, and the dominant conception appears to still be related to a traditional deathbed scene, where death is peaceful and the dying are prepared, despite how rare such a scene is.

⁴³ Norfleet, p. 11.

⁴⁴ Airès, *The Hour of Our Death*, p. 590.

⁴⁵ This will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 3 – with specific analysis of David Wojnarowicz’s essay in the *Witness: Against our Vanishing* exhibition catalogue – and Chapter 6.

Oxford, UK. Euthanasia was proposed as a right in Washington State in 1991 and California in 1992, but passed first in Oregon with the 1994 Death with Dignity Act, making Oregon the first state to legalise assisted suicide.⁴⁶ The infamous psychiatrist Dr. Jack Kevorkian performed the first publicly assisted suicide in 1990.⁴⁷ Kevorkian's practice of assisted suicide was highly controversial, and part of the dialogue of euthanasia as either a dignified way to take control of death or a potential for the abuse of power over and murder of innocent people. New York was in the middle of this debate, and tension increased in 1994 when the New York Task Force on Life and Law published a widely respected report against assisted suicide. Both the euthanasia debate and the protests for political action against AIDS evidence a desire for the individual to be allowed control over his or her death and a sense of dignity in dying. While dignity is a broad term, it is used by both the assisted dying facility Dignitas in Switzerland and in the 'Rights of People With AIDS' as written in The Denver Principles (established in 1983 as part of the Persons with AIDS Self-Empowerment Movement), one of which was 'To die – and to LIVE – in dignity'.⁴⁸ In both cases the question of humanity is intimately tied in with dignity, as both speak of human dignity or rights as human beings.⁴⁹

I demonstrate in the coming chapters that the concern for dignity in death was at the crux of the artistic representations of the dead by Goldin and Serrano. Both artists demonstrate care in their representations of the dead, and this care is informed by the crisis with death and dignity at the time. By examining Goldin and Serrano I offer a new avenue for the interpretation of their post-mortem pieces, and moreover I reflect, in the conclusion, on how these case studies are in dialogue with the crisis of their time. I seek to understand if these artists, as part of the larger influx of photographers capturing the dead at the time, were reflecting on the crisis of their time or offering a solution to

⁴⁶ The Death with Dignity Act in Oregon 'allows terminally-ill Oregonians to end their lives through the voluntary self-administration of lethal medications, expressly prescribed by a physician for that purpose.' 'Death with Dignity Act', Oregon Health Authority, 11 June, 2013.

⁴⁷ Dr. Jack Kevorkian was a psychiatrist practicing in Detroit who made headlines throughout the 1990s for publicly and openly assisting his patients in suicide; his nickname in the press was 'Dr. Death'. He publicly assisted in the suicide of Jane Adkins in 1990 and was investigated, but the murder charge was dropped because there was no state law against suicide. As a result of Kevorkian's continued practice, the passing of such laws was explored. Adkins's death and the attempts to change Michigan law are relayed in Maria Puente, 'Leeway in Michigan Death Laws', *USA Today* (25 October, 1991), Nexis Web, [accessed 9 June, 2013], among others. Kevorkian's 'suicide machine' was contested and banned in 1991; see Edward Walsh, 'Court Bars Use of "Suicide Machine"; Doctor Who Aided in Women's Death Denounced; Appeal Planned', *Washington Post* (6 February, 1991) Nexis. Web, [accessed 9 June, 2013]. Kevorkian was tried four times for assisted suicide from 1994 to 1997.

⁴⁸ A copy of The Denver Principles is available on ACT UP New York's website, "The Denver Principles" *ACT UP*, <<http://www.actupny.org/documents/Denver.html>> [accessed 11 June 2013].

⁴⁹ Dignitas's brochure emphasises the 'commitment to safeguard human dignity and human rights'. 'Objectives and Purpose of DIGNITAS', *DIGNITAS: To Live with Dignity / To Die With Dignity* 2013, <<http://www.dignitas.ch/images/stories/pdf/informations-broschuere-dignitas-e.pdf>> [accessed 11 June 2013].

the crisis. This argument relies on the selection of Goldin and Serrano from within the wider practice of artistic post-mortem photography.

I have already noted that Goldin and Serrano offer insight into the representation of the dead in photography because they represent two different strands of art photography of the corpse: those who photograph loved ones as they are dying and in death, and those who photograph unfamiliar corpses within the morgue. Additionally, Goldin and Serrano are useful case studies because they come from differing backgrounds in the New York art scene. Goldin was part of the post-punk group of artists, writers and actors influenced by the residue of the glam era of posing and shallow beauty, which sprang from Andy Warhol and The Factory.⁵⁰ I will go into depth in the first section on this underground scene in New York, but the group, as evidenced in Goldin's photographs, followed the mentality of 'sex, drugs and rock and roll' and a desire to live life their own way, in particular breaking from the traditions and values of their parents' generation.⁵¹ By contrast, as I detail in the second part, Serrano was involved in a more politically engaged stream of the art world. His marriage to Julie Ault, founding member of the New York City artist collective Group Material, which focused on the interplay between politics and aesthetics, meant that Serrano experienced a more political engagement with an established place in the art network.⁵² Before becoming a professional photographer, Serrano had a stable career in advertising and film, which influenced his work but was part of the mainstream as opposed to the underground culture of New York City. Comparing two such different artists in my conclusion adds weight to the themes that reappear in the work of both, and helps to ensure that these themes are not limited to a single vein within the tradition of photography, nor to particular subgroups within the New York art scene.

Given the divergent backgrounds of Goldin and Serrano and their conflicting approaches to photographing the deceased, I have chosen to divide this dissertation into two parts. In order to best demonstrate how these artists care for the deceased in their photographs, Part I focuses on Goldin's *Cookie in Her Casket* within the context of *The Cookie Portfolio* and Part II addresses Andres Serrano's *The Morgue*, with the

⁵⁰ This relationship is discussed at length in the section on Goldin. See also Darren Pih, *Glam: The Performance of Style* (London: Tate, 2013); Mick Rock, *Glam!: An Eyewitness Account* (London: Omnibus, 2005).

⁵¹ Breaking from the past with a laissez-faire attitude to life is spoken of in direct relation to Goldin in Max Kozloff, 'The Family of Nan', *Art in America*, 75 (1987), p. 41.

⁵² Group Material aimed to counter the mainstream art distribution and network, hoping to open up art to the masses. While more open and making use of unusual spaces, Group Material was more established as an art space than the club basements and apartments in which Goldin would display her slideshows. I consider both informal venues in subsequent chapters; see also Julie Ault, ed., *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material* (London: Four Corners Books, 2010); Stephen Westfall, 'The Ballad of Nan Goldin', *BOMB* 37 (1991), pp. 27–31.

conclusion comparing the two artists, and considering their work in relation to the evolving social space of death and dying. The introduction to Part I presents Nan Goldin's photographic practice and reviews the previous reception and interpretation of her work. This relies on a trajectory beginning with her early photographs in Boston, even though predominant critical analysis was produced since the exhibition of her iconic work *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*. I also use Martha Rosler's *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Systems* to consider the relationship Goldin's work has with documentary photography (and the artist's insistence that her work is nothing like documentary) in order to frame my own interpretation of *Cookie in Her Casket*.

Chapter 1 introduces *Cookie in Her Casket* and situates the piece within Goldin's work. In order to best understand *Cookie in Her Casket* I expand on the entirety of *The Cookie Portfolio* – the context in which *Cookie in Her Casket* was first displayed. As with Goldin's wider work, *The Cookie Portfolio* follows a friend of Goldin, and as such this chapter also establishes the social setting of the portfolio within the Bowery area of New York City, where Goldin and Cookie lived and worked. The setting of the Bowery and the influences of drag identity all influence Goldin's presentation of Cookie. I argue that *Cookie in Her Casket* was taken at a critical time in Goldin's career when she moved from documenting a life influenced by the 'glam' era of glitz, drugs, posing and living entirely in the moment, to a realization of the fragility of life and the camera's ability to hold on to her dying friends. I draw a particular connection between the idea of posing and constructed identity in Goldin's work and Jennie Livingston's documentary of new York City's drag ball culture, *Paris is Burning* (1990), untangling how Goldin's relationship forms the basis of a different approach to documenting constructed identities during this time. Goldin's more personal approach to documentary is read in relation to her emphasis on love in her work, establishing the importance of personal narrative in Goldin's series. Outlining Goldin's emphasis on personal narratives, the second chapter gives significance to Goldin's lack of consistency in the portrayal of Cookie in life and in death.

Chapter 2 explores the presentation of Cookie in death by comparing her as she appears in *Cookie in Her Casket*, the images of Cookie in Goldin's wider *Cookie Portfolio*, the work of other artists, Cookie's autobiographical short stories and the so-called 'Cookie Look'. I argue that Cookie carefully cultivated a certain 'look' that was evident across her film and writing work, and artistic representations that relied particularly on her unique sense of style and over-the-top makeup and hair. In life, Cookie was unmistakable and iconic, however the elements of this 'look', I

demonstrate, are all but invisible in *Cookie in Her Casket*. I acknowledge the role of the bereaved and the embalmers in this change in Cookie's persona, but ultimately find that any elements of the 'Cookie Look' that may have remained after embalming were further erased by Goldin's camera. I suggest that *Cookie in Her Casket* uses what Ruby described as the traditional 'Last Sleep' style of photography in order to counter the narrative of suffering Cookie endured as a result of contracting HIV.

Chapter 3 offers answers to the questions raised in Chapter 2 by considering the role of *Cookie in Her Casket* as a publicly circulated work of art. In an artistic context, the more generic image of Cookie in death, I argue, is a form of care. Beginning with Bazin's notion that photography is a form of embalming, I address how *Cookie in her Casket* presents Cookie as free from the abjection of death and from the social destruction of an individual that comes with death.⁵³ Goldin demonstrates her care for Cookie through the beautified image of death, which hides the dehumanizing effects of AIDS and also maintains the personal connection between Goldin and Cookie. The public circulation of such an image of Cookie also dignifies Cookie's death. Her death is not secretive or shameful, but beautiful and traditional. She is presented as any other beloved friend, and by presenting her within a familial context, Goldin encourages viewers similarly to take on an empathetic role when looking at Cookie. In this chapter I consider specifically the effect of this image in the context of 1980s New York City, when the issues of dignity in death were being brought up socially and politically, and when there was particular outcry against the lack of care shown to HIV and AIDS patients.

Part II turns to Andres Serrano's *The Morgue*. In the introduction, I demonstrate the theme of political engagement in critical responses to Serrano's work, beginning with his time with Group Material and moving through the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) controversy of 1989 that made Serrano a household name. I argue that the NEA controversy followed Serrano throughout his career, overshadowing alternative interpretations of his work. This provides a background for the fourth chapter, which reviews critical engagement with Serrano's work. Here I argue that rather than the political, a reading of beauty in Serrano's work offers a new interpretation of *The Morgue*. I give a review of the work done on beauty in relation to Serrano, highlighting the discussions of Wendy Steiner and Mieke Bal, noting how beauty in his work has consistently been tied to Serrano's use of painterly techniques. I

⁵³ The notion of abjection is drawn from Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. and ed. Leon S Roudiez, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, ed. Mark Poster (London: Sage, 1993).

put forward the argument that the association of nostalgia with beauty is restrictive, and instead engage with the idea of beauty as a tool to be wielded by the artist, and a choice made in an artwork. This will return as a central piece of my argument in Chapter 6.

In the fifth chapter, I focus specifically on an interpretation of *The Morgue*. Opposing the contemporary rejection of his work as too detached, I explain that Serrano deliberately presents the corpse as an object, a corpse separated from a living history or personal story. By segmenting the corpse through cropping and by using impersonal titles, Serrano encourages association with the distance of a forensic or medical photograph, but undermines these assumptions of distance through artistic choices such as lighting, colours and the size of the images. The absence of subjectivity allows what Barthes called the *studium* – the formal elements that relay to the viewer the intention of the photographer – to dominate over the personal connection to the photograph or the subject.⁵⁴

In Chapter 6, I argue that within this *studium*, Serrano elevates the corpse to the status of an icon or allegory. Considering the rich colour of Cibachrome and the religious theme of the work, I put forward a reading of the series through the metaphor of a stained glass window. This lays the groundwork for an understanding of how beauty functions within *The Morgue* as a way to alleviate the abjection of the corpse, as described by Julia Kristeva, and in fact find the sublime within that abjection. Serrano's images, I argue, mediate death through beauty and religious references, two ways Kristeva claims repress the abject.⁵⁵ I contend that more than just repress the abject, Serrano uses beauty and religious iconography and references to present the sublime within the abject. This requires a careful examination of Kristeva's theory of abjection and the notion that only within religion and art is the dead body free from abjection. Having established that Serrano presents the corpses from abject to sublime, I then draw a comparison between his work and Joel-Peter Witkin's *The Glassman* to emphasise that the transformation from abject to sublime, in Serrano's work, occurs through the act of photographing. This helps to support my overarching argument that through photographing the corpse, and particularly through beauty, Serrano demonstrates care for the dead body, offering dignity to the dead beyond memorial representation.

The conclusion draws together the similarities between Goldin and Serrano's work to reflect on the changes that were occurring in the attitudes toward death at the time. I argue that Goldin and Serrano's photographic representations of the dead body

⁵⁴ Barthes, p.27. Townsend also discusses Barthes' terms *studium* and *punctum* with respect to Serrano's *The Morgue*. Townsend, *Vile Bodies: Photography and the Crisis of Looking*, pp.135–136.

⁵⁵ The two ways are religion and art. Kristeva, p.17.

have echoes in our mediated interactions with death today. Their work demonstrates a way of caring for the body through removing the abject nature of the thing, creating a beautified or otherwise unrealistic encounter with the dead that remains the standard expectation for a social space of the dead. Death, today, is visible, but mediated, and the roots of this change are certainly to be found in this time period, and appear to relate to the artistic presentation of the dead.

PART ONE:

Re-considering *Cookie in Her Casket*

Introduction

Cookie in Her Casket (Figure 1) is a muted photograph that might strike one as traditional and nostalgic. There is an initial impression of the past, as the tonal quality brings to mind the grey-scale of early photography (though in this case the photograph is shades of grey and orange). *Cookie in Her Casket* was taken at the funeral viewing of Dorothy ‘Cookie’ Mueller, a close friend of Nan Goldin, and the sobriety of the occasion is matched by the image.⁵⁶ The camera focuses on Cookie from the torso up, lying in a satin-lined casket, with the opened lid cutting off the background save for a few flickering candles in the upper left of the image. The rushing of the satin in the casket flows into the uneven petals of gardenias that encircle her head. The only distinct gardenia is by her forehead as though it would be tucked behind her ear or arranged in her hair.⁵⁷ Within the layers of satin lies Cookie, her face dimly lit so the outline is sharper than any detail. Light reflects off her lower lip and chin, but pales in comparison to the glowing satin cross laying on her chest. Between her chin and the cross are a layer of jewels and sequins, all hinted at by a glimmer of orange, making her necklaces indistinguishable from her dress. Her hands are clasped just below the cross, with arms encrusted in bangles and her fingers bejewelled with rings. Cookie does not dominate the photograph, but her serene expression underlines the stillness of the image.

Cookie in Her Casket has been exhibited and purchased as a stand-alone piece, but it was originally part of a sixteen-image series entitled *The Cookie Portfolio*. The portfolio existed as both a series of individual works and, in at least two instances, as a grid. First displayed as a grid in 1990 the viewer’s eye was cast across all of the images, making connections beyond the chronological order (provided in the titles).⁵⁸ The portfolio was displayed in a grid again for Goldin’s 2002 Matthew Marks gallery exhibition, *The Devil’s Playground*.⁵⁹ In the meantime, however, the series was exhibited as discreet images with some images, such as *Cookie in Her Casket*, gaining additional notoriety. Some of the photographs within the portfolio have changed

⁵⁶ I discuss the relationship between Mueller and Goldin with greater depth in Chapter 2. Their friendship is discussed in reviews and catalogues, such as: Toby Litt, “All the World’s a Stage,” *Modern Painters*, 15 (2002), 32–35; Guido Costa, *Nan Goldin* 55 (London: Phaidon Press, 2001); Joyce Henri Robinson and Jonathan Weinberg, *Fantastic Tales: The Photography of Nan Goldin* (London: Tate, 2005).

⁵⁷ Cookie’s long time friend and former partner, Sharon, discussed the gardenias in an interview with Goldin. Adam Barker, Edmund Coulthard, and Nan Goldin, *I’ll Be Your Mirror* (London, England: British Broadcasting Corporation 1995).

⁵⁸ The grid was in the first manifestation of *The Cookie Portfolio, 1976-1989* was exhibited at The Photographic Resource Center, Boston (1990).

⁵⁹ The only published catalogue of *The Cookie Portfolio* is Nan Goldin, *Cookie Mueller: Photographs* (New York: Pace/MacGill Gallery, 1991). For a description of the effect of seeing *The Cookie Portfolio* as a grid, see: Litt.

throughout various publications. When published as a photo essay for *Camera Austria* in 1992, the portfolio included *Cookie in the Garden of Ciro's*, an image of Cookie in a garden in Provincetown, taken two months before she died.⁶⁰ This image was also part of the 1991 Pace/MacGill exhibition and accompanying catalogue, *Cookie Mueller: Photographs*. However, in the reproduction of *The Cookie Portfolio* in the *I'll Be Your Mirror* catalogue, this image was removed and instead a photograph of two friends crying at Cookie's funeral was inserted before the final image of Cookie's living room.⁶¹ For the purposes of my research, I am using the Pace/MacGill exhibition (and catalogue) version of the portfolio. While *Cookie in Her Casket* is in all versions of *The Cookie Portfolio*, the Pace/MacGill exhibition in 1991 is the form that would have been seen in New York in the 1990s, which is the focal period of my research.

In order to demonstrate how Goldin expresses care for her deceased friend in *Cookie in Her Casket*, one must understand that Goldin's photography is situated within a personal narrative. The personal context of Goldin's work combines with her role as an artist to create a tension between private and public. If one considers the content of *Cookie in Her Casket*, the uneasy balance of public and private is evident. The photograph memorialises a private moment, where the mourner (Goldin) is gazing upon her deceased friend for one of the last times in the intense emotional setting of a funeral. Nonetheless, the seemingly private photograph is a publicly circulated artwork, intended both for display and for purchase by someone who may not have known Goldin or Cookie. Despite its public circulation, Goldin's presentation of *Cookie in Her Casket* relies on the notion of personal narrative. The photograph is part of a fifteen-image portfolio, *The Cookie Portfolio* (also titled *Cookie Mueller* in the publication of the Pace/MacGill exhibition catalogue) chronicling fourteen years of friendship.⁶² The photographs begin with a piece written by Goldin in the style of a eulogy, explaining how she met Cookie and about their relationship before Cookie contracted HIV and died of complications related to AIDS. This note establishes a memorial narrative to the series that, as discussed in the coming chapters, encourages empathy. The range of images and experiences captured, including birthdays, weddings and funerals, give the viewer a sense of a vibrant young woman before tracing her decline and untimely

⁶⁰ Nan Goldin, "Cookie Mueller," *Camera Austria*, 1992, pp. 3–11.

⁶¹ Nan Goldin, *Nan Goldin: I'll Be Your Mirror*, ed. by Nan Goldin, David Armstrong, and Hanz Werner Holzwarth (New York: Witney Museum of American Art, 1996); Nan Goldin, *Cookie Mueller: Photographs* (New York: Pace/Mac Gill Gallery, 1991).

⁶² Goldin, *Cookie Mueller: Photographs*.

death.⁶³ These are touching moments, but given Goldin's personal narrative, they are presented as *private* moments, even in a public space.

This tension of private and public is induced by Goldin's personal narrative, which pervades her oeuvre. This introduction extends a reading of the reception of Goldin's work as an on-going struggle between the paradigms of personal/professional and documentary/artistic. The personal approach to photography extends beyond *The Cookie Portfolio*, and is in fact a defining feature of Goldin's work. By 1990, when *The Cookie Portfolio* was first exhibited at the Photographic Resource Center in Boston, Goldin had become a rising star in the art world, and part of the established art scene. Her reception, conversely, emphasized the snapshot style, the amateur feel and the personal narrative of her photography, making it difficult to situate her role as photographer with the emotional connection to her subjects. If one examines the reception of Goldin's oeuvre since her first significantly recognized piece, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, there emerges a pattern of uncertainty in placing Goldin and her artwork. From early on, critics have been concerned with the balance between documentary and artistry in Goldin's work, her personal, familial approach to photography, and her more analytical and formal abilities as a trained artist. This has manifested as a tension between the personal narrative surrounding her work, along with the 'snap shot' style of photography, on the one hand and the composition, artistic value and marketing of her work on the other.

The Ballad of Sexual Dependency began as a series of slideshows in Cookie's apartment and the underground clubs of the Lower East Side in New York City, and grew into an internationally recognized piece with a book and exhibition backed by Aperture.⁶⁴ While I will go into detail about the exhibition in the next chapter, for the moment one should consider Max Kozloff's review of *The Ballad* as exhibited at Burden Gallery in New York.⁶⁵ Kozloff's review, 'The Family of Nan', highlighted the tension that defined Goldin's works, underscoring *The Ballad's* sense of a family

⁶³ This note appears at the start of the portfolio in the catalogue, and its reproduction in *I'll Be Your Mirror*, and at the end of a photo-essay version of the portfolio in *Camera Austria*. See: Goldin, *Nan Goldin: I'll Be Your Mirror*; Goldin, "Cookie Mueller."

⁶⁴ *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* is discussed in the next chapter. For more on the history of *The Ballad* see, among others: Michael Bracewell, 'Making Up Is Hard to Do' *Frieze*, 12 (1993) <http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/making_up_is_hard_to_do/> [accessed 10 October 2012]; Stephen Westfall, "The Ballad of Nan Goldin" *BOMB*, 37 (1991), 27–31; Marvin Heiferman, Mark Holborn and Suzanne Fletcher, eds., *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (New York: Aperture, 1996); Louis Kaplan, 'Photography and the Exposure of Community: Reciting Nan Goldin's "Ballad"', in *American Exposures: Photography and Community in the Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2005), pp. 81–107; Goldin, *Nan Goldin: I'll Be Your Mirror*; Costa.

⁶⁵ For example, Kozloff appears in: Arthur C. Danto, 'Nan Goldin's World' *The Nation* (December 2, 1996), 32-35 (p. 32); Tom Holert, 'Nan Goldin Talks to Tom Holert,' *Artforum International*, 41 (2003), 232–274.

album.⁶⁶ Kozloff's review focuses on the emotional closeness between artist and subject, outlining the importance of Goldin's non-conventional family to read the images. He stops only briefly to consider the consequences of such a family album being distributed to the public. Kozloff's main concern is how the viewer should respond to these images, ending in the enquiry 'how admirable is the act of coarse self-exploitation, which devalues privacy and personal dignity in the name of artistic license?'⁶⁷ These ethical concerns hover around the key issue of placing the private and intimate moments in publicly circulated, and traded, artworks. Nonetheless, they do not question whether these moments are still private when used as art pieces. As Kozloff points out, these images require authenticity, however he never asks why such personal, intimate images are put into the public sphere.⁶⁸ The tension between public and private is always present in Goldin's work, and the narrative of friendship clouds the fact that these familial and personal images are being bought and sold; that her relationships with her subjects are commodities.⁶⁹

The idea of the talented, but emotionally connected photographer (mixing amateur and professional), is fostered by Goldin's early interest in photographing the people around her. In an interview, she explained that her free-school received a grant from Polaroid which afforded each student a camera. From early on she photographed her friends and other members of her class.⁷⁰ She began with a Polaroid and shooting the occasional super-8 film, always looking at her friends, including fellow photographer David Armstrong, before turning to a 35mm camera.⁷¹ While still in high school, Goldin and Armstrong moved to Provincetown where she lived with a group of friends, and eventually met Cookie.⁷² In Provincetown, Goldin turned her camera on her roommates and their involvement with the drag scene in Boston. Goldin would photograph her roommates around the house, as they prepared for the evening, and

⁶⁶ Kozloff insisted, 'There can be no doubt that the work has been realized as a "family" snapshot album' and he finds the fascination with Goldin to be in the reconsideration of the family album for this unconventional family and the non-traditional moments captured within it. Max Kozloff, "The Family of Nan," *Art in America*, 75 (1987), 39–43 (p. 39).

⁶⁷ Kozloff, p. 43.

⁶⁸ Kozloff, p. 39.

⁶⁹ This will be revisited in the next three chapters. While there was early concern of voyeurism to Goldin's work, it was countered by Goldin's insistence that her work was done with love, respect and acceptance among her group of friends. My point here accepts the presumption that Goldin is photographing out of love, while questioning the commodification of such an emotional and personal interaction.

⁷⁰ Paul Tschinkel, "Nan Goldin - All My Life (Excerpt, ART/new York no.47)," *You Tube*, 2010 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omKMdqqI_NY> [accessed 2 February 2014].

⁷¹ Bracewell; Nan Goldin, Edmund Coulthard, and Adam Barker. *I'll Be Your Mirror*. London: Blast! Films, 1998.

⁷² Goldin lived with Cookie Mueller and Sharon Nisep along with a few other members of the John Waters film circle. In an interview, Goldin called Provincetown 'a gay resort three hours away from Boston. It is the farthest point in America's east coast.' Mazur, Adam and Paulina Skirgajllo-Krajewska. 'If I want to take a picture, I take it no matter what: Nan Goldin interviewed by Adam Mazur and Paulina Skirgajllo-Krajewska'. 13 February 2003, Warsaw. <<http://fototapeta.art.pl/2003/ngie.php>> [accessed 30 May 2013];

subsequently in the glitz and glam of Boston drag bar ‘The Other Side’.⁷³ Some of these early images, taken when she lived with drag queens in Boston from the age of fifteen to twenty, were exhibited alongside her 1996 exhibition *I’ll be Your Mirror*.⁷⁴ Along with a retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art of the same name, a film was made documenting Goldin’s career. In the film, Armstrong recalled that he and Goldin’s other roommates would sort through boxes of Goldin’s photographs, setting aside pictures of themselves, in a competition for who had the greatest number of images.⁷⁵ Armstrong’s description establishes the sense of pride Goldin’s subjects felt at being photographed, and their exhibitionist tendencies. Goldin continued to photograph in this kind of environment when she moved to New York.

At the School of the Museum of Fine Arts (1977/78) she was taught by Henry Horenstein, seeing a mutual interest in going beyond the ‘façade of American bourgeois life’, introduced Goldin to Larry Clarke and Diane Arbus.⁷⁶ The school exposed her to other artists and new equipment. Goldin moved from black and white to colour, began to use flash and switched to working with Cibachrome, a print made on polyester known for its richness of colour and clarity.⁷⁷ During this time, Goldin and her school friend David Armstrong exhibited at Atlantic Gallery in Boston and were part of the ‘Boston School’, which Goldin described as ‘people [who] took their own pictures; they broke the double spell in photography, against the anti-sentimentality of the ‘80s and the patriarchal technicality of the ‘70s.’⁷⁸ This attitude was associated with a post-punk mentality, which I expand upon in Chapter 1, that thrived on making one’s own way, relying on the handmade and the unique.⁷⁹ These aspects of post-punk helped lay the base for a narrative of Goldin’s work that emphasizes the ‘amateur’ and the ‘personal’ above her professional and careful role as photographer. Before *The Ballad* was exhibited, the formalism of Goldin’s work stood out. In a *New York Times* review of

⁷³ Before Goldin’s retrospective, these images were exhibited in 1973 at Project Inc, in Cambridge. In 1993 were compiled into the series *The Other Side*; see: David Armstrong and Walter Keller, *The Other Side: Nan Goldin* (Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications and DAAD Artists in Residence Programme, 1993).

⁷⁴ Goldin, *Nan Goldin: I’ll Be Your Mirror*. The exhibition was a retrospective, so it was sensible to include these works as they were exhibited in 1973. However, their inclusion also implies that these early images were part of the same technique and arc as those produced after her formal education.

⁷⁵ Goldin, Coulthard, and Barker.

⁷⁶ Elisabeth Sussman, ‘In/Of Her Time: Nan Goldin’s Photographs’, in *Nan Goldin: I’ll Be Your Mirror*, ed. by Nan Goldin, David Armstrong, and Hanz Werner Holzwarth (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996), pp. 25–97 (p. 30).

⁷⁷ Goldin began with a Polaroid while at her free-school and then moved on to filming with super 8 before using a traditional camera with 35mm film, which she continued to use at the School of Museum of Fine Arts. See Bracewell. Goldin used gelatin silver print for her early photographs. See Goldin, *Nan Goldin: I’ll Be Your Mirror*; Nan Goldin, *The Devil’s Playground* (London: Phaidon Press, 2003).

⁷⁸ Tom Holert, ‘Nan Goldin Talks to Tom Holert’ *Artforum International*, 41 (2003), 232–274 (p.234).

⁷⁹ This atmosphere is discussed in Chapter 1 with specific relation to Goldin and her group of friends. For more on post-punk see Brian Cogan, *Encyclopedia of Punk Music and Culture* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006); Steve Redhead, *Subculture to Clubcultures: an Introduction to Popular Cultural Studies*, (New York: Blackwell Publishers, 1997).

contemporary photographers, critic Andy Grundberg linked Goldin, Mary Frey and Joel Sternfeld as ‘self-conscious’ photographers, noting ‘it is precisely their awareness of the [photographic] medium’s fictional possibilities that separates them from the well-intentioned forces of journalistic sincerity.’⁸⁰ Grundberg’s analysis, while only briefly discussing Goldin, highlights a lack of sincerity in her work, pulling it away from the documentary and highlighting her awareness of the story that a camera can create.⁸¹ Curiously, soon after this article was published, he praised Goldin’s work for presenting the truth rather than playing with the ‘fictional possibilities’ – such as misrepresentation of a person or a group – a camera offers.

Goldin moved to New York in 1978 and continued to take photographs of her family of friends. During this time, Goldin had a few group exhibitions of isolated photographs, but these photographs were eventually collected into a slideshow work that became *The Ballad*. *The Ballad*’s earliest form was a series of slideshows shown first at Cookie’s apartment. In 1979 it then made a public appearance at a friend’s birthday party in Lower East side’s Mudd Club.⁸² For years following, the slides and order altered slightly with each presentation of *The Ballad*.⁸³ Because the audience were Goldin’s friends and acquaintances, each change of the slides was an exciting moment for the group, curious who would stay and who would be added. At the suggestion of her friends, Goldin added music to the show in 1980.⁸⁴ While the music and the slides regularly have altered, *The Ballad* began to gain artistic weight. The early personal setting for the slides encouraged a familial reception for the work, and encouraged engagement with the piece as a personal endeavour. As I will argue in Chapter 3 with respect to *Cookie in Her Casket*, viewers from outside the group were invited in to see from within the group, identifying empathically with the photographer. Goldin continued to show *the Ballad* in the bars and clubs of the Lower East Side, including a showing at the bar where she worked, Tin Pan Alley – known for supporting female artists and musicians with informal shows.⁸⁵ The slideshow was presented at St. Marks on the Bowery, a site of artistic convergence for the underground of the Lower East

⁸⁰ Andy Grundberg, ‘Photographers Who See Beyond the Fact’ *The New York Times* (New York, 7 September 1986), p. 43.

⁸¹ This argument is reversed decades later, when Litt argues that Goldin’s crowd are exhibitionist, making the images, seem disingenuous because the subjects are perpetually on show. See: Litt.

⁸² Holert, p. 232.

⁸³ The effects of the fluidity of the piece have been discussed in, among others: Costa, pp.9-10; Sussman, pp. 34; Robinson and Weinberg, pp.13-16.

⁸⁴ Sussman, p.32.

⁸⁵ Darryl Pickney, “Nan’s Manhattan,” in *Nan Goldin: I’ll Be Your Mirror*, ed. by Nan Goldin, David Armstrong, and Hanz Werner Holzwarth (New York: Witney Museum of American Art, 1996), pp. 203–273. For more on Tin Pan Alley and Goldin’s time tending bar, see: Marvin Hiefferman, “Pictures of Life and Loss,” in *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (New York: Aperture, 1996), pp. 277–318; Westfall.

Side, in the same year that Aperture produced a catalogue for *The Ballad*. These local haunts ensured that the crowd at an exhibition of *The Ballad* would include the subjects of her photographs.⁸⁶

During this early development, *The Ballad* was seen as a hybrid of film and photography. It was exhibited regularly at the OP Screening Room, an underground venue on Broadway where Jack Smith also presented slide shows, and shown at the 39th Edinburgh International Film Festival in 1985. From the onset, *The Ballad*'s use of the slideshow format resulted in recognition: it was shown at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 1981, followed by screenings in Washington DC and the Netherlands in 1983, then subsequent international exhibitions in Germany, Sweden, Stockholm, The Hague and Milan before being taken up by Aperture in 1986.⁸⁷ The exhibition at Burden Gallery, part of the Aperture Foundation, meant a mainstream catalogue as well, and situated Goldin firmly among the respected emerging artists of her time. A year later, *The Ballad* was exhibited at the Smithsonian in Washington D.C. and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

In Grundberg's review of the Burden exhibition of *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, there exists an uneasy balance between his praise of the reality and documentary within her images and his attention to the formal and artistic construction of the work. Grundberg initially focused on the authenticity of the series, noting that Goldin 'records' moments not often caught on camera, resulting in a frank reflection of the dissatisfaction felt by a generation.⁸⁸ This leans toward a description of the work as documentary photography. He then, in contrast, acknowledges that despite 'the snapshot-like formlessness of many of her pictures, "The Ballad of Sexual Dependency" as a whole is tightly organized', going on to address the artistic composition of the pieces.⁸⁹ Grundberg then seesaws between finding the images 'candid' and 'exaggerated', placing her work in the space between documentary and artistic interpretation. Ultimately, the article ends with Grundberg deciding to frame *The Ballad* in the light of a documentary, though an unusual one. Grundberg's article demonstrates that though there has always existed a tension between amateur and

⁸⁶ The choice of audience could be another example of the tension between private and public in Goldin's work. As *The Ballad* was originally shown in private screenings among Goldin's friends, there was a level of control over the group and an ensured intimacy and familiarity with the work and the subjects. As the project grew, this control decreased, but at this time, Goldin's circle was still a part of the audience.

⁸⁷ Various forms of *the Ballad* were exhibited at Galerie Venster, Rotterdam Arts Foundation, The Netherlands (1983), Café Humlan, Umea, Sweden (1984), Cinema Wuppertal, Germany and Arsenal Cinema, Berlin (1984), Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden (1984), Wekstatt Kino, Munich (1984), Forum des jungen Films, Berlin Film Festival (1986), Image and Sound Festival, The Hague (1986), and in Plastic, Milan (1986).

⁸⁸ Andy Grundberg, 'Photography Review: Nan Goldin's Bleak Diary of the Urban Subculture,' *The New York Times* (New York, 21 December 1986), p. 33.

⁸⁹ Grundberg, 'Photography Review: Nan Goldin's Bleak Diary of the Urban Subculture', p. 33.

professional in Goldin's work, it was once considered as both professional and documentary.

Grundberg's inclination to understand Goldin's photographs as a form of documentary emphasises her connection to the group she photographs in order to separate her from traditional photo-journalism or documentary.⁹⁰ In response to her entire oeuvre, critics have consistently addressed the unclear documentary aspect of Goldin's photographs, each time noting her unusual position within the group she photographs.⁹¹ No matter the critical reception, Goldin steadfastly insists her work is not documentary because she is part of the same group as her subjects, and that role breaks from photographers of the past – like Diane Arbus, whom I will address shortly – whose work was related to the documentary. Goldin insists on dissociating her work from the term documentary because of its imbalanced power dynamic, as described by her contemporary Martha Rosler. Artist Rosler produced *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Systems* (1974-5) in response to the same crisis on documentary. The work consisted of a series of black and white photographs of buildings and spaces in the Bowery juxtaposed with text reflecting words for various states of inebriation.⁹² Rosler insisted the piece was 'a work of refusal' rejecting the role of the documentary photographer as an enforcer of wider social power system.⁹³ She also rejected the existing forms of documentary, which, she argued, objectified the subject through nostalgia and eliciting vague sympathy.⁹⁴ Looking into the past, Rosler saw documentary photographers as propagating a myth of poverty, exploitation, or victimhood of their subjects. *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Systems*, however, avoided photographing people, and thereby avoided misrepresenting, or victimizing, the residents of the Bowery.

Rather than nostalgia and distanced sympathy, Goldin's closeness encourages

⁹⁰ Goldin's constant insistence on herself as a group member with a camera rather than a photographer supports this.

⁹¹ See, for example: Ann Wiens, "'X'ers By Proxy: Artforum's Mid-Life Crisis.' *New Art Examiner*, 25 (1997), pp. 18–19; Goldin, *Nan Goldin: I'll Be Your Mirror*; Heiferman, Holborn and Fletcher; Sarah Ruddy, 'A Radiant Eye Yearns From Me: Figuring Documentary in the Photography of Nan Goldin' *Feminist Studies*, 35 (2009), pp. 347–380; Kozloff; James Crump, ed. *Variety Photographs by Nan Goldin*. New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2009; Linda Yablonsky, "Still in Control, in front of the camera," *Art Newspaper* 23.253 (Jan 1, 2014), p. 71; David Rimaneli, 'Being Nan Goldin' *Artforum International* 42.10 (June 2004), p. 85.

⁹² *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Systems* was reproduced in Martha Rosler, *3 Works: Critical Essays on Photography and Photographs* (Halifax, N.S: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981).

⁹³ Martha Rosler, "In, around, and afterthoughts (on documentary photography)" *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, Richard Bolton, ed. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989). pp. 304–334. In his work on Rosler, Steve Edwards noted that Rosler viewed the photographer in these types of documentary as having 'social authority' as well as moitary power over the subject photographed. Steve Edwards, *Martha Rosler: The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems* (London: Afterall, 2012) p. 77.

⁹⁴ Edwards argued that Rosler's work attempted to 'reinvent' documentary photography by directly clashing with the nostalgic form of documentary that had developed in the post-War era, the political role of this kind of documentary, and desire only to photograph individuals who were suffering. Edwards, p. 79.

empathy and familiarity in the viewer. In a context where documentary photography is being attacked from within the art world for exploiting and victimizing the subjects, Goldin's identification as a member of the group she photographs denies the distance of artists like Arbus.⁹⁵ In fact, Goldin specifically distanced herself from Arbus, insisting: 'I actually never liked Arbus' pictures of transvestites... I think that Arbus' work is all about herself.'⁹⁶ By placing Arbus' work as self-reflection, Goldin recognizes that Arbus was not documenting, but using her subjects. While Goldin does not address the power dynamics of the photographer within wider practice, she detached herself from work like that of Arbus by exclusively photographing her own life within a group of friends. Goldin's insistence that she photographed from within the group, and the inclusion of herself as a subject, derails the dichotomy of a powerful photographer using the camera as a judgement that reinforces the notion of poverty as spectacle.⁹⁷ As I argue in Chapters 2 and 3, it also entices an empathetic response from the viewer through Goldin's emotional connection to the subject. By eliminating the distance between subject and photographer, the subject is presented as an equal. Not only an equal to the photographer, but to the viewer as well. The personal narrative surrounding the images gives context to the subjects, and reinforces the idea that Goldin's pieces are photographs of friends. As I demonstrate in Chapter 3, knowing details of the relationship between Goldin and her subjects makes the viewer privy to intimate details that encourage intimacy between subject and viewer.

Grundberg's uneasy label successfully distances Goldin from photographers like Arbus, Agee or Evans which, as Rosler insisted 'manages to institute a new genre of victimization' where the photographer victimizes the subject in the act of photographing them and then they are further victimized by the use of these photographs overtime to hold them in their state of debility.⁹⁸ The question of Goldin's relationship with the subjects of her photographs creates a tension that is not quite related to the old form of documentary where the photographer maintains social power over the subject. However, despite both Goldin and Rosler photographing the Bowery, Goldin's work is also not as neutral as the unpopulated images of Rosler's *The Bowery In Two Inadequate Systems*. With Goldin's work ending up in a gallery, it is hard to separate Goldin from other artists who bring images of the poor and inebriated of the

⁹⁵ Rosler described Arbus' works as 'satisfyingly immobilized imagery as a surrogate for *the real thing*, the freak show'. Rosler, "In, around, and afterthoughts (on documentary photography)", p.308.

⁹⁶ Westfall, p. 27. Goldin instead preferred the work of Larry Clark, See also: Kaplan, Costa, *Nan* 55.

⁹⁷ Goldin also shies away from the term 'documentary' for the same reason, though critics, as I will demonstrate, continue to use the term in relation to her work.

⁹⁸ Rosler, "In, around, and afterthoughts (on documentary photography)", p.320.

underground to the elite of the art market for consumption.⁹⁹ By turning the camera on herself and her loved ones, however, she becomes as vulnerable to the viewer's scrutiny as her subjects. Being the subject as well as the photographer only further clouds the narrative that surrounds her work, associating her with the family, the personal, and the everyday rather than the side of the professional. The narrative of love and personal experience, highlighting her non-traditional 'family' of friends consistently informs the reception of her work. As described in a review by Louise Gray: 'all Goldin's work has a baseline in a quest for intimacy, and with it the continuing exploration of family and familiarity.'¹⁰⁰ Framing Goldin's work as 'exploration of family and familiarity' puts the personal sentiment of the work at the forefront of artistic reception.

In the catalogue for *The Ballad*, Goldin called her work 'my visual diary', a term supported by the intimacy of the moments captured as well as Goldin's need to take her camera everywhere.¹⁰¹ While *The Ballad* catalogue was published in 1996, the work evolved in accordance with Goldin's relationships and experiences. *The Ballad* is still shown in slideshows, but by the mid-1980s *The Ballad* appeared in exhibitions and auction houses as Goldin moved into the professional world. *The Ballad* was also reproduced in catalogues and in sections as photo essays, taking the work out of its original context and the community, largely of Goldin's friends, that formulated around the slideshows.¹⁰² As Goldin moved into the professional art scene and the work evolved into print and image installations, the sense of community was retained, as reflected in the reviews and essays that accompany it. The narrative of Goldin's tribe is infused into *The Ballad* as though it is necessary to accompany the images' re-contextualisation as art pieces. It is as though the narrative is a ghost haunting the photographs to ensure the original personality and community of the subjects is not completely removed.

The Ballad laid out the expectation for narrative in Goldin's photographs. Sussman noted that the slideshow ensured an overarching narrative to *The Ballad*,

⁹⁹ Being paid for these images, which I discuss in greater detail in relation to *Cookie in Her Casket*, further clouds the issue of distance in documentary for Goldin.

¹⁰⁰ Louise Gray, 'Nan Goldin' *Art Review*, 2 (2004), 103. This sentiment is echoed in other reviews. See also: Maria Walsh, 'Nan Goldin: Whitechapel Art Gallery, London' *Art Monthly*, 2002, 19–20; Isolde Brielmaier, 'Nan Goldin: Matthew Marks' *Art In America*, 100 (2012), 111–112.

¹⁰¹ Nan Goldin, 'Introduction', in *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, ed. by Marvin Heiferman, Mark Holborn, and Suzanne Fletcher (New York: Aperture, 1996), pp. 6–9 (p. 6). This version of *the Ballad* included *Cookie in Her Casket*. Additional references to Goldin's work as a diary appear in: Catherine Lampart, 'Family of Own Gender', in *The Devil's Playground* (London: Phaidon Press, 2003); David Armstrong, Walter Keller and Nan Goldin, 'On Acceptance: A Conversation', in *Nan Goldin: I'll Be Your Mirror* (New York: Witney Museum of American Art, 1996), pp. 447–462.

¹⁰² Danto mentions in his review of *I'll Be Your Mirror* that the original audience were these members of an intimate group, putting an automatic distance between later viewers seeing the images as part of the art world. Arthur Danto, "Nan Goldin's World," *The Nation*, 2 December 1996, pp. 32–35.

which was later enforced by the addition of music, guiding interpretation of the images through pointed lyrics.¹⁰³ Sussman suggested that the music gives ‘flow’ to the slides, countering the staccato nature of the slide-projector and developing an explicit narrative for the images.¹⁰⁴ The narrative flow creates a subtle bridge between photography and cinema.¹⁰⁵ Costa explained in the *Nan Goldin 55* catalogue that critics would be better served to focus on the ‘association between it [*The Ballad*] and the language of cinema.’¹⁰⁶ However, the flow of a slideshow is closer to a diary: separate entries that stand alone, but together reveal connections and evolution of the subject and the storyteller. Like a diary, Goldin’s work relies on personal narrative while engaging the audience through relationships and experiences that rely on common ground – parties, friends, fights, crushes – allowing for the reader of the diary, or viewer of works, to find parallels in their own life. Additionally, the personal exposition of a diary encourages the reader to connect with the author through empathy. Goldin remarked in an interview about *The Ballad* that ‘Having the narrative voice of the soundtrack gives it larger context than just pictures of my friends’, but the effect is not completely lost without music because Goldin captured experiences and a kinship which which a wider audience can relate.¹⁰⁷ The reproduction of *The Ballad* in catalogue form and in blogs or other publications speaks to the strength of the images in their own right. The images capture moments many of us have experienced – parties with friends, fights with lovers, moments of sex, sleep, tears and joy – and while the viewer may not know the individuals or have a connection to the time, the sentiments of the image are enduring. As Sante suggested, Goldin’s images are universal because they are personal: ‘the doors between her life and her work are kept wide open, and that is why, when I look at her pictures, even of people and places far removed from my daily existence, I see my own life, then and now.’¹⁰⁸ By intertwining her life and work, Sante explains, Goldin connected with her subjects, and ultimately the audience. The audience is encouraged to enter into the group by making comparisons between their lives and the life depicted in the image. The universal appeal of her images is supported by the embrace of Goldin in

¹⁰³ Elisabeth Sussman, ‘In/Of Her Time: Nan Goldin’s Photographs’, in *Nan Goldin: I’ll Be Your Mirror*, ed. by Nan Goldin, David Armstrong, and Hanz Werner Holzwarth (New York: Witney Museum of American Art, 1996), pp. 25–97 (p. 32).

¹⁰⁴ Sussman, p. 34.

¹⁰⁵ See Marcus Griel, ‘Songs Left Out of Nan Goldin’s “Ballad of Sexual Dependency”’, *Aperture*, 2009, 76–81 (p. 79); Joyce Henri Robinson and Jonathan Weinberg, *Fantastic Tales: The Photography of Nan Goldin* (London: Tate, 2005), p. 14.

¹⁰⁶ Guido Costa, *Nan Goldin 55* (London: Phaidon Press, 2001), p. 9. Additionally, Hoberman likens Goldin’s slideshow to New American Cinema. See: J. Hoberman, ‘My Number One Medium All My Life: Nan Goldin Talking with J. Hoberman’, in *Nan Goldin: I’ll Be Your Mirror*, ed. by Nan Goldin, David Armstrong, and Hanz Werner Holzwarth (New York: Witney Museum of American Art, 1996), pp. 135–202 (p. 135).

¹⁰⁷ Goldin qtd in Stephen Westfall, ‘The Ballad of Nan Goldin’, *BOMB*, 37 (1991), 27–31 (p. 31).

¹⁰⁸ Sante, p. 193.

advertising – including a campaign she shot for Jimmy Choo.¹⁰⁹

Goldin's personal style extended into the method by which she took photographs and the reasons for taking them, making each image about a personal connection between photographer and subject. Goldin commented that 'the instant of taking a picture is a moment of clarity and emotional connection for me. To photograph someone is to caress them.'¹¹⁰ The intimate and familiar term 'caress' expresses the connection Goldin feels through the camera. Goldin considers the camera an 'extension of herself' and as such, every member of her friendship circle expected to be photographed.¹¹¹ The accepted image of Goldin is taken from her insistence that she interacted with the world through her photographs. As such, her photographs may be a reflection of herself and the relationship Goldin believed she had with her friends. The personal aspect of her role as photographer enhances the use of the term 'caress' to stress the personal within snapshot photography.¹¹² Critics have associated Goldin with the snapshot in part because Goldin photographed her close friends and her life, recalling snapshot collections, and in part because the images could be blurred or out of focus recalling amateur photography.¹¹³ Goldin acknowledged in an interview with writer and film critic Hoberman that her work 'comes directly from the snapshot, which is always about love... and history.'¹¹⁴ Even in Goldin's pause between 'love' and 'history' it is clear that love is vital in reading her work. By love, Goldin was referring to the aforementioned mutual affection between photographer and subject, expanded on by Kaplan in *American Exposures*. He argued that by focusing on love, Goldin interpreted the snapshot outside of the traditional paradigm of the photograph as trace of the individual. Kaplan instead suggested that Goldin's photographs are a trace of love, what is left behind when Goldin 'touches' her subjects through the lens. Kaplan surmised that because of the love Goldin expresses through the camera, her snapshots 'yield a relationship of immediacy and intimacy, a performative "I love you", the touch and caress of the haptic.'¹¹⁵ The photograph is conceived of by Kaplan as a 'touch' by

¹⁰⁹ Naomi Attwood, 'WOW! Nan Goldin shoots the new Jimmy Choo campaign' *Grazia Daily* (5 October 2011) <<http://www.graziadaily.co.uk/fashion/archive/2011/10/05/wow-nan-goldin-shoots-the-new-jimmy-choo-campaign.htm>> [accessed 1 Feb, 2014]

¹¹⁰ Nan Goldin, 'Nan Goldin', in *Bad Girls* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993), p. 41 (p. 41). The desire to connect to the audience was highlighted in Phyllis Thompson Reid, "Nan Goldin – Dark Dairy." *Aperture* 176 (Fall 2004): 'Both giving and demanding, Goldin has a gift for connection that is a product of her bottomless desire for it' (65).

¹¹¹ Darryl Pickney, 'Nan's Manhattan', in *Nan Goldin: I'll Be Your Mirror*, ed. by Nan Goldin, David Armstrong, and Hanz Werner Holzwarth (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996), pp. 203–273 (p. 204).

¹¹² Goldin, 'Nan Goldin', p. 41.

¹¹³ Goldin told Hoert: 'Actually, I take blurred pictures, because I take pictures no matter what the light is. If I want to take a picture, I do not care if there is light or no light.' Again, Goldin's message is a revision of herself as an amateur, avoiding her reality as a professional photographer.

¹¹⁴ Hoberman, p. 135.

¹¹⁵ Kaplan, p. 87.

the photographer enacted on the subject, and also a way to keep in touch with the subject. It is a communication between photographer and subject, and a way of maintaining the bond between them.

The element of history adds the layer of shared experience. Goldin's 'caress' is also about shared history, which connects Goldin with her subjects. Goldin's friends and some critics have insisted that there is no judgment in her work. They argued that Goldin is 'empathetic' to the subject and encourages empathy in the viewer. As Bracewell relayed: 'Our response, hopefully, is compassionate and humane'.¹¹⁶ Goldin's empathy is arguably an expression of the connection between the photographer and subject in a shared history. While her photographs unveil intimate moments, and even aspects of her friends' identities, the photographs also reveal what Goldin sees as her relationship with her friends. Sussman argued that Goldin's world was one of self-definition in a constructed, self-created space, recorded by constant picture taking.¹¹⁷ Therefore, by reaching out through photography, Goldin 'caresses' her subjects while constructing herself in relation to them. Goldin's 'caress' contrasts with Barthes's assertion in *Camera Lucida* that '[t]he photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me.'¹¹⁸ Barthes explains the photograph as a projection of the subject, which then touches the viewer; a touch that he calls *punctum*. For Barthes, *punctum* is the aspect of the photograph that touches him, emphasizing that the viewer is drawn to a photograph by its emanation. In contrast, Goldin's 'caress' suggests the photograph as a way for the photographer to reach out and touch the subject, as both Kaplan and Sussman discussed. Goldin's 'caress' is not merely an emanation by the photographer - one might use the term 'probe' in that case - for a caress requires acquiescence by the subject. The caress is viewed as shared vulnerability, where the photographer is as exposed as the subject.

Goldin's caress offers a feminine counterpoint to Sontag's description of the camera as a phallic, invasive object in *On Photography*. Sontag describes photographing an individual as 'violate[ing] them, by seeing them as they never see themselves' in a masculine assertion where the photograph is like a gun or a penis.¹¹⁹ Admittedly, Sontag is clear that she is speaking about the social use of the camera, but her premise of the camera as a phallic object can, and has, been applied to art

¹¹⁶ Bracewell. Sussman, p. 27; Lampart, p. 57; Roberta Smith, 'A Piaf with a Camera Sings of Self', *New York Times*, 4 October 1996, p. C25; Marvin Hiefferman, 'Pictures of Life and Loss', in *Nan Goldin: I'll Be Your Mirror*, ed. by Nan Goldin, David Armstrong, and Hanz Werner Holzwarth (New York: Witney Museum of American Art, 1996), pp. 227-318 (p. 320).

¹¹⁷ Sussman, p. 27.

¹¹⁸ Barthes, p. 80.

¹¹⁹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), p. 15.

photography.¹²⁰ In fact, within *On Photography*, Sontag attacks the work of Diane Arbus for her objectifying distance and violation of the subjects.¹²¹ Sontag's disgust at the objectifying eye of Arbus (which she relates to the camera in the 1966 film *Blow-Up*, in which the camera is associated with the violence of a murder and the intrusion of voyeuristic spying) would be answered by Goldin's regular assertion that she is photographing as a member of the group.¹²² In fact, the personal connection she has as a photographer to her community could be seen as an answer to Sontag's criticism of Arbus.¹²³ Goldin's description of the caress insists on the vulnerability of the photographer, which Sontag does not consider, instead asserting that '[t]o photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and, therefore, power.'¹²⁴ Sontag's assertion that the photographer appropriates the subject, by implication, is an assertion of power over the subject by the photographer. Goldin's description of the snapshot in relation love and history requires a collective relationship, in which the photographer, Goldin, is also present in the photographs through her connection with the subject. This is still a power relationship but one where the photographer and subject are on a more equal footing. That is not to say that Sontag's point is completely invalid. Because Goldin took the photographs, they are forever *her* perspective and *her* side of the relationship – what Sontag might call Goldin's 'knowledge' of the relationship – which puts the photographer in a position of power, but it is limited in comparison to Sontag's phallic camera.

Goldin has called her camera 'a part of her body', and considering the number of pictures she has taken, it is reasonable to suggest that Goldin's camera was the lens through which she saw the world, and herself.¹²⁵ Because of this deeply personal aspect to her work, it is easy for viewers, as Sante suggested, to get a sense of familiarity when looking at Goldin's images. However, the other side of this emotional and personal style of photography is financial displacement. If the emotional connection between

¹²⁰ Sontag, p. 8.

¹²¹ Sontag, p. 33-45.

¹²² Goldin also discussed *Blow Up* as an influence, particularly in relation to the glamour of photography: J Hoberman, 'My Number One Medium All My Life: Nan Goldin Talking with J. Hoberman', in *Nan Goldin: I'll Be Your Mirror*, ed. by Nan Goldin, David Armstrong, and Hanz Werner Holzwarth (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996), pp. 135–202 (p. 135). Goldin identifies with the fashion photographer lead character, David, and the glamour of photographing models, not his voyeuristic use of the camera, nor the sense of violence associated with photographing that is relayed in the film.

¹²³ Considering Goldin found Arbus during her degree, and maintains that Arbus and Clark are influences, it would be surprising if Goldin had not read Sontag's response to Arbus in *On Photography*. Goldin may well have been responding, for she appears to agree with Sontag's disdain for photographers who capture subjects outside their own social group. This would be an interesting area for future academic exploration.

¹²⁴ Sontag, p. 4.

¹²⁵ Pickney, p. 204.

photographer and subject, as revealed in the photograph, is so central to her work, than how do they fit into the commodification of her work as an artist? Such emotional exposure may arguably allow the viewer to connect with the sentiment in the photograph, but Goldin's distribution of these personal moments to the masses expounds that vulnerability. These intense experiences – and if it is a connection, between photographer and subject one should call them experiences rather than the more disconnected term 'moment' – are put on display to the world for the purposes of being bought. These are not public installations to be experienced; they are art works in a gallery that runs on sales. As such fragments of these relationships are available to be purchased and hung in a living room. It makes one wonder about image pricing: In the 1991 exhibition at Pace/MacGill, each image in the portfolio was priced at \$900, with the entire portfolio selling for \$6000. What might Max Mueller think of this; not only is the artist making money of images of his mother, but how would the pricing strike him? Would he find all these moments of the same 'value' in his own memory? Moving away from Goldin's monetary gain, a version of the Cookie Portfolio, *Cookie Mueller 1949-1989*, sold at auction for \$68,500 in 1999, whereas the memorial series *Gilles and Gotscho* sold at the same auction house for \$20,500 in 2014.¹²⁶ While the price relates to the popularity and provenance of the Cookie images, along with other concerns of the art market, would Max be proud his mother's memorial series sold for more than one of Goldin's other deceased friends? Would he have been hurt if it had not? These are not the questions asked of the buyers nor, it seems, of Goldin, despite using such emotionally charged terms like 'caress'. The value of this 'caress' creates a tension with the emotive subject.¹²⁷

Yet, there must be a great amount of power to the vulnerability of Goldin as a photographer because commodity is not part of the narrative of Goldin's work. If she were the penetrating photographer, these questions might be asked, but mutual vulnerability seems to cloud the potential perspective of her work as the buying and selling of relationships. Calling her work a 'visual diary', Goldin shifts the focus to herself: these are her versions of relationships, her perspective, and if she is willing to sell the way she connects to her life and her friends, than there is apparently nothing to

¹²⁶ 'Cookie Mueller 1949-1989', *Christies* <<http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot/nan-goldin-cookie-mueller-1949-1989-1613226-details.aspx?intObjectID=1613226>> [accessed 5 Feb 2014]; 'Gilles and Gotscho', *Christies* <<http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/photographs/nan-goldin-gilles-and-gotscho-5767072-details.aspx>> [accessed 5 Feb 2014].

¹²⁷ This brings up another, complicated, point about the value of Goldin as a professional artist. Her professional status gives such value to her emotional connection to the subjects.

say on the matter (for nothing is said).¹²⁸ As artist and writer Oriane Stender described, ‘A life lived in public is apparently its own reward, but one can’t help wondering what prompts Goldin to continue to chronicle the now-familiar exploits [of her group]?’¹²⁹ Stender reads the photographs as a reflection of Goldin’s life in the public eye, not referring to the public display of the subject. As such, Stender questions why Goldin is willing to situate her life and emotions in a public forum. There will not likely be a response to Stender’s question, or to the question of what it means to sell such personal photographs, but it only touches on the financial tension. It is easier to overshadow the financial aspect of the transaction with Goldin’s personal connection to the photographs: they are photographs of her life that have other people in them.

Considering this openness, Goldin’s work is more akin to a photographic album than to a diary. The presentation of a slideshow or a grid maintains a narrative juxtaposition of an album, while the photographs display the personal geared towards a public context, like an album.¹³⁰ Photographic albums were originally a way to express the private and familial to the world while reinforcing familial bonds. Victorian albums were placed around the house specifically to be on display to friends and visitors. In this way the Victorian album is quite like Goldin’s work. Writing about the Waterlow album, art historian Di Bello remarks ‘Photographic family albums provided not only a record, but also an attractive form of entertainment, which combined notions of family and personal history with the genteel connotations of portraiture and album making.’¹³¹ Goldin described her images as a ‘visual diary’, but the combination of personal history with entertainment, notions of the family and broader comments on society make Goldin’s work akin to the family album.¹³² Both are photographic narratives reliant on the intimacy of a family while being intended for display and analysis by the unfamiliar viewer. Using this connection, one can read Goldin’s work in relation to constructed identities and experiences that may have roots in reality, but are geared toward a viewer outside of the shared history. In this context, Goldin’s assertion that photographing is a loving caress can be seen as part of a familial relationship – as the

¹²⁸ Kolzoff argues the diary is like a soap opera rather than a diary, but maintains the sense of connection between subject and photographer, with the viewer as outsider: Kolzoff, 41. Catherine Lampert, on the other hand sees the ‘diary’ as a way to reject the idea of a perfect image: Lampert and Lampart. Both critical responses to the notion of the diary engage in the emotional aspect of the work, turning away from the financial.

¹²⁹ Oriane Stender. ‘Chasing the Dragon’ *Artnet* (March 31, 2006) <<http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/stender/stender3-31-06.asp>> [accessed 14 February 2014].

¹³⁰ The grid creates several narratives because of the various possibilities presented to the viewer and their eyes search the grid. On the other hand, the slideshow has a single narrative, making it more like a traditional album, where a grid may be seen like a scrapbook.

¹³¹ Patrizia Di Bello, *Women’s Albums in Victorian England* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), p. 87.

¹³² For more on the social reflection of Victorian albums see: Di Bello; Siegel.

photographer sister was in the Waterlow album – rather than a distanced observer.¹³³

During the time that *The Ballad* was gaining traction, Marvin Heiferman, an art curator and critic who wrote for the catalogue for *The Ballad*, represented Goldin. By 1988, Heiferman decided to no longer represent artists, and helped connect Goldin with Pace/MacGill Gallery in New York.¹³⁴ At Pace/MacGill, Goldin put together *The Cookie Portfolio* before moving to Berlin with a D.A.A.D. grant to produce *The Other Side*, a series including images of drag queens from her youth in Provincetown, 1980s New York, and her trip to Thailand in the early 1990s.¹³⁵ *The Other Side* references the drag bar in Boston where Goldin and her friends hung out, and the overall feel of the work is dedicated to emphasising the beauty and love Goldin saw in her drag subjects/friends.¹³⁶ In both *The Cookie Portfolio* and the catalogue for *The Other Side*, the aura of Goldin is that of the compassionate and emotionally entangled photographer. *The Cookie Portfolio* begins with a handwritten eulogy where Goldin reminisces about the first time she met Cookie and their eventual friendship. She relays the story of their growing close and then Cookie contracting HIV, recounting: ‘While I was away in 1988 Cookie got sick. When I came back to see her in August 1989 the effects of AIDS had robbed her of her voice. But when I photographed her she spoke to me, she was as present as ever.’¹³⁷ These three sentences establish how the images in the portfolio should be read, and lays out a specific perspective of Goldin. Specifically, the portfolio is a memorial, collected and pieced together by a loving friend. Goldin stresses her personal relationship rather than consider herself a photographer chronicling Cookie’s life and death. The camera, she insists in her hand-written note, allowed the women’s bond to endure the disease. The pain of absence is also present, for Goldin was absent for Cookie’s downturn, only seeing the shocking effects after nearly a year in rehab. The photographer’s narrative allows the viewers access to the friendship between Goldin and Cookie, and focuses attention on the emotions of loss, fear, and love. The camera is carefully depicted as a vehicle for interaction and maintenance of a familial bond, rather than as a one-sided penetrating tool, an argument explored in Chapter 1.

The same narrative of Goldin as a member of the group she photographs appears in the catalogue for *The Other Side*, where Goldin explains the images were taken when she was part of the group, and that the camera was not offering a voyeuristic

¹³³ Di Bello, p. 79.

¹³⁴ Goldin relays the story of Heiferman calling around to galleries in: Holert, p.232. Interestingly, Peter MacGill also represented Joel-Peter Witkin, an artist discussed in the second and third sections of this work.

¹³⁵ Goldin noted in the catalogue to *The Other Side* that she had attempted to return to her original Boston group to photograph them, ‘But it didn’t work: I was an outsider, it was no longer my home’. Armstrong and Keller, p. 6.

¹³⁶ Armstrong and Keller.

¹³⁷ Bracewell.

distance.¹³⁸ Goldin explains she did not want to objectify or study her friends: ‘I wanted to pay homage, to show them how beautiful they were.’¹³⁹ The intimacy of this statement demonstrates that Goldin not only wants her friends to see themselves as beautiful, but she also intends the viewers to take on her perspective. The same reverence for the subject appears in Goldin’s description of Cookie as ‘my idol’ in the *Cookie Portfolio* eulogy.¹⁴⁰ The narratives of Goldin as part of the group, the girl wanting to elevate and love through her camera, informed the critical reception of the work. In a review of *The Other Side* Liz Kotz mentions the family and the snapshot style, specifically noting the initial images for their ‘amateurish’ feel.¹⁴¹ Kotz was disappointed by *The Other Side*, claiming Golden softened reality of these drag and transvestite subjects, leaving them glamorized but not revealed with any honesty. She notes that this in part relates to the ‘amateur’ arrangement of the images (She states: ‘Artistically, the sequences don’t hold together’ citing curious juxtapositions and shifts in style).¹⁴² Some images seemed flippant or unnecessary for Kotz, who bemoans that *The Other Side* is too different from *The Ballad* because it does not appear to have the same awareness of the darker side of these subject’s lives.¹⁴³ Kotz’s review uncovers the extent to which critical reception of Goldin’s work hinges on *The Ballad* and its sense of family, with Goldin being considered an insider. While some reviews were more positive than Kotz, her relentless comparison between *The Ballad* and *The Other Side* ultimately hinges on something that is not about aesthetics or composition. Kotz finishes the article: ‘This is the core obsession in the book: Goldin’s love of drag queens, and her sense that she too ‘is’ one. Yet the stakes of this confusion of identities and positions emerge only intermittently’, summarizing that ‘love’ is more fundamental to the critical reception of the work than the photographs themselves.¹⁴⁴ This love extends beyond the camera – it is Goldin’s love for her subjects, but also a plea by Goldin for the viewers to love the subject. Kotz’s disappointment at Goldin’s apparent blindness to the darker aspects of the drag world is accepted as a form of ‘love’ but one that is inadequate. Whether one agrees with Kotz or not, it is clear that ‘love’ outweighs any other message of the photographs, including their aesthetic.

¹³⁸ Liz Kotz, ‘The Other Side’ *World Art*, 1 (1993), 98–99 (pp. 99).

¹³⁹ Armstrong and Keller, p. 5.

¹⁴⁰ Goldin, *Nan Goldin: I’ll Be Your Mirror*, p. 256.

¹⁴¹ Kotz introduces her review by first introducing *The Ballad*, touching on the necessary awareness the family album and the snapshot in any approach to Goldin’s work. Kotz admires these traits as unique to Goldin’s *Ballad*, and is disappointed by the lack of authenticity she feels in *The Other Side*. Kotz, p. 98.

¹⁴² Kotz, p. 98.

¹⁴³ Kotz bemoaned: ‘*The Other Side* is stagey and theatrical; even shots that probably weren’t posed look as if they were.’ Kotz, p.98.

¹⁴⁴ Kotz, p. 99.

Personal narrative dominates the catalogue for Goldin's 1996 retrospective *I'll Be Your Mirror*. The exhibition catalogue includes essays from her close friends to describe life with Goldin in the Bowery. The inclusion of Luc Sante's 'All Yesterday's Parties', Daryl Pinckney's 'Nan's Manhattan' and David Wojnarowicz's 'Postcard from America: X-Rays from Hell' – originally written for an exhibition that Goldin curated in 1989 – aim to give the reader a sense of the Lower East Side in the 1980s. The narrative serves to ensure that the exhibition was read through the guise of personal experience.¹⁴⁵ The exhibition similarly pointed to the narrative of Goldin's life in the Bowery, situating all of her work with respect to *The Ballad* and her personal life. As Roberta Smith relayed in her review, '[...] the show unfolds as a series of chapters that adhere to Ms. Goldin's life story closely, reducing her achievement to a highly personal kind of photo-journalism.'¹⁴⁶ While Smith highlights the 'reduction' of Goldin's work to the personal and the photo-journalistic, she does not offer an alternative, only mentioning the composition and use of colour. Smith highlights the formal elements, unlike Koltz, but they are undermined by the 'highly personal' nature of the work. While Smith uses the term photo-journalism, it is as a way to marry the private and intimate images with their public display. In Smith's review the personal outweighs any of the professional – including formal elements of the photograph. As a retrospective, one that came arguably too early in Goldin's career, the focus of *I'll Be Your Mirror* is on Goldin as a member of her self-professed 'tribe', directly considering the emotional relationship as an accompaniment to her use of the snapshot.¹⁴⁷ In his review of the exhibition, Arthur Danto focused on Goldin's work as a twist on the family album, accepting these works as part of the private and personal story of the family but presented in a public setting with a blatant, honest approach.¹⁴⁸ Koltz and Danto's arguments for considering Goldin's work as a family album will reappear in Chapters 2 and 3, though I will be considering the effect on the viewer of this familial framework.

Danto's interpretation stands on Goldin's consistently expressed desire to photograph from within a group she knows and loves, one in which there is no question as to her personal relationship with the subject.¹⁴⁹ In an interview with Armstrong in the

¹⁴⁵ Goldin, *Nan Goldin: I'll Be Your Mirror*.

¹⁴⁶ Roberta Smith, "A Piaf with a Camera Sings of Self," *New York Times*, 1996, C25.

¹⁴⁷ Goldin refers to her 'tribe' in: Holert; David Armstrong, Walter Keller and Nan Goldin, "On Acceptance: A Conversation," in *Nan Goldin: I'll Be Your Mirror* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996), pp. 447–462; Adam Mazur and Paulina Skirgajllo-Krajewska, "If I Want to Take a Picture, I Take It No Matter What: Nan Goldin Interviewed by Adam Mazur and Paulina Skirgajllo-Krajewska," *Photo Tapeta* <<http://fototapeta.art.pl/2003/ngie.php>> [accessed 1 January 2013].

¹⁴⁸ Danto, p. 33–34.

¹⁴⁹ Goldin speaks of her insider position in many of her interviews. See Adam Mazur and Paulina Skirgajllo-Krajewska; Hoberman; Holert; Tschinkel; Armstrong, Keller and Goldin.

I'll Be Your Mirror catalogue, Goldin explained her relationship with the snapshot as being 'about love' downplaying her formal aesthetics and talent as a trained photographer.¹⁵⁰ As in Smith's review, the professional training would undermine the personal and loving aspects of the photographs. The professional photographer, taking these kinds of intimate photographs, would be a journalist or a documentary photographer. This is not a connotation Goldin wishes to perpetuate, nor for which her work is known. Throughout the interview, she talks about her history and about love and emotions, until Armstrong insists that one should not dismiss the formal qualities of the work. Goldin's response immediately pulls away from the association: 'Forget formal decisions – it's not even about making conscious decisions about content, or thinking, I'm gonna do this project or that. You know, it's so essential, it comes from a need to survive.'¹⁵¹ Goldin dismisses Armstrong's comments on the formal elements of her work, and then re-directs the interview to focus on her work as a natural impulse. This shifts the focus from her as a photographer manipulating their surroundings to a helpless observer emotionally relaying her experiences. The sentiment goes well with the notion of her work as a 'visual diary', where the viewer is peeking in on a private world rather than consuming a product presented by the photographer.¹⁵² What has remained unaddressed, ten years after *The Ballad* was printed by Aperture, is how this emotional closeness functions in a world where each of these personal moments between photographer and subject can be sold to people who are not part of the community, nor interested in the community.¹⁵³ The struggles brought up by Goldin's mix of the personal and public will remain throughout my argument, but is particularly relevant to the personal, memorial aspect of *Cookie in Her Casket*.

The next three chapters examine the case study of Nan Goldin's *Cookie in Her Casket* (1989) in the context of *The Cookie Portfolio*. In Chapter 1, I will situate the portfolio within Goldin's work, noting the portfolio came at a key juncture in Goldin's oeuvre. I clarify that *Cookie in Her Casket* evidences the radical shift in the life of Goldin's friends and in her own work: from an exhibitionist lifestyle of glamour, drugs, sex, violence, and self-destruction to an awareness of the fragility of life and a desire to

¹⁵⁰ This quote is revisited relative to Kaplan's interpretation of Goldin's photography as a 'caress' in Chapter 1. Goldin, *Nan Goldin: I'll Be Your Mirror*, p. 450.

¹⁵¹ Goldin, *Nan Goldin: I'll Be Your Mirror*, p. 451. While a fellow artist, Armstrong, seems determined to remind the interviewer (and reader) that Goldin is a practiced artist, Goldin intensely avoids the association. Armstrong's insistence suggests that up until this point the formal qualities of Goldin's work have often been overlooked, but Goldin appears to be happy with that.

¹⁵² Heiferman, Holborn and Fletcher, p. 6.

¹⁵³ That is not to say that Goldin's work never comes under scrutiny; the concern of voyeurism comes up in, for example, Walsh; and Ruddy. However, if a critic or writer accepts Goldin's premise of being part of the group and emotionally connected, displaying herself and her relationships rather than being a voyeur, they do not question the financial transaction that underlies the personal story.

commemorate and care for the group. In Chapter 2, I contend that there is a clash within *The Cookie Portfolio* between the constructed persona of Dorothy ‘Cookie’ Mueller in life as a vibrant woman with her own distinct ‘Look’ and the nearly unrecognizable representation of Cookie as she lay in her casket. The portrayal of Cookie in death also adheres to a more traditional form of photography that breaks from Goldin’s well-known snapshot style. Chapter 3 considers Cookie’s constructed identity in *Cookie in Her Casket* with respect to embalming as a means of staving off abjection. I assert that the photograph, like embalming, allows a space to interact with the corpse outside of the abject. In this way, a photograph can then function as a platform for the bereft to continue to care for the deceased after burial. I demonstrate how Goldin demonstrates care for Cookie in the taking and display of *Cookie in Her Casket*. Additionally, as a publicly circulated artwork, *Cookie in Her Casket* responds to the detached medical view of the dying, and specifically the isolation of AIDS patients in America at that time.

CHAPTER 1

Outliving Ourselves: Goldin's Life and Work the Bowery

Taking into account the importance of personal narrative in Goldin's work, *Cookie in Her Casket* comes at a time of change in Goldin's life and career. *Cookie in Her Casket* only hints at the life revealed in the rest of *The Cookie Portfolio*. The light reflecting off her bangle-encrusted arms, layers of necklaces and sparkling dress suggest a more glamorous existence than her demure hair and makeup or the satin coffin and large satin cross suggest. In life, Cookie had a unique vivacity and glamour. The heavy makeup and rich fabrics adorning Cookie in the first image of the portfolio, *Cookie with Max at My Birthday Party*, indicate immediately that she is no ordinary mother. Her child is at a birthday party in the twilight hours wearing a Zorro mask, hinting at a playfulness in both mother and child. Max is sitting with his mother, both looking at the camera, but Cookie with an expression less innocent to the camera than her son's wide-eyes, a smile nearly creeping to her lips. She knows what it is to be in front of the camera, and this strong personality, happy to pose and full of life, is visible in the photographs before her death.

Throughout *The Cookie Portfolio*, Cookie is photographed at clubs and house parties, toilets, alleyways and hallways, and in the vulnerability of her sickbed and x-ray machine.¹⁵⁴ The camera followed Cookie into interesting places, though it is easy to forget Goldin was there too, not just as a spectator but the host of the birthday party, another body on the club dance-floor, tending bar at Tin Pan Ally, and walking the streets of the Lower East Side late into the night. The various parties, clubs and more intimate moments of Cookie's life were just a fraction of the life that she and Goldin, and their group of friends, lived in the 1970s and 1980s. Life in the Bowery, an area of the Lower East Side where Goldin and her friends lived, is part of the story of *The Cookie Portfolio*, even more so because pieces of it were documented in *The Ballad*. *The Cookie Portfolio* plucks a single strand from the web of stories within *The Ballad*.

¹⁵⁴ As exhibited at Pace/MacGill in 1990 and published in the 1991 catalogue: *The Cookie Portfolio* consisted of: *Cookie with Max at My Birthday Party, Provincetown, 1977*; *Cookie and Sharon dancing at the Back Room, Provincetown, 1976*; *Cookie and Millie in the Girl's Room at the Mudd Club, New York City, 1979*; *Cookie at Tin Pan Alley, New York City, 1983*; *Cookie laughing, New York City, 1985*; *Cookie and Vittorio's wedding: The ring, New York City, 1986*; *Cookie with Me After I was Beaten Up, Baltimore, Maryland, 1986*; *Cookie in the Bathroom at Hawaii Five-O, New York City, 1986*; *Cookie in the Garden of Ciro's, Provincetown, September, 1989*; *Cookie and Sharon on the Bed, Provincetown, 1989*; *Cookie at Vittorio's Casket, New York City, September, 1989*; *Cookie and Max, New York City, September, 1989*; *Cookie being x-rayed, New York City, October, 1989*; *Cookie in Her Casket, New York City, 1989*; *Cookie and Vittorio's Living Room, New York City, Christmas, 1989*. They were Cibachrome prints, available as a portfolio for \$6,000 and individually for \$900. The images were in a print run of 25. Pace/MacGill Gallery, price list, Nan Goldin, *Cookie Mueller* (1991).

Goldin is not a documentary photographer, and her photographs do not attempt to reveal life in the Bowery, but they indicate the life of her friends, and aspects of this lifestyle. The attitude of violence and sexual destruction in *the Ballad*, and the tragedy of friendship and loss relayed in *The Cookie Portfolio* are inextricably linked to a larger story, hinted at in these photographs, which helps to frame the creation and the reception of these images. The underground scene in New York City is not the subject of Goldin's photographs, but failing to understand or appreciate this scene would diminish the importance of her work, because it played such an important role in the original reception of Goldin's work, and because it would gloss over the important place *Cookie in Her Casket* holds within Goldin's oeuvre. This chapter outlines the style and influences of Goldin's early work in order to demonstrate how drastic the shift was from capturing a life lived on the edge, to commemorating life, which was all too fleeting.

The underground scene of the Bowery was lived and, to an extent, captured by Nan Goldin and her close circle of friends including (photographer) Peter Hujar, (writer and actress) Cookie Mueller, (artist) Greer Lankton, (photographer) David Armstrong and (actress) Sharon Nisep. *The Ballad of Sexual Dependancy* reflects the lifestyle and ethos of this close-knit group in the early 1980s. As Guido Costa, a friend of Goldin, remarked in the catalogue for *Nan 55*, 'Goldin's work is seen as a mirror held up to her generation' though viewing her images as purely documentary would ignore her mix of formalism with rich, seductive colours and a careful handling of the snap-shot aesthetic.¹⁵⁵ Instead, one can find in *The Ballad* an attitude influenced by the sixties. Elizabeth Sussman likened *The Ballad* to the punk aesthetic of the 1970s and early 1980s, highlighting the homemade quality of the slide show and the accompanying music, which would stop and start sharply, reminiscent of a mixed-tape.¹⁵⁶ This association was furthered by the use of music by punk-rock band *The Velvet Underground*, and Goldin's later series *I'll Be Your Mirror*, whose title was appropriated from a song of the same name in the album *The Velvet Underground & Nico*, produced while the band was working with Andy Warhol. However, some aspects of Goldin's work were influenced by the glam era of the sixties. The inclusion of several of Goldin's photographs in the 2013 exhibition *Glam!: The Performance of Style*, supports her association with the 1960s and early 70s 'glam' subculture that pre-

¹⁵⁵ Guido Costa, *Nan Goldin 55* (London: Phaidon Press, 2001), p. 3. See also: Kozloff; Pickney; Sussman; Bracewell.

¹⁵⁶ Elisabeth Sussman, "In/Of Her Time: Nan Goldin's Photographs," in *Nan Goldin: I'll Be Your Mirror*, ed. by Nan Goldin, David Armstrong, and Hanz Werner Holzwarth (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996), pp. 25–97 (p.34).

empted the rawness of punk with glamour and decadence while maintaining a sense of immediacy.¹⁵⁷ This recent exhibition at Tate Liverpool was the first to explore the ‘glam’ movement with respect to art, and Goldin’s inclusion in the show opens the possibility of more thorough consideration of how the glam movement relates to her work.¹⁵⁸ While the exhibition focused on British glam, one acknowledged foci of the glam movement was Andy Warhol and his studio, the Factory, which opened in 1962 in mid-town Manhattan.¹⁵⁹

As Warhol was one of Goldin’s proclaimed influences, his relationship with glam is a good entry-point into the feel and aesthetic of the era.¹⁶⁰ Goldin has admitted Warhol was an influence but only with respect to his films, particularly mentioning the influence of *Chelsea Girls*.¹⁶¹ Kaplan argued that one could see the influence of Warhol in Goldin’s early black-and-white images, likening Goldin’s images of her friends in seductive poses to Warhol’s silk screen, but noted that Goldin avoids such connotations because she prefers to frame her work as more personal than the detachment of the Warhol Factory.¹⁶² Goldin’s insistence on a communal, personal relationship between herself and her subjects pushed against Warhol’s works which were more distanced and documentary. However, there are echoes of Warhol’s *Chelsea Girls* in Goldin’s iconic *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*. The connection between the two is obvious in the format – following multiple stories through interweaving photographs, accompanied by an alternating soundtrack – and the sense of glam in the posing of the subjects.

Warhol was attracted to and proliferated the glam of stardom and he was also interested in key aspects of glam such as the surface, camp, and the pose.¹⁶³ For example, the original Factory was completely covered in silver by Bill Name, fitting the

¹⁵⁷ The *Glam!* Exhibition was held at TATE Liverpool from 8 Feb- 12 May, 2013. The exhibition included a range of artists including David Hockney, Andy Warhol, Cindy Sherman, Richard Hamilton and Peter Hujar in addition to Goldin. While the exhibition cited itself as exploring British Glam, several American artists, fashion designers and film-makers were included. For example, the catalogue also features John Waters, underground director from Provincetown whose close-knit cast included Cookie Mueller. Goldin was not one of the central artists in the exhibition, but her inclusion opened up the possibility to consider her work as evolving from the sixties and 1970s rather than purely within the post-punk 1980s context in which it is normally viewed. Because the exhibition is unique in its focus on glam and is the first connection made between Goldin and glam, I focus on the examination of glam within this exhibition as an entry-point into Goldin’s work. For more on the glam movement in general, see also: Mick Rock, *Blood and Glitter: Glam-- an Eyewitness Account* (London: Vision On, 2001); Barney Hoskyns, *Glam!: Bowie, Bolan and the Glitter Rock Revolution* (London: Backpages Ltd, 2011).

¹⁵⁸ See Pickney; Kotz; Sussman.

¹⁵⁹ Warhol as a glam figure is also present in: Rock. See also: Stuart Lenig, *The Twisted Tale of Glam Rock* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2010); Judith A. Peraino, "Plumbing the Surface of Sound and Vision: David Bowie, Andy Warhol, and the Art of Posing," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 21.1 (2012): 151-184.

¹⁶⁰ Stephen Westfall, "The Ballad of Nan Goldin," *BOMB*, 37 (1991), 27-31 (p. 27).

¹⁶¹ Westfall, p. 27; Kaplan, p. 90.

¹⁶² Kaplan makes a specific association with regard to Goldin’s 1973 *Ivy with Marilyn*, a photograph of Ivy posing beneath a Warhol *Marilyn* print in their shared apartment. Kaplan is careful to note that Goldin distances herself from Warhol by using the sense of community between herself and the subjects. Kaplan, p. 89-91.

¹⁶³ Peraino.

feel of glam by providing a constant presence of glitter, and a reflective surface. It was, as *Glam!* curator Darren Pih noted, ‘perfect for pose and narcissistic performance as perpetual modus operandi’.¹⁶⁴ The need to see and be seen, and particularly ‘the pose’ were central to preforming glam in fashion, music and art.¹⁶⁵ Performance was a large part of how the glam movement developed and thrived, as it relied on the surface of beauty and construction, making posing a central aspect of the movement.

Warhol’s dictum that everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes fit within the narcissistic glam culture that wanted to be seen, be famous, be fabulous, and yet was highly irreverent.¹⁶⁶ This was particularly visible in the notion of camp where gender boundaries became fluid (at least for men) and the highly constructed affect of camp was a lesson in pastiche.¹⁶⁷ Warhol and his entourage’s flagrant disregard for the social norms and expectations of higher echelons of society, and the art world, brought with it a glorified view of sexual experimentation and drugs without consequences. It was, indeed, “sex, drugs and rock and roll” for those within The Factory.¹⁶⁸ Warhol’s portraits were the essence of glam, capturing the famous or creating the famous with an interest only in the performance and flat surface gleam. Warhol’s portrait of David Bowie (Figure 2) reflects the glam sentiment: Bowie is recognizable and yet washed out with his lips heavily highlighted in red to bring out the femininity of his face. The vibrant colours of green and yellow are too vivid to feel natural and the lightning bolt insights danger and, as makeup, references constructed beauty. Bowie is posed, fashionable, glamorous, androgynous and on a massive scale. He is accessible in that the image is mass-produced, and yet the image itself separates him from the normal and the everyday. Warhol mixed the craving for access to celebrity with the construction and artifice of creating the work, which reflected on the artifice of Bowie and other icons’ identity and their fame.¹⁶⁹

Warhol was one of the epicentres of glam in New York, but in his work, one can see the split between the Hollywood, glitterati, sense of glam and its darker side.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁴ Darren Pih, “The Politics of Artifice,” in *Glam: The Performance of Style*, ed. by Darren Pih (London: Tate, 2013), pp. 9–38 (p. 29); Hoskyns.

¹⁶⁵ Rock; Hoskyns; Periano.

¹⁶⁶ Henry Geldzahler and Robert Rosenblum, *Andy Warhol: Portraits of the 1970s and 1980s* (London: Anthony d’Offay Gallery in association with Thames and Hudson, 1993).

¹⁶⁷ See: Kelley, Mike. “Cross Gender/Cross Genre” in *Glam: The Performance of Style*, ed. by Darren Pih (London: Tate, 2013), pp.53-62; Lenig.

¹⁶⁸ This expression comes from Ian Dury’s 1977 song ‘Sex and Drugs and Rock & Roll’, a staple of British punk rock.

¹⁶⁹ Leon Paroissen, ‘Foreward’ in *Andy Warhol: Portraits of the 1970s and 1980s* (London: Anthony d’Offay Gallery in association with Thames and Hudson, 1993), 9-12 (p.9).

¹⁷⁰ For more on Warhol’s influence on glam, see (among others): Lenig; Brigitte Weingart, ““That Screen Magnetism”: Warhol’s Glamour” in *October* 132 (Spring 2010) pp. 43-70; Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006);

Warhol stood out as a pop artist whose work was also critical of the culture it was in, as Lucie-Smith argued, largely because of his *Death and Disaster Series*.¹⁷¹ Created from 1962-1963, the images included car crashes and suicides, revealing a much darker side to the New York scene.¹⁷² The series did not focus on the physical materiality of death, but they did show, on some occasions, dead and battered bodies. It was a shock to see such dramatic and tragic scenes among the celebrity and consumerism, and further to see them in such large scale in the context of the art scene.¹⁷³ While Serrano and Goldin came from an on going tradition of photographing the dead, as relayed in the introduction, Warhol was a noted influence on Goldin, and his *Disaster* series was iconic enough to have remained in the minds of art critics when *The Cookie Portfolio* came out. These works were striking in their bold confrontation with the darker side of glam. His *Ambulance Disaster* (Figure 3, 1963), a silkscreen on canvas in black and white, resembled a newspaper image, but blown up to 30 x 20 inches (some prints were as small as 12 x 8 but larger than newsprint) and doubled. The size and fact that it was printed by Warhol adds gravitas to the image, so that the body slung out the ambulance window looks dramatically posed, while the doubling plays down the tragedy making it repetitive and therefore just one in hundreds of deaths reported in the newspapers every day. The image does not focus on the deceased in the way that Goldin or Serrano do, as I will demonstrate, but the hints of glamour, beauty, and the feeling of posing the dead are elements that will reoccur in the coming chapters. Warhol's *Disaster Series* also hinted at the violent New York City that would become a recurring theme in the news, were the Lower East side was a centre for drug dealing, muggings and threat of death on a nightly basis.¹⁷⁴ Frederic Jameson viewed Warhol's work as having an fundamental lack of depth that was essential in postmodernism. To explain the shallow nature of postmodern painting, Jameson turned to Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes*, which Jameson viewed as having nothing behind the image; it was as if the image was the remains of something peeled away.¹⁷⁵ In line with this, Jameson described the disaster paintings as thematizing a 'kind of death of the world of appearance' but not expressed through its

¹⁷¹ Edward Lucie-Smith, *Art in the 1980s*, (Oxford: Phaidon, 1990) pp. 56-62.

¹⁷² This could also be said of his electric chair series.

¹⁷³ Lucie-Smith, p. 56. Warhol's images were not as explicit in their focus on the dead body as Jeffery Silverthorne's images in *Letters from a Dead House* (1972), which is noted by Linkman as the forerunner to the works of Goldin and Serrano that focused on the corpse.

¹⁷⁴ As suggested in: Henry Geldzahler, "Andy Warhol: Original Voyeur," in *Andy Warhol: Portraits of the 1970s and 1980s*, ed. by Henry Geldzahler and Robert Rosenblum (London: Hudson, Anthony d'Offay Gallery London in Association with Thames and, 1993), pp. 13-28 (15); and Lucie-Smith Edward, *Art in the 1980s* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1990) p. 56.

¹⁷⁵ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991) p. 8. Jameson did not see in Warhol's image any of the utopianism of Van Gough's *A Pair of Shoes*, and additionally found nothing positive or negative in Warhol's work. The lack of any substance or opinion to the piece seems to also feed into its lack of depth.

content so much as the treatment of that content.¹⁷⁶ The content of the *Disaster* images is mutated by its use and representation to become intentionally an object without affect. The lack of sentiment to the images, and the lack of depth, particularly a hermeneutic meaning to the image, made way for a certain aestheticization of the dead subject. While I will argue that beauty plays a role in both Goldin and Serrano's presentation of the dead, Goldin's *Cookie in Her Casket* is far from depthless in the way Jameson describes.

While Goldin only names Warhol's films as an influence, the *Disaster Series* was part of the art scene that would have circulated in the minds of the viewers, if not Goldin herself. Goldin did, at the very least, see selections from the series when she and Cookie visited the Andy Warhol Retrospective in February 1989.¹⁷⁷ However, the more direct connection for Goldin to glam was through Warhol's films and the thriving drag and gay culture of Boston in which she found herself in the 1970s.¹⁷⁸ Drag culture was heavily tied into glam culture, as demonstrated by Goldin's early photographs, the aforementioned images from *The Other Side*, entered the *Glam* exhibition.¹⁷⁹ Goldin has commented that these early images were derived from *Vogue* fashion shoots, naming among her early influences fashion photographers Cecil Beaton and Guy Bourdin.¹⁸⁰ Kotz equally noted these influences in her review of *The Other Side*: 'Goldin is playing a being Brassai, or a fashion photographer'.¹⁸¹

While one can see the influence of *Vogue* images throughout Goldin's early drag images, a useful comparison would be to look at *Vogue* cover girl Wilhelmina Cooper, who holds the record for *Vogue* covers, and was a prominent model in the fifties and sixties.¹⁸² Her prominence in *Vogue* throughout the sixties would have ensured Goldin regularly encountered images of Cooper in the pages of the magazine. One such example is comparing *Naomi Under the Palm Tree* (Figure 4, 1973) with a Wilhelmina Cooper image from the March 1964 issue of *Vogue*, printed while Goldin was in high school and fascinated by fashion photography (Figure 5). Cooper and

¹⁷⁶ Jameson, p. 9.

¹⁷⁷ Cookie's review in her 'Art and About' column for the East Village Eye can be read in: Mueller, Cookie. *Ask Dr. Mueller: The Writings of Cookie Mueller*. Amy Scholder, ed. (London: High Risk Books, 1997).

¹⁷⁸ Goldin mentions the influence of Warhol's films in: Westfall. See also: Costa, *Nan Goldin 55*; Heiferman, Holborn and Fletcher.

¹⁷⁹ For more on the relationship between drag and glam see also: Marianne Larochelle, Colon J. Guzman, Bill Picture, and Tonya Silver, *Glam Gender* (Montréal, Québec: Editions Marianne Larochelle, 2009); and Shelton Waldrep, *The 1970s: The Age of Glitter in Popular Culture* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013).

¹⁸⁰ Mazur and Skirgajllo-Krajewska. Goldin also acknowledges the importance of *Vogue* as an influence in Holert, 234. See also: Westfall; Heiferman.

¹⁸¹ Kotz, p. 98.

¹⁸² Cooper's prominence as a model in *Vogue* was mentioned in her obituary in TIME magazine: "Wilhelmina Cooper obituary," *TIME* (March 17, 1980). My own experience flipping through the *Vogue* magazines of the sixties reveal Cooper not only as a lead cover model, but a prominent figure throughout the magazine.

Naomi are similarly posed, with one leg bent up and each woman's face looking out of shot with hair piled above the head. The poses add length to the already tall, thin figures in line with the popular 'Twiggy' look of the sixties and early 1970s.¹⁸³ The influence of fashion photographers such as Chris von Wangenheim can be seen here as well.¹⁸⁴ Von Wangenheim's shoots in *Vogue* in the 1970s captured women in the middle of an action or as though they were captured in action against a simple background. The long lines of the body and the indoor space come across in *Naomi Under the Palm Tree*, as does the natural impression of the pose. Even when the subject is posing for the camera, it does not feel like the photographer has posed them. Referencing *Vogue* relays the importance of fashion and beauty in the idea of femininity, but also the role of photography played in establishing the parameters of beauty.¹⁸⁵ The ideals of beauty presented through images like that of Cooper, were then performed by Goldin's friends, and repeated in Goldin capturing these poses: this beauty is performed by and for the camera.¹⁸⁶ The role of the camera in the presentation of beauty was just part of the story, as some of the images Goldin took of her drag queen friends captured the construction and effort that went into creating their drag persona.

Goldin's works signal a focus on the construction of the glam or transvestite persona. In images such as *Roommate putting on Makeup, Boston* (Figure 6, 1973), the lighting reveals heavily plucked eyebrows that no longer seem arching and dramatic, but instead unruly and in need of constant maintenance. The red of her lipstick is powerful in a room of otherwise muted colours, but her lip brush in her hand again references the construction and effort that goes into it. Concentrating on the mirror and slightly hunched, the subject does not present the same kind of dramatic poses inspired by fashion. Here we see the element of constructed gender that appears in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*. Butler argued that gender was a kind of performance, which she later clarified was constructed not on a daily basis by the individual but performed and decided by gender from the moment of naming 'boy' or 'girl'. The elements of this gender construction lie, for Butler, in the repetition of rituals of that gender, which includes the putting on of make-up. In *Roommate Putting on Makeup* we see the performance of the ritual of the 'woman' in the roommate's construction of herself as

¹⁸³ On 'Twiggy' as a fashion icon see also: Georgina Callan, *The Thames and Hudson Dictionary of Fashion and Fashion Designers* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2012).

¹⁸⁴ Chris von Wangenheim was a well-known fashion photographer, who photographed icons and supermodels of the time like Wilhelmina Cooper and Gia Carangi. He worked with Harpers Bizarre and other popular magazine in the sixties before moving on to work primarily with *Vogue* from 1972, when Goldin was taking these photographs of her friends in Boston.

¹⁸⁵ This connection is also made in: Kotz, 98. Kotz, easily dismissing the influence of *Vogue* on Goldin, found this beautification of Goldin's drag friends as one of the failings of the exhibition.

¹⁸⁶ Litt similarly suggests that the subjects of Goldin's *Ballad* images perform their life for the camera, see: Litt, 35.

‘she’ rather than as transgendered. The complexities of this are another avenue into itself, but the basic construction of identity will be important later in relation to Cookie. The more glamorous pictures – where the drag queens are dressed up, posing like models from magazines, walking a beauty parade at drag nightclub *The Other Side* – are interspersed with pictures of bleaching eyebrows and putting on makeup. The mix of glamour and construction discloses an interest, right from the beginning, in the relationship between glam and identity within the camp, but also hints at the importance of being on display.¹⁸⁷

When these early photographs were included in an exhibition, *The Other Side*, that included images from 90s New York, Thailand and Berlin gay scene, critic Liz Kotz called the images ‘stagey and theatrical’.¹⁸⁸ But to a degree, the theatricality of the early 1970s photographs suits the theatricality of the drag scene and of the importance of glam at the time. Camp’s fascination with remaking the old to present a surface of glitz and glamour, along with the mix of femininity within masculine, echo the impression of the glam style.¹⁸⁹ Kotz’s critique is reminiscent of bell hooks’s critique of 1990 *Paris is Burning*, a documentary film by Jennie Livingston, which centred on the drag balls of Harlem and the Latino and African-American transsexuals, transvestites, cross-dressers, and drag queens that attended the ball. In her review, hooks disparaged that the spectacle and theatricality of the ball undermines and clouds the individual pain (and in one case death) of the subjects in the film and distracts from the issue of racial and social inequality that is perpetuated within the film.¹⁹⁰ In the film a Latino pre-op transsexual named Venus is murdered, and hooks relays ‘The audience does not see Venus after the murder. There are no scenes of grief. To put it crassly, her dying is upstaged by spectacle. Death is not entertaining’.¹⁹¹ Hooks and Kotz are disappointed with the shallow representation of the drag queens in Livingston and Goldin’s works respectively.

While *Paris is Burning* – released in August 1991 – post-dates the original black and white images Goldin took of her room-mates in Boston, the photographs of New York drag queens from 1991 and the first exhibition of *The Other Side* in 1993, make the comparison between *The Other Side* and *Paris is Burning* seem natural.

¹⁸⁷ The construction of camp identity was also the focus of the 1990 film *Paris is Burning*, where Livingston, as woman with a camera, offers the chance for fame and notoriety that drive some of the people in the film. This power dynamic is addressed in Butler; and hooks.

¹⁸⁸ Kotz, p. 98.

¹⁸⁹ Kelley makes this argument in Mike Kelley, “Cross Gender/Cross Genre,” in *Glam: The Performance of Style* (London: Tate, 2013), pp. 53–62.

¹⁹⁰ bell hooks, “Is Paris Burning?,” in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), pp. 145–156 (p. 154).

¹⁹¹ hooks, p.155

However, it was retrospective rather than contemporary criticism that brought the two together. One of the primary reasons for the dissociation between Goldin and Livingston's works is likely that Livingston was critiqued by hooks, and subsequently Judith Butler, for not put any of herself in the film. Both hooks and Butler – referencing hooks – note that Livingston takes the stance of an outsider when filming *Paris is Burning*, which, among other things, invites the viewer to take on a more phallic, empowered gaze allowing them to be in a position of power and assumed superiority by way of the camera.¹⁹² In Goldin's case, the photographs are presented as *her* perspective. She frames her work as an image of herself. Within *The Other Side* catalogue Goldin insists that she photographed her friends because she 'worshipped' them.¹⁹³ She insists on her insider status, emphasised by the notion that she, though the same person, is no longer an insider by virtue of having left the group: '[a]fter learning more about technique and equipment, I went back to photograph my old world. But it didn't work: I was an outsider, it was no longer my home.'¹⁹⁴ Though Goldin's work was deemed by Kotz to be 'too cleaned-up, too cautious to do justice to its subjects or its own obsessions' it is not framed as exploitative or irresponsible in the way that hooks frames Livingston's outsider perspective, which she argues 'pervert[s] and distort[s] one's perspective'.¹⁹⁵ By framing her work as a reflection of herself and her own desires or interests, Goldin asserts her photographs as theatrical because of the glamour she sees in theatricality, rather than as a spectacle to push attention away from reality in the way hooks describes *Paris is Burning*. In this framework, the theatricality of *The Other Side* is not exploitative but a reflection of a Goldin's fantasy.¹⁹⁶ Goldin's wonder and adoration of this fantasy is then tied up to the glamour of the camp – its excess, its beauty and its focus on the surface construction. The resonance of these elements in her wider oeuvre comes from the glam and camp of Boston in the 1970s, though it transforms over the course of her photographic experience. To a degree, this evolution was expected because of a split within the glam movement, where the darker side of glam informed the punk movement.

One of the key figures in examining a more abject side of glam, including drag, was director and film writer John Waters, whose underground films also starred Cookie

¹⁹² Judith Butler, "Gender Is Burning," in *Bodies that Matter* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 121–139; Hooks, "Is Paris Burning?"

¹⁹³ Nan Goldin, *The Other Side: Nan Goldin*, Armstrong, David, and Walter Keller, eds. (Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications and DAAD Artists in Residence Programme, 1993), p.5.

¹⁹⁴ Armstrong and Keller, p. 6.

¹⁹⁵ Kotz, p. 99; Hooks, "Is Paris Burning?", p. 152.

¹⁹⁶ Kotz, p.98

Mueller.¹⁹⁷ Waters represented a different side of glam, the ‘trash’ aesthetic which put greater emphasis on the violence, danger and abject within glam.¹⁹⁸ His films featured on a close-knit cast, centred on drag queen Harris Milstead, known as Divine, who while cast as a woman and heavily made up and costumed with sequins and boas, was always clearly male. The cast, known as the ‘Dreamlanders’ developed a cult following, but were often better known for a particularly abject scene they performed. Cookie, in her collection of short stories *Walking in a Clear Water in a Pool Painted Black*, wrote about the cast discussion of Divine’s infamous scene eating dog faeces and her own scene where she had intercourse with a chicken.¹⁹⁹ The latter scene was in his breakthrough film *Pink Flamingos* (1972), included in the *Glam* exhibition because it ‘plumbed the dark side of glam’.²⁰⁰ But it was more than this direct confrontation with abjection that made Waters’ work part of the glam movement. It was the mix of excess, posing, the desire to be a star, and particularly the glamour of violence that defined it as part of the era. The glory and fame mixed with threat and even death is exemplified in *Female Trouble*, when Divine’s character Dawn draws out a gun and shouts: ‘Take a good look at ME because I’m going to be on the front of every newspaper in this country tomorrow! You’re looking at crime personified and don’t you forget it!’ followed swiftly by ‘[w]ho wants to be famous? Who wants to DIE for art?’²⁰¹ This side of glam surrounded Goldin when moving into New York, and evolved into punk. The same rush of fame and glory, the same need to pose, the mixing and fluidity of gender and the thrill and rush of flirting with death are all present in Goldin’s *The Ballad*.

The images in *The Ballad* disclose an underground culture that was associated with punk, fuelled by drugs, and revelled in glamour and intimacy of self-destruction. The punk subculture was heavily influenced by music and defined by an anti-establishment attitude of rebellion against the structure of the previous generations. The general attitude, as relayed by sociologists Williams and Lewin, is ‘oriented around the goal of ending socialization and deconstructing social norms, beliefs, and values in

¹⁹⁷ Waters is specifically noted in Mike Kelley, ‘Cross Gender/Cross Genre’ in *Glam: The Performance of Style*, London: Tate, 2013. Print. Dates 8 Feb – 12 May 2013, 53-62; David Pih, ‘The Politics of Artifice’ in *Glam: The Performance of Style*, London: Tate, 2013. Print. Dates 8 Feb – 12 May 2013, 9-38.

¹⁹⁸ David Pih, ‘The Politics of Artifice’ in *Glam: The Performance of Style*, London: Tate, 2013. Print. Dates 8 Feb – 12 May 2013, p.32.

¹⁹⁹ Cookie Mueller, “John Waters and the Blessed Profession – 1969” in *Walking Through Clear Water in a Pool Painted Black* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1990), pp. 10-14; Cookie Mueller, “Pink Flamingoes” in *Walking Through Clear Water in a Pool Painted Black* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1990), pp. 70-79.

²⁰⁰ Glenn O’Brien, ‘The Birth of Glitter Rock’ in *Glam: The Performance of Style*, London: Tate, 2013. Print. Dates 8 Feb – 12 May 2013, 123-132 (p.129).

²⁰¹ Waters, John, Divine, David Lochary, Mink Stole, Mary V. Pearce, and Edith Massey. *John Waters’ Female Trouble*. S.l.: New Line Home Entertainment, 2004.

order to more purely experience life.²⁰² These attitudes embraced drugs as a gateway to purity and rejection of the norm, while also embracing gay rights and gender and racial equality.²⁰³ Manhattan bolstered an artistic subculture of the Lower East Side where recreational drug use, open sexuality, and a desire to live hard and die young inspired creativity alongside the dangers of abuse and addiction. Goldin captured moments of life in the Bowery, which, related to government neglect, had cheap housing, a thriving drug trade, bars and restaurants, and a crowd of poor, young artists.²⁰⁴ During the 1980s people from outside Manhattan fled to the Lower East Side, leading to a creative spike in the Bowery of poets, writers, artists and designers, as well as a thriving gay community.

To live in the Bowery was to live at night: the nightclub was a central space, not only for Goldin and her friends, but also for local residents. CBGB, the Mudd Club, and Club 57 became the landmarks of the underground scene, and Goldin tended bar at Tin Pan Alley, which was considered an artist's hangout more so than the other clubs, which were associated with the evolving music scene.²⁰⁵ The local church, St. Marks on the Bowery, held poetry readings and later AIDS protests; it was a fixture that still holds great cache in the community.²⁰⁶ St. Marks was known for supporting the artistic community: in the 1970s and 1980s, the church hosted literary, theatrical and musical groups. One well-known event held at St. Mark's was The Poetry Project, including memorial series tributes to poets such as Paul Blackburn and W.H. Auden.²⁰⁷ Goldin depicts the Lower East Side, like others have, as a refuge for the avante garde, centred on drugs, poverty, social equality and a desire to live in the moment.²⁰⁸ However, another more dangerous attitude clear from Goldin's work is that living in the moment came hand-in-hand with a drive of self-destruction with complete disregard for any kind

²⁰² Philip Lewin and Patrick Williams, "The Ideology and Practice of Authenticity in Punk Subculture," in *Authenticity in Culture, Self and Society*, ed. by Philip Vannini and Patrick Williams (Farnham, Surrey, 2009), pp. 65–86 (p. 71).

²⁰³ Kelley, p. 55. Linda Yablonsky, *The Story of Junk* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 1997).

²⁰⁴ The Bowery is also the subject of Martha Rosler's *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems, 1974-75*. The work consisted of forty-five gelatin silver prints of various locations in the Bowery juxtaposed with written descriptors (often one word). The work is currently held at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Rosler's captures empty spaces of the Bowery, where Goldin focuses on the people within those spaces. Goldin describes her apartment in the Bowery in: Holert. See also: Arthur Danto; Mallory Curley, *A Cookie Mueller Encyclopaedia* (New York: Randy Press, 2010); Pickney.

²⁰⁵ For more on these clubs and their popularity see: Christopher Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate and Resistance in New York City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p.218.

²⁰⁶ One such reading was held on Friday March 4 1994, entitled "Homage to Cookie Mueller". See: Curley, 233.

²⁰⁷ The Poetry Project continues at St. Marks; see: <http://poetryproject.org/history>

²⁰⁸ The life and atmosphere of the Lower East Side, was reflected in the Tony Award winning Broadway musical *RENT*, written from 1988-91. *RENT* was written about the same area that Goldin and Cookie lived in in New York City, and about the same time period. Some events and locations reference actual areas of the Bowery. Though he did not contract HIV, Larson was also held at the St. Cabrini Medical Centre, where Cookie and her husband were treated and died. Larson and Goldin did not move in the same group of friends, but this lends more weight to the similarities in their depiction of the Lower East Side.

of future or the need for one. Though photographs within *The Ballad* have been added and discarded over time, the early images of the series present a group of friends that live in the Bowery, primarily pictured at night in various clubs or at home, sharing intimate moments of their life with the world.²⁰⁹

Goldin was part of a self-made family that she has described as a ‘tribe’, which consisted primarily of artists, actresses and writers.²¹⁰ This feeling of tribalism emerged through a shared desire to live life as they wanted to, breaking from the paths laid before them by their parent’s generation to create their own way in the world.²¹¹ Their sentimentality came out of a disconnect with the previous generation, reflected in the early break from families experienced throughout the group, though notably by Cookie (who ran away from home to San Francisco) and Goldin and Armstrong (who left home in highschool to move to Boston).²¹² The disconnect and subsequent desire to forge a new relationship with the world was eloquently described by Mike Kelley in the *Glam* catalogue: ‘I didn’t feel part of my family, I didn’t feel part of my country; I had no sense of history: the world seemed to me a media façade, a fiction, and a pack of lies.’²¹³ The same attitude is also attributed to the punk movement by sociologists Lewin and Williams, who explained:

Many interviewees also described possessing an “I don’t give a fuck” attitude. When probed with respect to what exactly they meant by this, informants spoke of their concern with self-realization and with undoing societal influence in order to lead meaningful lives.²¹⁴

Breaking away and creating their own rules together, the group engaged in the same beliefs that gender and sexuality were open, that drugs broadened the mind and enhanced life experience, and a firm belief in experiencing anything and everything.²¹⁵

While the entire group dabbled in drugs, a few among the tribe were dealers, Cookie included. One of her friends, Yablonsky, wrote about her experience in *The Story of Junk*, which included minor characters Honey Cook, based on Cookie, and Ginger Snaps, modelled on Goldin. The novel suggests the ethos of the group as the experience of living predominantly at night, moving from club to club and getting high.

²⁰⁹ While the catalogue was published in 1986, Goldin recalled that the slides changed until 1994. Holert. The variations of slide shows often encouraged the same group of friends to return, see: Hieferman, 279.

²¹⁰ Tom Holert, “Nan Goldin Talks to Tom Holert,” *Artforum International*, 41 (2003), 232–274 (p.250).

²¹¹ Goldin commented on this in the *I’ll Be Your Mirror* documentary.

²¹² This is also a key characteristic of punk, see: Lewin and Williams, 71.

²¹³ Kelley, p. 54.

²¹⁴ Lewin and Williams.

²¹⁵ See also: Luc Sante, “All Yeasterday’s Parties,” in *Nan Goldin: I’ll Be Your Mirror*, ed. by Nan Goldin, David Armstrong, and Hanz Werner Holzwarth (New York: Witney Museum of American Art, 1996), pp. 97–128; Pickney; Mueller, *Walking Through Clear Water in a Pool Painted Black*; Bracewell; Hieferman; Guido Costa and Nan Goldin, *Ten Years After: Napels 1986-1996* (New York: West Zone Publishing, 1998); Guido Costa, “Getting High,” in *The Devil’s Playground* (London: Phaidon, 2003), pp. 84–5.

While Yablonsky's character was not as interested in the art world as Honey Cook and Ginger Snaps, the women always came together over drugs – either using or distributing them. Early in the novel, Yablonsky reveals that among the parties, the booze, the drugs and the sex '[t]he fast life went even quicker around here. We knew our time was borrowed, but nobody cared about that. What we couldn't borrow, we could always steal.'²¹⁶ The feeling of being perpetually on the edge, possibly running out of borrowed time, was part of the thrill and no one took that threat too seriously, because it added to the excitement.

The Ballad presents this thrill, focusing in on the extremes of relationships, including violence. Living on the edge, occasionally the violence could go too far, and Goldin documented her own abusive relationship. A few photographs in *The Ballad* capture Goldin with her bruised eyes and broken nose, including *Cookie and Me After I was Punched* (Figure 7), which was also included in *The Cookie Portfolio*. In the image Cookie is standing next to Goldin, whose is less bruised and bloody than images immediately following the event. Goldin remains vulnerable in contrast to Cookie, who has her arm around Goldin and faces the camera with a serious expression. Contrasting with Goldin's open mouth and uncertain eyes, Cookie appears ready to fight off any future harm. The protective image brings out the familial side of their relationship, both as sisters and as the Cookie that Goldin called 'the mother of the tribe'.²¹⁷ It also expresses that acknowledgement that Brian went too far, while some elements of danger were considered fun or exciting, that degree of violence, among intimates, was unacceptable.²¹⁸ The regularity of drugs in Goldin's work makes it less central to the story of danger in *The Ballad* than the potential danger of loving another person, as illustrated in *Heart Shaped Bruise* (Figure 8). A woman lifted her dress and rolls down stockings in the image to reveal a bruise on her upper thigh. The bruise is not viewed as darkly as later images of Goldin badly beaten by her boyfriend, but is presented playfully. There is a note of humour and seduction to revealing the heart by peeling away clothing - like a sneak peak into this woman's sex life more than her injury. The danger of relationships, particularly of heterosexual relationships, is the predominant

²¹⁶ Yablonsky, p. 28.

²¹⁷ Nan Goldin quoted in Holert, 232.

²¹⁸ While punk was not inherently violent, there remains an association between the two. The relationship between punk and violence among intimates is a valuable area of study that deserves greater attention. A certain level of violence was associated with punk, particularly the punk music scene (see: Kevin Mattson, "Did Punk Matter: Analyzing the Practices of a Youth Subculture During the 1980s," *American Studies*, 42 (2001), 69–97.) However, there was also, despite punks claims to gender equality, an association with violence among intimates, often associated with emotional intensity. For more on the relationship with domestic violence and punk see also: Katy Otto, 'Challenging Sexism in the Punk Community: A Different Kind of Dude Fest' *Off Our Backs* 34.9 (September-October 2004), pp.28-30; Lauraine LeBlanc, *Pretty in Punk: Girls' Gender and Resistance in a Boy's Subculture* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

message of *The Ballad*, clear from the title of the work.²¹⁹

The threat of death was considered more exciting than devastating for the first several years in the Bowery. In one of Cookie's short stories 'Sam's Party – Lower East Side, NYC – 1979', the host, Sam, overdoses on heroin in the bathroom with another friend Tom. Tom immediately gets Cookie to help him, without informing anyone else, and Cookie appears to know what to do from hearsay. She fills the tub with cold water and injects Sam with saline solution. Sam regains consciousness and is thrilled about the strength of the heroine, asking for more.²²⁰ The story expresses the buzz of being on the edge, but also the desire to remain there. The proximity to death, danger, and self-destruction is romanticized, and celebrated. While in the moment Cookie relays fear that Sam may die, once he is revived, it goes on to be a wild and exciting evening, and an amusing story for Cookie. The excitement in danger is palpable, particularly when tied with drugs, which were a part of the overall lifestyle.²²¹ The drug scene was also an underlying current of *The Ballad*. While the main story is how relationships can be threatening, if not damaging, drugs are a part of what brought the group together. Photographs of heroin use, or with needles in the shot were scattered within *The Ballad*, and in its published format, Goldin was open about her use of heroin and cocaine.²²² It was a part of how they lived there life, and it was not until later that they realised it would become part of how they died.²²³

Because many of the artists in the group photographed their friends through ups and downs, they eventually found themselves documenting mortal tragedies.²²⁴ AIDS hit their group of friends at a time when the cause, treatment and even the disease were uncertain. They were as shocked as the rest of the nation when their friends began to die, and the very lifestyle that embraced cheating death, was forcing them to face it. In retrospect, *The Ballad* began to take on a new meaning. Sante, spoke of the experience of seeing himself and his friends in the slideshow as 'uncanny', explaining: 'Nan's slides made us aware, however subliminally, of the fragility of our eggshell

²¹⁹ On the violence of heterosexual relationships and sexual coupling in *The Ballad* See also: Heiferman, Holborn and Fletcher; Kozloff; Westfall; Armstrong, Keller and Goldin; Robinson and Weinberg, Bracewell.

²²⁰ Cookie Mueller, "Sam's Party – Lower East Side, NYC – 1979" in *Walking Through Clear Water in a Pool Painted Black*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1990), pp. 114-123.

²²¹ As Sante described: 'One took drugs for fun, or maybe to stop up grief or despair, but most often to build a personality that could be taken out into the night.' Sante, "All Yeasterday's Parties", p. 100.

²²² In the catalogue for *The Devil's Playground*, Costa looks back to consider that heroin was a subject of *The Ballad* in its own right, but one cannot be sure if he means *the Ballad* in its first incarnations, or once it was laid down for publication. Costa, "Getting High" *The Devil's Playground* (London: Phaidon, 2003) p.84.

²²³ In the Introduction to *the Ballad of Sexual Dependency* Goldin talks about memory and how she realized that so many people around her were dying, and this was not only part of the impetus for her pictures, but the catalyst for her going to a rehabilitation clinic for heroin use. Heiferman, Holborn and Fletcher, p. 9,145.

²²⁴ Such as David Armstrong's photographs of Peter Hujar with AIDS (1989), or the intimacy of personal lives retold in Cookie Mueller's stories.

bodies, the transience of our fun, the vulnerability of our bonds.²²⁵ This would have a profound echo in the interview between Goldin and David Armstrong, where Goldin remarked that their friend Sharon ‘has several times gotten up in front of audiences and said, Thank you for keeping our friends alive.’²²⁶ The loom of death and transience of life, brought up in response to *The Ballad*, are recurrent concerns in Goldin’s work, along with a definitive sense of community and intimacy.

In addition to love – examined more thoroughly in the previous chapter – loss is an integral part of Goldin’s work: Goldin commented on a realization she had when putting together *The Cookie Portfolio*: ‘I always thought if I photographed everyone enough, I would never lose the person, I would never lose the memory, I would never lose the place. But pictures show me how much I’ve lost.’²²⁷ While Goldin accepted that the photographs cemented her sense of loss, the desire to keep her friend’s memories alive was the acknowledged catalyst for works such as *The Cookie Portfolio*. Perhaps inevitably, Goldin’s effort to keep her loved ones alive through photography only served to affirm their passing. The photograph, by its nature, serves to cement loss. When Barthes termed photographers ‘agents of Death’ in *Camera Lucida*, he was referring to every flick of the shutters as a death: the death of the moment – of that particular time, place, and subject.²²⁸ Goldin’s images, therefore could only confirm what was and, in doing so, what could no longer be. In the case of Cookie, and Goldin’s other deceased friends, Goldin’s images confirmed death in the desire to preserve life and memory.²²⁹

Goldin has a history of struggling with memory after a death. In the catalogue for *The Ballad*, Goldin admitted that her photography career was entangled with the suicide of her older sister, Barbara, at eighteen:

I’ve realized my motivation has deeper roots: I don’t really remember my sister. [...] I remember my version of her, of the things she said, of the things she meant to me. But I don’t remember the tangible sense of who she was, her presence, what her eyes looked like, what her voice sounded like. / I don’t ever want to be susceptible to anyone else’s version of my history. / I don’t ever want to lose the real memory of anyone again.²³⁰

²²⁵ Luc Sante, ‘All Yeasterday’s Parties’, in *Nan Goldin: I’ll Be Your Mirror*, ed. by Nan Goldin, David Armstrong, and Hanz Werner Holzwarth (New York: Witney Museum of American Art, 1996), pp. 97–128 (p. 102).

²²⁶ Armstrong, Keller and Goldin, p. 454.

²²⁷ Goldin, ‘Introduction’, p. 145.

²²⁸ Barthes, p. 92; Sontag would reiterate this correlation between death and the photograph, arguing that ‘the fascination that photographs exercise is a reminder of death’ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), p. 70. The use of photographs in tombstones and as mourning objects reiterates the sentimentality evoked by the trace of a loved one.

²²⁹ Thee desire to maintain a connection with the deceased while confirming their death is also present in early post-mortem images.

²³⁰ Goldin, ‘Introduction’, p. 9. The sentiment repeated in: Toby Litt, ‘All the World’s a Stage’, *Modern Painters*, 15 (2002), 32 – 35 (p. 70).

The sentiment echoes her comments on creating *The Cookie Portfolio*, further emphasising the role of personal relationships and loss in her need to photograph. The influence of Barbara's death is apparent in Goldin's exhibition *Sisters, Saints & Sybils* (2004), a homage to Barbara's memory.²³¹ The slideshow began with Goldin's re-telling of her sister's suicide, followed by family photographs and film clips from Goldin's youth, which proclaimed how drastically Barbara's suicide effected Goldin. In a review of the show for *The Village Voice*, Saltz claims '*Sisters* makes all of Goldin's work much clearer [...] It fills the gaps and makes her story much bigger and more heavyhearted.'²³² While some of the images from the show look to the future more than the past, *Sisters, Saints & Sybils* emphasised Barbara's death as the catalyst for Goldin's desire to photograph and maintain her own memory of her relationships.

With this in mind, the weight of *The Cookie Portfolio* (as Goldin's first memorial series and as the agent for the discovery that photography fails to maintain the presence of the individual) makes for an essential study in Goldin's work. In addition to the memorial aspects of the work, *Cookie in Her Casket* is a significant piece because it comes at a turning point in Goldin's life and work. In the *Nan 55* catalogue, Costa relayed that Cookie and her husband Vittorio's deaths 'affected Goldin so deeply that they caused a radical change in the way she made photographs'.²³³ Visually, it is easy to support Costa's argument: images after the *Cookie Portfolio* were taken outdoors, taking advantage of natural rather than artificial light, and there is a reduced attention to detail in her later work. However, these changes have also been attributed to Goldin's time in drug rehabilitation.²³⁴ In an interview, she observed: 'when I went to the hospital and I discovered natural light the work really changed' and, indeed, her work increasingly took advantage of natural light and landscapes began to feature in her exhibitions.²³⁵ However, within *The Cookie Portfolio* very little of this natural light appears, perhaps in her choice not to use flash in *Cookie in Her Casket*, but the low

²³¹ *Sisters, Saints & Sybils* is a 35-minute, three-projection slideshow with music, shown first as an exhibition at Matthew Marks gallery in 2004. The piece focuses on the death of Goldin's sister, Barbara, who was institutionalised by her parents before committing suicide in 1965. The photographs are a mix of family images of Barbara from her youth and Goldin's images from her time in rehab and some images of her own self-destructive tendencies. Goldin's accompanying essay expanded on her struggle to access the details of her sister's suicide as her parents attempted to keep her in the dark, a catalyst for her desire to photograph and reveal her own life. The show was dedicated to 'all our sisters who have committed suicide or who have been institutionalized for their rebellion'. See: Roberta Smith, 'Art in Review; Nan Goldin,' *New York Times* (April 7, 2006). <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/07/arts/design/07gall.html?_r=0&adxnnl=1&pagewanted=print&adxnml=1392638666-f5gsA+W16MbF1nRLUFAg6g> [accessed 13 June 2013]; Jerry Saltz, 'The Seventh Circle', *The Village Voice*, 12 April 2006, p. 92

²³² Saltz, p. 92.

²³³ Costa, *Nan Goldin 55*, p. 58.

²³⁴ Sussman; Hiefferman; Costa and Goldin.

²³⁵ Armstrong, Keller and Goldin, p. 449. An excellent example of the effect of the landscapes is presented in Costa and Goldin.

lighting of the church resulted in the orange glow of the photograph, both eerie and unnatural. This evolution is visible in her later work, but within *The Cookie Portfolio*, we still see a great deal of the old style, in part because many of the pictures were taken before Goldin's time in rehabilitation, and for those taken after, Goldin likely related to Cookie to her old life. However, this also demonstrates that Goldin's style changed gradually after returning from hospital. Her stylistic evolution could have reasonably also responded to the fundamental change within her group in response to the AIDS epidemic and, for Goldin in particular, Cookie's death. The origin of these changes is difficult to untangle, as Goldin went through rehab while Mueller was fighting AIDS. By the time that Goldin returned from the hospital, Cookie had lost her voice and struggled to walk unaided.²³⁶ Cookie was hospitalised at St. Cabrini Medical Center in New York City, where she died of AIDS related illness two months after her husband, Vittorio Scarpati.²³⁷ According to Yablonsky, Goldin was at the hospital when Cookie passed away.²³⁸ Such an experience undoubtedly contributed to a change in Goldin's life and, subsequently, her work.

A significant change represented by *Cookie in Her Casket*, in addition to the shift in style, is a shift in subject matter. The images of Goldin and her family of friends before 1989 show the post-punk lifestyle of the Lower East Side, living for the next high – drugs, sex, or excitement, on the edge of destruction. The first shock to the system of chaos came with *The Cookie Portfolio*, first in the image of Cookie at Vittorio's funeral – the first funeral in Goldin's work – followed by *Cookie in Her Casket*. The arc of *The Cookie Portfolio* tells the story of a change within Goldin's entire group: from the life of dancing (*Cookie and Sharon dancing in the Back Room*), clubs and bars (*Cookie and Mille in the Girls' room at the Mudd Club*), mixed with danger (*Cookie with Me After I was Punched*) and self-destruction, to a life where drug addiction and AIDS were destroying a group of friends, leaving behind emptiness (*Cookie and Vittorio's Living Room*).²³⁹ In *The Story of Junk* Ginger Snaps insists to the narrator that work, rather than life, needs to start coming first: “It's too short, especially now. So many of our friends are sick with AIDS, and other things. How many are already gone? We're not going to outlive ourselves.”²⁴⁰ This drive is made visible in

²³⁶ Nan Goldin, “Nan Goldin on Cookie Mueller,” *Digital Journalist*, 2001 <http://digitaljournalist.org/issue0106/voices_goldin.htm> [accessed 14 June 2012].

²³⁷ The St. Cabrini Medical Center, run by the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, accepted AIDS sufferers before governmental changes in the 1990s offered better support and medical care.

²³⁸ Yablonsky.

²³⁹ We can see a similar shift in David Wojnarowicz's work, which moved from irreverent portraits using mixed media, to a series documenting the death of his one-time lover and dear friend Peter Hujar.

²⁴⁰ Yablonsky.

The Cookie Portfolio, it was a shift from living on borrowed time to failing to outlive the lives they set for themselves, and for Goldin, it was the work that might be a way to steal some more time.²⁴¹ *Cookie In Her Casket*, focusing solely on the life lost, is harsh compared to the beauty and vivacity of Cookie that came before. Her life has stopped, and in that shocking moment the portfolio shifts. *Cookie and Vittorio's Living Room* at the end of *The Cookie Portfolio* shows what remains: the emptiness of mourning. Goldin did not stop documenting, but the way she went about it was increasingly about memory, as she said, it was *The Cookie Portfolio* that made her realize the magnitude of what she had lost. Cookie and Vittorio's death, along with over-doses and the spread of AIDS amongst her group of friends, symbolized a shift within the ethos of her group and, related to the change, *Cookie in Her Casket* represents a shift in the sensibility of her work. The particular impact of Cookie on Goldin's life and work can be seen in *Ten Years After: Naples 1986-1996*, where Goldin and Costa returned to Naples ten years after Goldin travelled to Naples to visit Cookie and Vittorio.²⁴² The memorial piece, discussed in greater depth in Chapter 3, shows that Cookie's loss remains with Goldin and had an enduring effect on her work, one that can be seen in a side-by-side comparison within the catalogue. There is no doubt that Goldin's work dramatically changed from 1986 to 1996, and the series makes clear that a large part of this change was centred on the loss of Cookie.

Knowing that *Cookie in Her Casket* came at a significant time in Goldin's career and life, her portrayal of Cookie in death becomes a signpost for her artistic engagement with the reality of dying. Described in the next chapter, the memorial portfolio follows the tragic course of Cookie's life with intimacy and personality. However, Goldin's representation of Cookie in death goes beyond a shift in style, and stands out as unique, if not disparate, from the rest of the series.

²⁴¹ The photograph of Cookie and Vittorio's empty living room is particularly evocative as it shows the living room from virtually the same angle as *Cookie and Max, New York City, September 1986* only with Cookie and Max removed from the living room. The sense of loss is palpable, but also the change in focus is evident: from living at the edge of death (Cookie and Max were photographed at Vittorio's wake) to absence.

²⁴² Costa and Goldin.

CHAPTER 2

On Display: The Cookie ‘Look’

Contrasting sharply with the vivacious and active images Goldin took in the clubs, houses and streets of the Lower East Side, *Cookie in Her Casket* (1989) is sombre. *Cookie in Her Casket* was the first image of Goldin’s to focus on the deceased.²⁴³ Cookie is captured with her eyes closed and hands clasped together below her stomach in a satin-lined coffin. The image cuts off below the hips, drawing attention to the white cloth cross laying on her torso, aglow with reflected orange light. The same orange gleam pervades the photograph, which could easily be confused for a tinted two-tone image. Cookie, embellished with an excess of bangles, necklaces and rings, glows faintly. The casket cuts horizontally across the photograph with light flitting across the ripples of material in the foreground while the lid blocks the background save for a few lit candles. Amongst the jewellery and satin, one can make out Cookie’s face in profile and her right hand. Her hair is smoothed back, accented by a white gardenia above her ear, and her makeup is subtle and natural. Despite the layers of jewels, sequins and satin, this image focuses on Cookie rather than the funerary scene: there are no floral arrangements or mourners in the photograph as there are in the previous image of Cookie by Vittorio’s casket.²⁴⁴ *Cookie at Vittorio’s Casket* (1989) and *Cookie in Her Casket*, both from *The Cookie Portfolio*, are the two of four post-mortem images in Goldin’s oeuvre, but *Cookie in Her Casket* stands out stylistically and in its overwhelming sense of loss.

In a review of Goldin’s 1990 solo show at Pace/McGill gallery, Grundberg highlighted the poignancy of *Cookie in Her Casket*: ‘Seeing such a vivacious and marvellously outrageous woman transformed into a waxen figure in a coffin is a difficult emotional experience, but one that gives Ms. Goldin’s photography sobering and welcome dignity’.²⁴⁵ Critical response to the portfolio consistently referred to

²⁴³ While Mueller died 10 November, the service and viewing occurred on Wednesday, 15 November, 1989. ‘Deaths’. *The New York Times*. 14 November 1989, p. D23. This church has a secular importance for Mueller, who performed several readings there.

²⁴⁴ For more on the ‘funerary scene’ in post-mortem photography see: Uli Linke, “Touching the Corpse: The Unmaking of Memory in the Body Museum,” *Anthropology Today*, 21 (2005), pp. 13–19; Stanley Burns and Elizabeth Burns, *Sleeping Beauty II: Grief, Bereavement and the Family in Memorial Photography* (New York: Burns Archive Press, 2002).

²⁴⁵ Andy Grundberg, ‘So, What Else Do You Want to Know About Me?’ *New York Times* (Sept 21, 1990) C23.

Goldin's loss and the 'emotional experience' at seeing Cookie dead.²⁴⁶ However, Grunberg's comment that Cookie is 'waxen' warrants consideration. The portfolio develops a narrative of Cookie's life, often at the bars and nightclubs of the Lower East Side, suggesting various facets of her style, personality, and demeanour that produce an overall portrait of 'Cookie'. In an interview with Armstrong and Keller, Goldin commented: 'Maybe more than other photographers I don't believe in the single portrait. I believe only in the accumulation of portraits as a representation of a person.'²⁴⁷ In this light, it follows that *Cookie in Her Casket* combined with the other images in *The Cookie Portfolio* to create a portrait of 'Cookie'. While one expects to see Cookie change over the course of the portfolio, this chapter argues that the portrait developed of the living Cookie is markedly different from her image in *Cookie in Her Casket*. A vivacious, wild and exciting woman with a distinct style is suddenly presented as a demure, muted, 'waxen' figure, so highly decorated it is difficult to recognize Cookie without the title to aid the viewer. This chapter will demonstrate the contrast between Cookie in *Cookie in Her Casket* and the living representations of Cookie. In order to understand the significance of this disruption, I first address the relationship between Goldin and Cookie as it is reinforced within *The Cookie Portfolio*. I then define the consistent living representation of Cookie through artist representations, friend's descriptions, and Cookie's autobiographical short stories – this is what John Waters described as the Cookie 'look'. The Cookie 'look' is visible throughout *The Cookie Portfolio*, with the exception of *Cookie in Her Casket*. While Goldin's narrative of friendship makes such misrepresentation shocking, I suggest that Goldin intentionally presents a generic image of Cookie in death.

In the context of *The Cookie Portfolio*, which begins with a hand-written eulogy by Goldin, *Cookie in Her Casket* is framed within the history of their friendship. Goldin and Cookie shared a familial friendship, as Goldin described: 'Cookie was a social light, a diva, my idol. Over the years she became a writer, a critic, my best friend, my sister.'²⁴⁸ Goldin's words evidence the significant role Cookie played in Goldin's life and situates Cookie as a pseudo-family member. Goldin was encouraged by Cookie to move to New York after living with her in Provincetown. Once in New York, the two were key features in a cohesive group of friends.²⁴⁹ Goldin was there for Cookie

²⁴⁶ See Costa, p. 10; Sussman, p. 39; Litt, p. 33; Weinberg and Robinson, p.1; Sarah Bancroft, 'Reflections of Absence' *New Statesman* 127.4393, p. 46.

²⁴⁷ Armstrong, Keller and Goldin, p. 454; This method of portraiture was referenced as well in comparison to Alfred Stieglitz in Robinson and Weinberg, p. 12.

²⁴⁸ Joyce Henri Robinson and Jonathan Weinberg, *Fantastic Tales: The Photography of Nan Goldin* (London: Tate, 2005), p. 2.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

through her relationship struggles, and Cookie supported Goldin during her abusive relationship with Brian. They were also supportive of each other's careers: Cookie held the first showings of Goldin's slide shows in her apartment, and Goldin took the photographs for Cookie's first book, *How To Get Rid of Pimples*.²⁵⁰ From their first meeting, it was clear that Goldin was exceptionally struck by Cookie.²⁵¹ Speaking about Cookie in the eulogistic letter included in the *Cookie Portfolio*, Goldin described Cookie as 'the starlet of the Lower East Side: [...] She was sort of the queen of the whole downtown social scene'.²⁵² The terms 'queen' and 'starlet' declare Goldin's admiration for Cookie, distinguishing her above Goldin's other friends.²⁵³ To Goldin, Cookie might have been family, but she was also her 'idol'.²⁵⁴

The narrative of their bond enhances the poignancy of the photograph, and reinforces the notion of Goldin as an insider. She is not only an insider, she is an admirer, placing the subjects above herself as the photographer. The strength of their relationship, reflected in these photographs, forms the personal documentary that Goldin embodies. Rather than Rosler's 'victims' of documentary photograph, Goldin ensures that the documentary label is not apply to her by presenting the subject (Cookie) as the complicit friend of the photographer.²⁵⁵ In fact, Goldin claims 'Part of how we grew close was through me photographing her [...] I was outside of her and taking her picture let me in' suggesting that the camera did not document so much as create their bond of friendship.²⁵⁶ I will argue in the next chapter that shifting the camera from a source of power and distance to tool for equality and closeness fosters a narrative of empathy.

However, the insider status and emotional description of the camera by Goldin clashes with the financial reality of selling such photographs. In 2008 Mueller's executor, Richard Turley, admonished Goldin for profiting from her images of Cookie, and claimed Goldin was publishing some of Mueller's writing without her

²⁵⁰ Cookie Mueller, *How To Get Rid of Pimples* (New York: Top Stories, 1984).

²⁵¹ See also: Sarah Bancroft, "Reflections of Absence," *New Statesman*, 127 (1998), 46; Guido Costa, *Nan Goldin 55* (London: Phaidon Press, 2001); Guido Costa and Nan Goldin, *Ten Years After: Napels 1986-1996* (New York: West Zone Publishing, 1998); Nan Goldin, *Nan Goldin: I'll Be Your Mirror*, ed. by Nan Goldin, David Armstrong, and Hanz Werner Holzwarth (New York: Witney Museum of American Art, 1996); Nan Goldin, *Cookie Mueller: Photographs* (New York: Pace/Mac Gill Gallery, 1991); Mallory Curley, *A Cookie Mueller Encyclopediadia* (New York: Randy Press, 2010).

²⁵² Nan Goldin, 'Nan Goldin on Cookie Mueller', *Digital Journalist*, 2001 <http://digitaljournalist.org/issue0106/voices_goldin.htm> [accessed 5 May 2013].

²⁵³ Cookie was also referred to as Goldin's 'muse and guru' by Guido Costa. Costa, p. 42. The term 'guru' referred to Goldin's embrace of Cookie's lifestyle and care-free attitude.

²⁵⁴ Goldin, 'Nan Goldin on Cookie Mueller'; Goldin, *Cookie Mueller: Photographs*.

²⁵⁵ Rosler, p. 306.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

permission.²⁵⁷ He commented in *New York Post* ‘Cookie was the earliest champion of Nan’s career and would be disgusted by her greed and broken promises to Max.’²⁵⁸ In this light, the camera has severed rather than maintained Goldin and Cookie’s friendship. Within Turley’s comment the tension is clear: there was once a relationship between Goldin and Cookie where Cookie was a ‘champion’ of these photographs, but at that time she received no financial compensation. However, since Goldin became famous, and after Cookie’s death, there is an expectation that Cookie’s son would benefit from such images. Goldin has not, as far as I am aware, referenced Turley’s comment in her writings or interviews on Cookie, maintaining the narrative of their close friendship.²⁵⁹ The narrative of mutual affection and support is certainly visible in *The Cookie Portfolio*, with no indication of the future ‘broken promises’ that Turley mentions. However, Goldin’s has such an open and mutually affectionate relationship with her subjects, where they are friends and ‘idols’ rather than ‘victims’, what should one make of the conflicting representation of Cookie in life and death?

Goldin’s photographs of the living Cookie are concurrent with Cookie’s carefully developed self-image. The name of ‘Cookie’, the nickname by which Dorothy Mueller was known since infancy, reflects her unique persona.²⁶⁰ From her autobiographical style of writing to her work as an actress and her friendship with several artists, ‘Cookie’ was consistently presented to an audience. Cookie invited observation from others through her writing, acting and as an artist model. Presenting herself was apparently an early concern for Cookie, who revealed in an interview with *Provincetown Magazine* in 1977 that she began to design clothing in her childhood.²⁶¹ In the article, Cookie mentions her inability to find clothing that she liked, instead making her own by altering clothing from thrift stores and borrowing from her mother.²⁶² In New York, Cookie continued to make her own clothing and occasionally design clothes for others. Her red dress in *Cookie and Millie in the Girls’ Room at the Mudd Club* was her own creation (Figure 9). Cookie’s conscious awareness of her looks

²⁵⁷ This presumably refers to Cookie’s text ‘Brief Tips from Italy’ included in the catalogue for Goldin’s *Ten Years After: Naples 1986-1996*, (New York: West Zone Publishing, 1998), 73.

²⁵⁸ The story itself was a page six article entitled ‘Big Cookie Revival’, referring to a play, *Love Dr. Mueller*, put on as an adaptation of Mueller’s writings at the West End Theatre. See: ‘Big Cookie Revival’, *New York Post* (November 20, 2008). The play was done with the permission of the estate, and while the images of Goldin’s are within her own rights as a photographer, I am unaware of any further legal action with regard to the publishing of ‘Brief Tips from Italy’ within Goldin’s catalogue for *Ten Years After*.

²⁵⁹ Goldin’s narrative is more beneficial when examining *The Cookie Portfolio*, especially as Turley’s comments were with regard to *Ten Years After*, discussed later in this section.

²⁶⁰ Cookie Muller, ‘My Bio – Notes on an American Childhood’, *Walking Through Clear Water In a Pool Painted Black*. (New York: Semiotext(e), 1990) 137.

²⁶¹ Images from the article and some of its text is quoted in Curley, 190.

²⁶² Mueller remarked in an interview with *The East Village Eye* that she still designed and sold custom items by request. Sybil Walker, ‘Cookie Mueller’ *The East Village Eye* (1981) 41.

may have also been related to her struggle with acne, which led to her first published book *How To Get Rid of Pimples* (1984). Each chapter followed the history of an individual to whom Cookie gave advice on clearing their acne.²⁶³ The book intimates that Cookie's struggle with pimples affected her self-esteem, which possibly contributed to her unique style.

Cookie's self-conscious presentation fits broadly within the constructed identity of gender Butler discusses in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Butler argues that the term 'woman' comes with a set of categories in which an individual is pigeon-holed, and that such gender is not inherent but enacted through ritual behaviour. One such example of ritualistic behaviour is Cookie designing her own clothing. By sewing and creating clothing Cookie enacts the traits of her female gender, but in performing these acts, she creates outfits that reject the mainstream, more conservative designs for women. The deliberate, public presentation of Cookie was created in a rejection of, yet adherence to, gendered expectations. In a sense, Cookie's persona is not unlike a form of drag. I am not here wishing to fall into the trap of equating drag to the performance of gender – Butler clarifies this misconception in *Bodies that Matter*. Instead, I put forward that within Cookie's construction of her persona appears 'a sense of defeat and a sense of insurrection' that Butler found in Jennie Livingstone's 1990 documentary of drag ball culture in New York, *Paris is Burning*.²⁶⁴ Butler explained that within the film, drag personas appropriated racial and social stereotypes in order to subvert them, and Cookie similarly takes on gender expectations, but takes them to extremes in an act of redefining herself. Her acts of subversion, I will reveal, go beyond the process of hand-making unique and controversial clothing.

To varying degrees, everyone presents a version of themselves through dress, hair, makeup, jewellery and other aesthetic choices, but Cookie was an icon of sorts. Working on films with long-time friend John Waters as one of the Dreamlanders situated Cookie firmly within 1970s glam of posing, surface presentation and constructed identity. Waters described Cookie as one of a kind, naming her unique style the Cookie 'look'.²⁶⁵ In addition to directing Cookie in five films, Waters lived with Cookie and her son Max for a short time when she was thrown out of her parents home,

²⁶³ Cookie Mueller, *How to Get Rid of Pimples* (New York: Top Stories, 1984). The final chapter offers her cure, which is homeopathic and rigorous

²⁶⁴ Judith Butler, "Gender Is Burning," in *Bodies that Matter* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 121–139 (p. 128).

²⁶⁵ John Waters, "Introduction," in *Ask Dr Mueller: The Writings of Cookie Mueller*, ed. by Amy Scholder (London: High Risk Books, 1997), pp. i–xii (p. xiii).

and the two remained good friends.²⁶⁶ Waters saw Cookie endure highs and lows and always with a casual, unruly beauty:

She was the only person I knew who didn't comb her hair for twenty-five years and still managed to look... well, beautiful. [...] The Lower East Side is still filled with fake Cookies but they never seem to pull it off as effortlessly as the real Cookie did. Yes, they look crazy. Yes, they look scary. Some even cheap enough. But Cookie combined it all, and somehow became a knockout.²⁶⁷

Cookie's style was unique and appealing enough to make her a trendsetter. Waters exudes 'she always wore high heels and too much eye makeup', hinting at how key eye makeup was to Cookie's enduring 'look'.²⁶⁸ Her 'look' is a constructed identity that appears to defy the traditional norms of what is expected by her gender – in particular its sense of 'crazy' and 'scary' – while at the same time reliant on femininity of makeup and clothing for the expression of sexuality and femininity, much like a drag persona. I will first demonstrate Cookie's cultivation and control over this persona, and how it was reflected accurately by artists, including Goldin, and by Cookie's literature.

The Cookie 'look' was constituted of several visual elements that are repeated in artistic renderings of Cookie, and described in her autobiographical short stories. These elements, as Waters described, centred around heavy eyeliner, a mess of unruly blonde hair, and unique style (in clothing, jewellery and shoes) which combed to create something beautiful and crazy. For example, Bob Bert's 1985 painting of Cookie (Figure 10) emphasizes her mane of frizzy blonde hair and heavy eye makeup, staples of the 'look'. The yellows and oranges of her hair marked with waves shows the voluminous blonde tangle. The blue overarching eye shadow that takes the focus of her face, and the heavy lower lid of her eye makeup flips up into her signature cat-eye point. As a style icon of sorts, Cookie's look also embodied the sense of recklessness, extremes, grit and grime of the New York underground scene.²⁶⁹ The extreme nature of her style is visible in *Cookie and Millie in the Girls' room at the Mudd Club*: the wild mess of hair cascades and frizzes down Cookie's shoulders, while the cheap strips of her outfit shine in faux-silk glory. Cookie's clothes and large rings are cheap, and her hair is a mess, she may even appear a bit 'crazy'; but it all comes together to make 'Cookie'. Cookie is not presented as 'scary' in Goldin's photographs, although at the

²⁶⁶ Cookie Mueller, 'Pink Flamingoes' *Walking Through Clear Water In a Pool Painted Black* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1990) 78.

²⁶⁷ Waters, p. xiii.

²⁶⁸ Waters, p. xi.

²⁶⁹ Echoing this sentiment, in a memorial poem to Cookie, Denise Duhamle wrote: 'You were the bad girl/ everyone wants to be'. Denise Duhamle, "Beauties Who Live Only for an Afternoon," in *Up is Up, But So is Down: New York's Downtown Literary Scene*, ed. by Brandon Stosuy (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 305.

time her tattoos and heavy eye-makeup might make Cookie intimidating. Still, Cookie's sense of fun and vulnerability come out in Goldin's work, at least when she is alive.

Comparing Waters and Goldin does not suggest that either have a definitive view of 'Cookie', but supports the existence of an image of 'Cookie' that was maintained through her use of make-up, her choice of clothing and her hair. In her writing, Cookie demonstrates an awareness of this 'look', with particular attention to her hair and eyeliner. In her short story 'My Bio – Notes on An American Childhood' Cookie disclosed that bleaching her hair was as much an emotional as a stylistic habit. Cookie's mother suggested that Cookie bleach her hair whenever she was depressed, a tradition Cookie insisted was essential to her teens.²⁷⁰ Hair can serve as a shield or can distract from the face, like a mask.²⁷¹ For Cookie, it appeared to be a distraction, a way to literally lighten herself after tragedy. Cookie's hair was something of a trademark, making her easily recognisable in Goldin's images. This glimpse into how Cookie used her hair in painful situations stresses the self protective side of the Cookie 'look'. The unruly cascade of Cookie's hair, described by Waters as uncombed, suggested a carefree and rebellious woman, though her rebellion was also a form of protection.

Eyeliner was also a key part of Cookie's 'look'; the flipped corners and heavy makeup led to the nickname 'catwoman'.²⁷² The first physical description of Linda Yablonsky's 'Honey Cook', based on Cookie, begins with eyeliner: 'She knew Jayne Mansfield's life story by heart and never went anywhere without wearing eyeliner.'²⁷³ Eyeliner also appeared in Cookie's short stories, but it tended to feature as a catalyst for unwanted attention. In the *I'll Be Your Mirror* documentary, Sharon laughed that Cookie insisted on help with her makeup until the end.²⁷⁴ Cookie held onto makeup as a way to maintain her identity, even while her body was becoming paralysed and she lost her voice. If she couldn't have her body, she at least had her makeup. Moreover, eyeliner is presented as an essential part of her identity despite its negative connotations. In her essay 'The Stone Age – Sicily – 1976', Cookie and her lesbian partner, Shaggy, are discussing why, despite being together, they are regularly approached by men: "“Maybe it's your eye makeup,” Max said from the back seat. He was pretty astute for a four year old.”²⁷⁵ Cookie's appraisal of Max as 'astute'

²⁷⁰ Mueller, 'My Bio', p. 142.

²⁷¹ Rose Weitz, "Women and their Hair: Seeking Power through Resistance and Accommodation," in *Gender & Society* 15.5 (Oct. 2001), 667-686. Curley notes that Cookie's favourite hair colour was 'White Minx': Curley, p. 205.

²⁷² The nickname was given to Cookie by Jan Collins. Curley, p. 28.

²⁷³ Linda Yablonsky, *The Story of Junk* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 1997).

²⁷⁴ Goldin, Coulthard, and Barker.

²⁷⁵ Cookie Mueller, 'The Stone Age – Sicily – 1976' *Walking Through Clear Water In a Pool Painted Black* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1990) p. 96.

demonstrates that Cookie was aware her eye makeup could result in unwanted attention. The same response to eyeliner appears in ‘Abduction and Rape – Highway 31 Elkton, Maryland – 1969’, in which Cookie and three friends were abducted while hitch-hiking. The story begins “‘They were just three sluts looking for sex on the highway,’” the two abductors and rapists said later when asked to describe us. This wasn’t the way we saw it’, moving into a description of preparing for the trip by putting on smudge-proof eyeliner and mascara.²⁷⁶ Again, Cookie connected eye makeup with sexual attention, but she insisted that sex was irrelevant to her choice of makeup. Through the theme of eye makeup, Cookie makes a point about stereotyping and sexism, standing up for the rights of women to dress and present themselves as they please free of harassment.

Even when describing Cookie as a beloved friend, Waters made the comment that Cookie wears ‘too much eye makeup’.²⁷⁷ Arguably, Cookie intentionally went past the line of what was considered reasonable in order to define herself. This resonates with Goldin’s images of drag friends in Boston. As mentioned in the previous chapter, images such as *Roommate putting on Makeup* demonstrated how makeup was an important part of constructing drag identity. Butler outlined gender as ‘the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory form that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, or a natural sort of human being.’²⁷⁸ One such action would be the putting on of makeup. The ritual is strongly associated with femininity, but in a drag context makeup subverts and redefines gender expectations. In Cookie’s case, makeup was essential to her beauty and identity but she was able to use the ritual to redefine herself. By putting on ‘too much’ makeup in an excessive play, Cookie defies the supposed norm of the female in her time. While Cookie is constructing her gender, she is also constructing herself and her identity as ‘Cookie’ within her gender.

The Cookie ‘look’ was so much a part of Cookie’s identity that the deterioration of the look underscores the vulnerability of her battle with AIDS. The last five images of Cookie alive in *The Cookie Portfolio* show Cookie’s decline. As her health deteriorated, so did elements of the Cookie ‘look’. In *Cookie in the Garden at Ciro’s* (Figure 11), Cookie’s cat’s eyes, vibrant red lips, colourful clothing, and large earrings maintain the Cookie ‘look’. Cookie’s attitude has not diminished, as she tilts

²⁷⁶ Cookie Mueller, ‘Abduction and Rape – Highway 31 Elkton, Maryland – 1969’ *Walking Through Clear Water In a Pool Painted Black* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1990) p. 39. In an interview Mueller remarked ‘Sure. I don’t mind. I don’t care. A lot of people think of me like that. It wouldn’t matter. I’ll be a slut.’ Walker, p. 41. Mueller appeared to accept that her look garnered negative attention and – outwardly – dismissed it.

²⁷⁷ Waters, p. xi.

²⁷⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 33.

her head toward the camera with a sly smile that recalls the first image with Max. However, there are allusions to her decline: she has lost weight since the previous image (granted, it was taken three years before), her wild locks are limp, though still unruly, and she hunches over as she takes out paper to roll her cigarette. Even more telling: on the bench beside Cookie rests her cane. At this time, her husband was in the hospital with a collapsed lung, and the cane beside her reminds the viewer that Cookie is also near death. The subsequent image, *Sharon with Cookie on the Bed* (Figure 12), reveals a dramatic change in Cookie's health. Cookie shrinks into the darkness in the folds of her bed, leaving shadows to obscure her face. Her makeup is unclear, but a glint of touches her unruly waves of hair. The 'look' has greatly diminished, but the focus of photograph turns away from Cookie to her former lover and friend, Sharon. In the foreground, Sharon sits on the edge of Cookie's bed, head tilted down and a tear-stained tissue in her hand. Both women appear exhausted, but Cookie is barely present. Like *Cookie and Me After I was Beaten Up*, we see a strong woman protecting a more vulnerable one, however Mueller is now the weak party and the overarching feeling is one of struggle rather than strength. Sharon, sitting on the edge of Mueller's bed, is visible upset: dabs of mascara on her eyes relay tears, while her face is half-covered in shadow. Sharon spent several months nursing Cookie after she succumbed partial paralysis and lost her voice.²⁷⁹ A photograph of Cookie and Vittorio on their wedding day hangs between the two women, creating a sharp contrast.²⁸⁰ The photograph recalls happier times for Cookie, and emphasises the sacrifice of Sharon, who remained Cookie's devoted caretaker, a job that would have otherwise belonged to Vittorio.²⁸¹ *Sharon with Cookie on the Bed* is the first image of Cookie without makeup, exposing the exhaustion and illness in her face. Her emotive face, though barely visible, makes clear her misery and pain. The focus away from Cookie forms a bond between Sharon and Goldin, both concerned for the health and life of their friend.

The next two photographs were taken at Vittorio's funeral, *Cookie at Vittorio's Funeral* captures Cookie in front of her husband's casket, and *Cookie and Max* she is

²⁷⁹ As noted in Curley, p. 222; Goldin, "Nan Goldin on Cookie Mueller." Sharon discussed physically carrying Cookie to and from appointments and helping her with every aspect of her treatment in the *I'll Be Your Mirror* documentary. Goldin, Coulthard, and Barker.

²⁸⁰ Cookie wrote about her eight-year relationship with Sharon in: Mueller, "The Stone Age – Sicily – 1976," *Walking Through Clear Water in a Pool Painted Black* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1990), 93-99. Cookie Mueller, "The Stone of New Orleans – 1983," *Ask Dr. Mueller: The Writings of Cookie Mueller*, ed. by Amy Scholder (London: High Risk Books, 1997) 30-39. The pain of their breakup, and Cookie's subsequent trip to Italy to get over Sharon, where she met Vittorio, is the subject of Mueller, "The Italian Remedy – 1982" *Ask Dr. Mueller: The Writings of Cookie Mueller*, ed. by Amy Scholder (London: High Risk Books, 1997) 46-57. Waters also discuss their relationship in the introduction to *Ask Dr. Mueller*.

²⁸¹ In *The Story of Junk*, Yablonsky writes about the death of Honey Cook, where her lover is the only one in the room with her when she dies. This photograph suggests the same devotion.

seated on the living room sofa with her son and their dog, Beauty.²⁸² In both images, Cookie's cat's eyes are present, though less dramatic than previously pictured, her hair is limp, though still wild, and her face relays exhaustion. In *Cookie at Vittorio's Funeral*, Cookie is crying and pained. In *Cookie and Max*, she leans on Max for support with a wary smile. The tousled hair and the shine of her bangles and necklaces suggest something of the healthy Cookie, but it is clear in both photographs that she is struggling. Following Vittorio's funeral, the image *Cookie being x-rayed* (Figure 13) might be confused for an image of the deceased. A small window of light offers Cookie's face, with eyes closed, obscured by a pattern of shadows. The blackness of the void that surrounds her is a reference to death, while her tied back hair, lack of make-up and closed eyes suggest that Cookie is lost. Cookie is isolated and vulnerable, being intimately scanned by a machine. Here she is no longer performing as 'Cookie' and has none of the tropes of the look to act as a shield between her and the viewer. Her lack of performance is underscored by her closed eyes, which suggest a lack of pose or engagement with the camera or the photographer.²⁸³ In other images, even when ill, Cookie is expressive, actively performing herself as Cookie through her gaze into the camera.²⁸⁴ The exceptions are *Sharon with Cookie on the Bed*, and this image of Cookie in the x-ray machine. While there is a great deal of emotion to *Sharon with Cookie on the Bed*, in the confines of the x-ray machine, Cookie is isolated and absent. The isolation palpable in the scene references the isolating factors of the hospital, of AIDS, and of Cookie suffering without her husband.²⁸⁵

However, *Cookie being x-rayed* provides a sharp contrast to *Cookie in Her Casket*, where the orange glow, jewellery and flowers hide any hint of the exhausted battle with illness or pain Cookie experienced at losing her husband. Comparing *Cookie being x-rayed* and *Cookie in Her Casket*, the disjuncture between Cookie presented in life and in death is disturbing. Not only is there none of the vibrant, unique and excited

²⁸² The room and couch are empty in the final image *Cookie and Vittorio's Living room*. Beauty is also present with Cookie and Vittorio in photographs from *Ten Years After*: Costa and Goldin. Cookie also wrote about Beauty in Cookie Mueller, "Dogs I Have Known," in *Ask Dr Mueller: The Writings of Cookie Mueller*, ed. by Amy Scholder (London: High Risk Books, 1997), pp. 54–57.

²⁸³ Owens argued that posing for the camera was like freezing ones-self into a defiant mask of 'I' to present to the camera. The closed eyes, in this context, suggest a lack of awareness of the camera and hence a lack of assertion. Craig Owens, "Posing," in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power and Culture* (Los Angeles: University of California Press), pp. 201–217 (p. 210).

²⁸⁴ For more on the pose as an assertion of identity and the 'I', see, among others: Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1981); Owens; Jean-Luc Nancy, "Nous Autres," in *The Ground of the Image* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 100–107.

²⁸⁵ The degree of isolation is less when compared to (Goldin's friend) David Wojnarowicz's photographs of dying Peter Hujar taken in the same year. Both Goldin and Wojnarowicz's photographs are of a friend dying of AIDS in a hospital environment. Both present the hospital as sterilizing and isolating, making the clinical nature of the hospital appear dehumanizing. For more on Wojnarowicz's images of Peter Hujar, see: David Wojnarowicz [et Al.], *Witness: Against Our Vanishing* (New York, N.Y.: Artists Space, 1989).

Cookie in her post-mortem image, but there is also no testament to the suffering and pain she endured in her last months.²⁸⁶ In contrast, Goldin's friend David Wojnarowicz's photograph of the deceased Peter Hujar in his hospital bed, makes visible the ravages of AIDS. *Untitled (Peter Hujar)* (Figure 14), highlights the deterioration of Hujar and how AIDS has dramatically changed his body, in particular making his face gaunt and angular. Both Goldin and Wojnarowicz capture the struggle of a loved one suffering from AIDS; but *Cookie in Her Casket* offers a beautified vision of death.

This post-mortem image is also unsettling in its lack of reference to the living Cookie – neither the Cookie 'look' nor the exhausted and isolated woman of *Cookie being x-rayed* are visible in *Cookie in Her Casket*. Cookie's lack of expression contradicts her emotive nature displayed in photography and film, further alienating *Cookie in Her Casket* from a living vision of Cookie. Key elements of the look are entirely removed: Cookie's trademark eyeliner that lifts at the corners is not visible, her tattoos are hidden beneath a layer of bangles, and the bleached blonde hair that had never been combed is markedly tame. Especially when seen in the context of *The Cookie Portfolio*, which captures both the Cookie 'look' and Cookie's distinct and expressive character, why would the image of Cookie in life be so different in death? Would this difference not make *Cookie in Her Casket* appear disingenuous?

I propose that these differences help present a generic image of Cookie that falls in line with the traditions of post-mortem portraiture, mentioned in the introduction. From the onset of photography, bereaved families commissioned post-mortem photographs and included the photographs in family albums or displayed them on mantelpieces as part of the family narrative.²⁸⁷ One of the enduring compositional elements of the post-mortem portrait is the depiction of the deceased well dressed and in the appearance of comfort (laying on a soft surface), with eyes closed as though asleep. As mentioned in the introduction, Ruby termed this enduring style the 'Last Sleep' style in which the deceased was photographed with eyes closed, lain out on a bed or similar

²⁸⁶ This is not something Goldin speaks of, though she acknowledges that Cookie was paralyzed and lost her voice, these painful moments are only expressed in photographs. Goldin, "Nan Goldin on Cookie Mueller." In *The Story of Junk*, however, Honey Cook's death in the hospital acknowledges the sense of isolation that comes with treatment, as many of Honey's friends left the room before she died. Yablonsky.

²⁸⁷ Audrey Linkman, *Photography and Death* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011); Audrey Linkman, *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits* (London: Tauris Parke Books, 1993); Jay Ruby, *Secure the Shadow: Death and Photography in America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995); Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004).

surface, as though in repose.²⁸⁸ As Ruby noted, by the twentieth century it had become increasingly common to display the deceased in their casket, however the dominant practice of presenting the eyes closed and the deceased as ‘asleep’ remained. In fact, the funeral industry reinforced the ‘Last Sleep’ image by producing lined coffins and head pillows making for a comfortable casket that resembled a bed.²⁸⁹

The ‘Last Sleep’ style of early post-mortem photography is visible in images such as *Young Girl “Sleeping”* c. 1853 (Figure 15). *Young Girl “Sleeping”* displays a child in a white dress laying on a white cushion or pillow with her eyes closed. Traditional to ‘Last Sleep’ photographs, the focus is on the child’s face, which was posed in an expression of peaceful sleep. While there are no props to distract from the child, in other images from the same era, a cross or collection of flowers might have been placed in the child’s hand still ensuring the face was prominent. Though a century separates the two images, there are visible similarities between this image and *Cookie in Her Casket*. Both subjects are presented in white clothing, with their eyes closed as though in a peaceful sleep. Although, *Cookie* is not as clearly displayed because the casket, flowers, and dress obscure her face. *Cookie in Her Casket* falls in line with the later evolution of post-mortem portraiture, which included aspects of the funerary scene, some dominating the deceased, as exemplified in the 1913 post-mortem silver plate of a young woman in her coffin (Figure 16). The silver-plate image shows significantly more of the funeral scene, including floral arrangements, than we see in *Cookie in Her Casket*, but the overall effect is similar. In both images a woman is laid out in a lined and beautiful casket, her body decorated – *Cookie* with jewellery and a white cross, the young woman with flowers – photographed in their coffin with eyes closed as though ‘at rest’.

The convention of the ‘Last Sleep’ is still practiced by the funeral industry in the United States. For a viewing, the funeral director arranges the casket in the church or in the funeral parlour, surrounding the deceased with any flowers or tokens left by

²⁸⁸ Ruby fully explains three styles, though the ‘Last Sleep’ is the only relevant style in relation to *Cookie in Her Casket*. These styles, he claims ‘appear to straightforwardly reflect cultural attitudes toward the dead and the rituals surrounding them’, though he is looking at these different styles over the course of half a century, focusing on the period between 1840 and 1880. Ruby, p. 63. The styles are not meant as firm rules, but one can see elements of each of these styles brought into later post-mortem portraiture, I explain. His noted styles were supported by: Burns and Burns; Stanley Burns, *Sleeping Beauty: Memorial Photography in America* (Altadena, CA: Twelvvetrees Press, 1990).

²⁸⁹ For more on the comfort of coffin design, and its specific relationship to the bed, see: Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*, Second Edi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Robert W Habenstein and William M Lamers, *The History of American Funeral Directing* (Milwaukee: Bulfin Printers, Inc, 1955); Vanderlyn R Pine, *Caretaker of the Dead: The American Funeral Director*. (New York: Irvington Publishers Inc, 1975).

the mourners.²⁹⁰ Embalming and arranging the body in their coffin ensured an idealized image of the deceased in their ‘Last Sleep’.²⁹¹ Because of the efforts of funeral directors, contemporary post-mortem images taken at wakes are somewhat standardized.²⁹² Should a bereaved family member want a post-mortem photograph, they need only press a button, though some chose to include themselves in the photograph as well.²⁹³ The practice remains common, though as early as World War II, according to Linkman’s research, people stopped including the photographs in albums. Those who continued to take post-mortem photographs, as Ruby discovered, kept a single copy in a private place, making contemporary post-mortem photography acutely private.²⁹⁴ While Goldin may not have been aware of the historical background to post-mortem portraiture, the practice of photographing the deceased remains strong in the United States and she would have likely been aware of other people photographing at funerals.²⁹⁵ She would have also certainly been aware of the tradition of celebrity post-mortem portraits. Abraham Lincoln’s funeral and post-mortem photograph was one of the earliest highly prized post-mortem photographs to proliferate through the masses.²⁹⁶ In the 19th century carte-de-visite of deceased politicians and scientists or theatre stars were collected and occasionally placed into albums.²⁹⁷ Closer to Goldin’s era, political activist and supporter of African American rights, Martin Luther King Junior, was photographed in his coffin in an image that was distributed throughout the press in 1968, when Goldin was fifteen.²⁹⁸ Outside of politics, there were a plethora of images

²⁹⁰ For more on the tradition of laying the body in American funerals and wakes, see, among others: Mark Harris, *Grave Matters: A Journey Through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial* (New York: Scribner, 2007); Habenstein and Lamers; James J Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); Metcalf and Huntington.

²⁹¹ For more on embalming and reconstruction in presenting an image of sleep, see: Metcalf and Huntington; Ronny E Turner and Charles Edgley, “Death as Theater: A Dramaturgical Analysis of the American Funeral,” in *Life as Theater: A Dramaturgical Source*, ed. by Dennis Brissett and Charles Edgley, Second Edi (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009), pp. 285–297; Michel Ragon, *The Space of Death: A Study in Funerary Architecture, Decoration and Urbanism*, ed. by Alan Sheridan (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983); Jessica Mitford, *The American Way of Death* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1963); Philippe Airès, “The Reversal of Death: Changes in Attitudes Toward Death in Western Societies,” in *Death in America*, ed. by David E Stannard (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975).

²⁹² This is discussed in the introduction. For more, see also: Linkman, *Photography and Death*; Burns; Ruby.

²⁹³ This is discussed in Ruby, pp.83-8.

²⁹⁴ The exception lies in photographs of the famous dead, as illustrated previously. Not every famous person is commemorated this way, however, so the rarity of public post-mortem photographs makes those famous individuals who are photographed unique in some way. Surprisingly little work has been done about the famous dead photographed in their coffins, however, work has been done on figures who are selected for embalming. See, for example: Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Christine Quigley, *Modern Mummies: The Preservation of the Human Body in the Twentieth Century* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co, 2006). Ruby, pp. 161–2.

²⁹⁵ Continued practice of post-mortem portraiture is discussed in personal research with the Thanatos Archive in Washington: Ruby; Linkman, *Photography and Death*.

²⁹⁶ Ruby, p. 19.

²⁹⁷ Bernard Edward Charles Howarth-Loomes, *Victorian Photography: A Collector’s Guide* (London: Ward Lock Limited, 1874); Linkman, *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits*.

²⁹⁸ ‘Mourning is Led by President; Marches and Services Are Held’ *New York Times*, (April 8, 1968), p.33. An image of Martin Luther King Jr. in his casket by Benedict J. Fernandez is held by the US National Gallery.

of actor and singer Elvis Presley's funeral, including an image of Elvis in his coffin (Figure 17) in 1977, just before Goldin moved to New York. Such post-mortem images adhere to the 'Last Sleep' tradition, including a lined coffin, focusing on the upper body.²⁹⁹ Photographing celebrities in their coffins for public display has endured, and Goldin was likely referencing this tradition when she photographed Cookie.³⁰⁰

The power of the 'Last Sleep' style is clear in *Cookie in Her Casket*: the restoration of dignity to the deceased. In the beginning of this chapter, I quoted Grundberg who noted that the 'waxen' presentation of Cookie in her casket 'gives Ms. Goldin's photography a sobering dignity.'³⁰¹ One of the reasons that 'waxen' is associated with 'dignity' is the tradition of 'Last Sleep' post-mortem images. The photographs were considered dignified, but early embalming (and in some cases no embalming) led subjects to appear waxy or inhuman.³⁰² The 'Last Sleep' falls in line with a notion of Tercier's 'good death'.³⁰³ As explained in the introduction, Tercier noted the difference between the reality of a medical, invasive death, and the dream of a 'good' death with often involves a deathbed scene where the deceased is able to communicate last wishes to family and meets death at peace. Though this is not a deathbed scene, Cookie's peaceful face of the 'Last Sleep' conveys an acceptance of death, meeting it on equal terms. In comparison to *Cookie being x-rayed*, *Cookie in Her Casket* restores beauty to the image of Cookie through her makeup and jewellery, the lack of lines on her face, and fuller cheeks. Gone is the woman exhausted by medical tests, drawn out in an illness that took her voice and her ability to walk unaided. This photographic construction is distinct from the medical trials she endured. As Tercier predicted, the reality of death, that is the moment of dying, was medical for Cookie. However, the image of death presented to friends and family is one that restores a 'death with dignity' through the 'Last Sleep' image of a beautified Cookie.³⁰⁴

²⁹⁹ The largest change to the practice has been the circulation of these images. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century post-mortem images would be displayed in the family home, on mantel pieces and in public albums, for friends and visitors as well as family to see. Ruby believed that the practice was private as early as World War I, however Linkman revealed a continued practice in the 1920s. My own work in the Thanatos archive suggests that post-mortem memorial images were still taken by professional photographers and held in albums until the 1940s and the practice was largely eliminated during the Second World War. Today, as Linkman and Ruby point out, post-mortem images are taken for and kept by a single family member, sometimes in secret. The exception appears to be the public circulation of stillborn children. Linkman particularly mentions the website *Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep*. Linkman, p. 164; Ruby; Jay Ruby, 'Portraying the Dead', *OMEGA: Journal of Death and Dying* 19.1 (1988): 1-20.

³⁰⁰ This practice is quite common, continuing more recently with the funerals of pop celebrities Michael Jackson in 2009 and Amy Winehouse in 2011. Photographs of deceased cultural and political figures in American history goes back to the funeral parade of President Lincoln. See: Pine; Ruby.

³⁰¹ Andy Grundberg, "So, What Else Do You Want to Know About Me?," *New York Times* (New York, 21 September 1990), p. C23.

³⁰² Edward Francis, "Embalming: A Satisfactory Method of Performing," *Public Health Reports (1886-1970)*, 30 (1915), 2223-2226; "Embalming of the Dead," *The British Medical Journal*, 1 (1898), 1403-1404.

³⁰³ Tercier, p. 10.

³⁰⁴ Tercier, p. 18.

While the ‘Last Sleep’ style gives the expectation for a serene expression on Cookie’s face, it does not offer an explanation for the absence of the Cookie ‘look’. Granted, a funeral technician would have been in charge of Cookie’s hair, but there was still a difference between how Cookie was presented at the wake, and how Goldin represents her in *Cookie in her Casket*. Cookie attempted to have some control over how she looked in death. In a November issue of *New York Post* it was noted by a friend of Cookie that she wished ‘to be laid out in my best clothes with all my jewelry.’³⁰⁵ The attempt to maintain a certain look in death reveals that Cookie wished to be presented as her glamorous self. The fashion decision as to her ‘best clothes’ was left to the interpretation of her friends, and because Cookie adapted or created many of her outfits from scratch, clothing would have been a tribute to her unique sense of style. Ironically, in *Cookie in Her Casket* one can barely make out her clothing between the strong lighting contrast and layers of necklaces and bangles. Sharon relayed that Cookie hated taking her jewellery off for x-rays, but the amount is suspect.³⁰⁶ The excess of jewellery – taking ‘all my jewelry’ literally – is likely a form of veneration by her friends, as it encrusts Cookie, a pseudo-gilding as through to make her more precious. Is this their way of honouring Cookie’s style, or do these bangles speak more to the grief of the mourners? Different from the experience one might have at the wake, in *Cookie in Her Casket* the jewellery helps to give Cookie’s body a shimmer that hints at glamour but hides her hand-designed clothing, and speaks more to the choices of the bereft than of Cookie.

With respect to the rest of the Cookie ‘look’, Sharon insisted that she put on Cookie’s eye makeup, rather than the funeral team, because it would be ‘what she liked’, but this detail does not show up on camera.³⁰⁷ There is no visible eyeliner in *Cookie in Her Casket* because the low lighting of the photograph obscured any makeup, washing the details of her face in an orange haze. This would have made a considerable impact on the visibility of the Cookie ‘look’ in death. The same orange haze makes the clothing Cookie was wearing indistinguishable from the bangles and flowers, removing another element of the ‘look’. The light picks up uncharacteristically smooth hair, and the tributes given by friends: flowers, the excessive jewellery, and a cloth cross. By drowning out the elements of Cookie’s unique ‘look’ and focusing in on more generic

³⁰⁵ *New York Post* 15 Nov. 1989 p. 6 quoted in Curley, p. 508.

³⁰⁶ Goldin, Coulthard, and Barker. This might relate more directly to the over-the-top camp funerals of the time. While little has been done on the academic research of funerals within the LGBT community, it was common for friends to take over control of the funeral and include camp and kitsch items, over-the-top colours or dress, to make the funeral more personal to the deceased and their lifestyle.

³⁰⁷ Goldin, Coulthard, and Barker.

elements of a funeral – particularly the flowers, coffin and cross – *Cookie in Her Casket* presents a neutral image of the deceased. This could be any dead woman but, as I argue in the next chapter, that is the point.

Further supporting a more generic and universal image of Cookie in death, the cloth cross of the photograph clashes with Cookie's life experience in favour of a more religious tone. Her funeral, arranged by her friends with help from the catholic Cabrini Medical Center, was held at the Episcopal St Mark's in-the-Bowery. As such, the viewing and service was Episcopal with a possible Catholic influence due to the Cabrini sisters.³⁰⁸ The choice of the cross, however, was that of Cookie's long time friend and former partner, Sharon.³⁰⁹ In an interview for the *I'll Be Your Mirror* film, Sharon comments that she picked a cross for Cookie's casket but does not explain why she did so. Cookie was never particularly religious, though important people in her life were. Her mother was raised Southern Baptist, a source of some contention for Cookie, and as a bisexual woman may have felt alienated by their doctrine against homosexuality.³¹⁰ This outsider relationship to religion resonated with Waters and Goldin, who both reclaimed Christian iconography in a secular context throughout their work.³¹¹ Because of this distanced relationship with religion, Sharon's choice to add the cross is a confusing one, perhaps more related to Sharon's sentiments on religion than a reflection of Cookie's wishes.

However, the prominence of the cross in *Cookie in Her Casket* suggests that Goldin had a further reason to emphasise the religious symbol. The images of Cookie's husband taken by Goldin months earlier at the same church does not show a cross in his casket, though he was the more religious of the two.³¹² The prominence of the cross in the photograph is perhaps more beneficial when examining Goldin's later series *Ten Years After*, which also memorialised Cookie and Goldin's relationship. Comprised of two sets of photographs: the first from Goldin's trip to visit Cookie and Vittorio in Italy,

³⁰⁸ It is easy to discount these influences, but as religion was not a part of Vittorio's funeral, it is likely that Cookie would not have wanted it to be a part of hers.

³⁰⁹ Goldin, Coulthard, and Barker.

³¹⁰ Mueller makes a reference to her mother's Southern Baptist roots in: Mueller, 'Pink Flamingoes', 78. Cookie's writing and lifestyle embraced a more spiritualist sensibility. In her short story 'Haight Ashbury – San Francisco – 1967', Cookie encounters a variety of organized groups, both cult and religious, including encounters with Manson Family, a Catholic confessional, and a Satanist. Cookie goes from one threatening experience to another, each time returning to the haven of drugs to open and soothe her mind. Cookie Mueller, 'Haight Ashbury – San Francisco – 1967', *Walking Through Clear Water In a Pool Painted Black*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1990) 5-17.

³¹¹ Waters was known for his use of the miraculous birth and Madonna motif in his films. Even before *Sisters Saints and Sibyls*, Goldin consistently referenced religious iconographic poses.

³¹² Vittorio, a non-practicing Roman Catholic, often poked barbs at the church in his political cartoons. The iconography of the church appeared to resonate with Vittorio as angels and putti were a regular motif in his work. Cookie Mueller, Vittorio Scarpati, and Edit DeAk, *Putti's Pudding: Cookie Mueller and Vittorio Scarpati*, (Kyoto: Kyoto Shoin, 1989).

the second taken ten years later. The later photographs include votive boxes of dead junkies in Italy replete with images of the saints and the recurring theme of the Virgin Mary.³¹³ Goldin's wider interest in the myth of religion and the power of its iconography is at play when she chose to make the cross a prominent part of Cookie's viewing.³¹⁴ The cross helps to associate Cookie with these kind of icons, fitting within a wider, more traditional, form of memorial. These religious symbol as and icons are widely recognised in funerary tradition – and in post-mortem photography – making their addition a way to ensure Cookie's memorial image is traditional, at least in America. Rather than a wild, 'crazy' or 'scary' Cookie described by Waters and captured by artists, we have a woman in a coffin in a religious service, like any other woman who died. The cross is also traditional in the history of post-mortem photography.³¹⁵ While we may not be able to determine why the cross was of significance to Sharon, I argue in Chapter 3 that its prominence within *Cookie in Her Casket* presents Cookie within a generic tradition of depicting the dead. The presence of the cross has a similar effect to the absence of the Cookie 'look'. In *Cookie in Her Casket*, any combination of the 'cheap', 'scary' and 'crazy', which Waters described as integral to the beauty of the Cookie 'look', is gone.³¹⁶ Instead, the viewer is faced Goldin's somewhat traditional and indistinct memorial image of 'Cookie': it could be any woman, any age, any cause of death. As a result, the image of Cookie presented for the viewing is generic and impersonal. This representation is finally captured in a photograph, where the deceased Cookie is framed through Goldin's gaze in *Cookie in Her Casket*.

The discrepancy between the living and deceased presentation of Cookie Mueller is a conscious decision by Goldin. The presentation of Cookie in *Cookie in Her Casket* has the effect of normalizing Cookie, making her image more universal, and tying her in with broader historical traditions in contrast to her break from the mainstream as part of the New York post-punk underground. In the next chapter, I will explore the implications of this more generic presentation of Cookie, as well as the circulation of an otherwise personal and familial image within the public art scene.

³¹³ Costa and Goldin.

³¹⁴ Goldin's affinity for religions iconography was discussed more in relation to her recent work. See, for example: Randy Kennedy "The Look of Love", *The New York Times* (26 October, 2011) http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/27/arts/design/nan-goldin-at-the-matthew-marks-gallery.html?_r=0 [accessed 5 May 2013].

³¹⁵ Crosses were common in photographs of children until the early twentieth century, and thereafter crosses, doves and other religious symbols became a part of the funerary scene for postmortem photographs of adults and children alike. Linkman, *Photography and Death*; Stanley Burns and Joel-Peter Witkin, *Masterpieces of Medical Photography: Selections from The Burns Archive* (Pasadena, C.A.: Twelvetrees Press, 1987); Ruby; Barbara Norfleet, *Looking at Death* (Boston, MA: David R. Godine, 1993).

³¹⁶ Waters, p. xiii.

CHAPTER 3

Cookie in Her Casket in Circulation

The previous chapter established a discrepancy between the representation of the deceased Cookie in *Cookie in Her Casket* and the living Cookie in the rest of *The Cookie Portfolio*. While embalming and the tradition of ‘Last Sleep’ resulted in Cookie’s unusually serene expression, as the photographer, Goldin altered the image even further with her choice of lighting, film, composition, reproduction and even the act of photographing itself.³¹⁷ The act of photographing and its reproduction are the central considerations explored in this chapter. Taking a photograph is, as Barthes famously noted, a form of death – the death of that moment.³¹⁸ When looking at an photograph, there is an acute awareness that everything in the photograph has ceased to be as it was *in that moment*, even the subject. So, a photograph of a living person represents the death of the person in that moment, but what of taking photographs of the dead? To begin with, the act of taking a photograph fundamentally changes one’s relationship with the corpse.

When film theorist André Bazin likened photography to embalming in ‘The Ontology of the Photographic Image’ he argued: ‘photography does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption.’³¹⁹ Bazin pointed to the photograph as a source of petrification, comparing the image to an insect encased in resin.³²⁰ He explained that the photograph can not render the subject immortal, but rather turned the subject into an ‘object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it.’³²¹ This distinguishes the photograph from cinema – which reproduces the object in time – and painting – an interpretation reliant on the subjective gaze of the painter.³²² While Bazin was not the first theorist to analyse the photograph as an object removed from time, his use of the term ‘embalming’ revealed awareness

³¹⁷ For more on the role of the photographer in the construction of the photograph See: Barthes; Owens; Sontag, *On Photography*; for more on its consideration in photography-based research, see: Tinkler.

³¹⁸ When Barthes termed photographers ‘agents of Death’ in *Camera Lucida*, he was referring to every flick of the shutters as a death: of the moment, of that particular time, place, and subject, that could not be regained. Barthes, p. 92.

³¹⁹ André Bazin, ‘The Ontology of the Photographic Image’, in *What is Cinema?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 9–16 (p. 14).

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Bazin’s interest in the effects of reproduction through the image aligns with his championing of documentary and Italian neorealist films. Bazin’s assertion that the photograph liberates an object from time and space was taken up by Sontag in *On Photography* when she argued that the ‘freezing of time...has produced new and more inclusive canons of beauty’ by keeping available what time would have destroyed. Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 112.

that the object removed from time is altered. Taking Bazin's analysis to its logical conclusion, the mechanical re-presentation of an object by the camera is not a reproduction of that object, and therefore an object removed from time and space is no longer the same. This applies to the embalmed body as well as the photograph.

With respect to a corpse, the embalmer's responsibility is to temporarily preserve the body for viewing and burial. Goodkin's 1982 patent for an alternative to embalming, accurately explained: 'The principal effect of the embalming process is to merely retard decomposition of the body or, more particularly, the externally visible effects thereof for a relatively brief period of time.'³²³ His clinical description of the purpose of embalming reveals two points: first, that the primary purpose of embalming is to delay the 'visible effects' of decay, and second that embalming is only temporary.³²⁴ Limited to the 'visible' stall of decay, the effects of embalming are ultimately aimed at the illusion of preservation.³²⁵ Like embalming, a photograph visibly abates decay, plucking the subject from the flow of time. In this way, Goldin's *Cookie in Her Casket* fundamentally changes Cookie by denying her bodily decay, and presenting instead the perpetual image of a beautified corpse. Still, the photograph has a sense of endurance, where embalming eventually gives way to decay.

The corpse, seen through the lens of time, is a transient object: moving from the corporeal state, in which it holds the visible trace of an individual, to a skeletal state of anonymity, through the process of decay.³²⁶ Embalming freezes the body's passage into non-existence, suspending the physical transformation in order to present a beautified final tableau. However, at the viewing there is a fleeting awareness that the body will be buried and ultimately decay. Unlike embalming, however, the photograph preserves the image of the un-decayed body long after burial, potentially outlasting those who might remember the deceased. While the photograph has greater longevity than embalming, which I will address, both embalming and photography separate the corpse from the reality of decay and dissolution, challenging the abject status of the corpse. In the case of *Cookie in Her Casket*, the enduring image of the un-decaying corpse is beautiful. This beauty was upheld through the acts of her friends (the jewellery clothing and makeup visible at the wake) and through Goldin's photography. Beauty,

³²³ Richard P. Goodkin, 'Method of Preserving Corpses', Patent 4351091, 28 September 1982.

³²⁴ Based on this, it would appear that longer preservation is deemed unnecessary, supporting embalming as a temporary suspension. Embalming also adheres to the desire for an illusion of beautified death.

³²⁵ Airès considers the desire to preserve via embalming narcissistic. Airès, "The Reversal of Death: Changes in Attitudes Toward Death in Western Societies", p. 205.

³²⁶ Immediately after death, the corpse is virtually indistinguishable from the living individual, as decay envelops the body, it separates from the living likeness to become a skeleton. Visually, the skeleton is anonymous, and in practice it is dissociated from any particular humanity.

before embalming, was a way to counter the decay of the corpse in the wake and in post-mortem photography. In *Photography and Death*, Linkman noted that a crown of flowers around a young woman symbolized purity, detracting attention from the abject corpse.³²⁷

The corpse is considered abject because it both represents the eventual death of the individual and because it is in the process of decay, a literal destruction of one's corporeal boundaries. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* literary critic and psychoanalyst, Julia Kristeva, described abjection as that which blurs ontological boundaries, jarring our sense of being because it challenges the limits that define the singular individual. Kristeva matured her theory of abjection from the developmental process when the child begins to distinguish their identity.³²⁸ In trying to define one's self, the child separates from the mother in a move that rejects her and establishes order and meaning in the child's world. Having delineated boundaries in the creation of his/her self, the individual would naturally be distressed when something questioned these crucial boundaries: the abject. These abject things resist taxonomy, both grating and ambiguous, their existence threatens to destroy the underlying framework that defines the individual, instigating a sort of fundamental identity crisis.³²⁹ Kristeva considered the corpse, outside of a religious or artistic context, to be the 'utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life', where death threatens the boundaries Kristeva contended are necessary to self-identity.³³⁰ Describing her reaction to a decaying corpse, she commented: 'There, I am at the border of my condition at a living being' and acknowledged the threat that she would 'fall' beyond that border as the corpse has done.³³¹ Decay is one of the key aspects of the corpse, which calls into questions the 'border' of one's living existence. Decay does not signify death, but it is the presence of death – even a wound or blood makes real one's own death, and therein lies the threatening abjection of decay.

Decay is particularly threatening because it destroys the individual. It is what

³²⁷ Linkman, *Photography and Death*, p. 37. Jacque Lynn Foltyn argued that flowers were placed on the head of the deceased in ancient cultures. Jacque Lynn Foltyn, "Dead Body: The Preservation, Memorialization and Destruction of Beauty in Death," in *Rest in Peace: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 72–83 (p. 73).

³²⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, ed. by Leon S Roudiez, European Perspectives (Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 12–13.

³²⁹ Kristeva, pp. 1–9. Kristeva's theory is relative to Lacan's work with 'object petite a', and thus, though the abject exists before our entrance into symbolic order, it is reliant on that symbolic order.

³³⁰ Kristeva, p. 4. Particularly in relation to decay it is significant that Kristeva separates out the corpse as abject from the corpse within religion. In addition to the sacred space that Christ holds as a crucified and risen corpse, relics of the saints are venerated across Christian communities, where the corruption of the dead body is disavowed and is elevated by its association with a saint. While the question of the corpse in religion will appear in relation to Serrano's work, the importance of the religious body is not as relevant to Goldin's work, nor to my explanation of the importance of staving off decay.

³³¹ Kristeva, p. 3.

one must ignore in order to live, and yet it actively eats away at our corporeal boundaries, until it engulfs us in death. Decay is also a threat to social identity, both of the deceased and of the living. A decade before *Powers of Horror*, sociologist Jean Baudrillard argued in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* that the horror of decay lay in voiding the corpse of its recognisable signifiers, reflecting the inevitable destruction of the social group:

The *social* abjection of decomposition which voids the corpse of its signs and its social force of signification, leaving it as nothing more than a substance, and by the same token, precipitating the group into the terror of its own symbolic decomposition. It is necessary to ward off death, to smother it in artificiality in order to evade the unbearable moment when flesh becomes nothing but flesh, and ceases to be a sign.³³²

Baudrillard's conception of decay as the 'voiding of significance' illustrates the corpse as a leaky container gradually separating from social existence. Watching a loved one decay, for Baudrillard, is watching the destruction of the symbolic connection of the mother, the friend, the son, etc. The threat to the deceased-bereaved relationship is also a threat to the identity of the living who is able to construct different facets of their identity with respect to social relationships. Decay takes the corpse from a subject to an object, destroying the individual in the process. Baudrillard stressed the value of objects as part of a social network of signification, directly criticizing Marx's concept of value based on use.³³³ This included the notion of the body and identity as part of a social system of interrelated values based on significance. Looking at the corpse in terms of its social relationships, Baudrillard's description reveals the corpse to be more than just the remains of an individual. A corpse symbolically represents the remains of other social relationships and, in decaying, the destruction of these relationships. Moreover, the ruination of said relationship does not affect the deceased; it is felt only by those left behind. In this context, it makes sense that Kristeva sees decay as threatening to the individual, not only because it destroys the physical limits of the body, but because it destroys certain self-defining aspects of the mourners. Decay is therefore a threat to the identity of the mourners as well as the physical identity of the deceased.³³⁴

After the destruction of the individual and the social the object-corpse is, as Tercier emphasised, a dangerous excess: 'They are what is "left over" from the state of undifferentiated existence that was sacrificed in the acquisition of order, symbol and

³³² Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, ed. by Mark Poster, translated by Iain Grant (Sage, 1993), p. 180. Baudrillard's comment supports Kristeva's view of the corpse as a violation of the limits of the body, though examines the effects within a specifically capitalist society.

³³³ See: Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin Books, 1992).

³³⁴ Again, it is important to note that in the case of relics in Christian communities, decay is disavowed by the spiritual significance of the saint and his or her remains. However, these relics are often cleaned and are merely bone samples, or something similar, which moves it beyond the state of decay.

language.³³⁵ As excess, corpses threaten the existing order with their lack of utility.³³⁶ Tercier acknowledged the need to purge the abject corpse when he argued that the social body must attempt to reintegrate the corpse into order through ritual. He suggested that burial and funerary practices met this need as they ritually cleanse the body in an attempt at social reintegration of the corpse. Kristeva also insisted on burial as the ultimate means of ‘purification’, a theory supported by the Freud’s notion of the taboo of the dead.³³⁷ In ‘Totem and Taboo’, Freud established the origins of taboo behaviour toward the dead in a fear of the spirit of the newly dead.³³⁸ The living, Freud asserted, fear that the dead will take vengeance on them.³³⁹ Freud argued that this fear originates in underlying guilt. In ‘Timely Reflection on War and Death’ he hypothesised that the living felt responsible – either because they were neglectful of the dead, or because of an unconscious desire for that person’s death.³⁴⁰ Freud saw burial as a way of burying guilt and alleviating fear for it both eliminated and cared for the body.³⁴¹ Caring for the body came with the rituals associated with burial, and the idea that burial was a way of settling, or bringing peace to the dead, which I will expand upon shortly. Burial as a means of purification further emphasizes the social rejection of decay, for the decay occurs out of sight.

The introduction of embalming into Western funerary rituals opened a space for the corpse to temporarily remain within society free from abjection. Without the threat of decay, the corpse can exist outside of the abject because, while there is no doubt that the deceased is dead, their identity and that of the viewer remain intact when the threat of decay is abated. Outside of the abject, the corpse (or image of the corpse) balances the appearance of life with the reality of death. Photographing an embalmed body allows for the image of the non-abject body to continue after burial while affirming the bereft’s knowledge of death.³⁴² With the photograph maintaining a non-abject corpse, the embalmed body could be buried before decay resumed, fulfilling the need to ritually reintegrate the departed into society through ‘purification’, while maintaining a physical object that imaged the same non-abject body. However, if the

³³⁵ Tercier, p. 149.

³³⁶ Tercier’s argument ties in with Kristeva’s assertion that ‘the corpse represents fundamental pollution’ (109).

³³⁷ Kristeva, p. 109.

³³⁸ Sigmund Freud, ‘Totem and Taboo’, in *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, ed. by Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin Books, 2005), pp. 55–57.

³³⁹ Freud, ‘Totem and Taboo’, p. 62.

³⁴⁰ Sigmund Freud, ‘Timely Reflections on War and Death’, in *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, ed. by Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 191.

³⁴¹ Burial does not deny decay, but allows decay to occur outside the visual boundary of society.

³⁴² Ruby, p. 43. Also, Bazin’s argued that truth was part of the mechanical reproduction of taking a photograph: ‘In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re-presented*, set before us, that is to say, in time and space.’ See: Bazin, (13-14)

body needs to be buried any way, why maintain a non-object version of the corpse?

In order to answer this question, the care of the embalmed body must first be considered. Care is a particularly apt term in relation to the corpse, for its historical use was linked with grieving. As noted in the Oxford English Dictionary, the earliest use of ‘care’ was defined as ‘to sorrow or grieve’, referring to mourning and lamentation in the 14th and 15th centuries.³⁴³ The definition acknowledges the way in which ‘care’ can connect the dead and the living, as lamentation expressed the emotions of the bereft while showing affection for the lost loved-ones. The phrase ‘to care for’ was used as early as the 13th century, but was more common after the 16th, and is defined as ‘to take thought for, provide for, look after’.³⁴⁴ My use of the term ‘care’ draws on both definitions, where expressions of care take into consideration the well-fare of the dead as though they were conscious, especially in relation to the physical comfort and appearance of the corpse, while expressing a continued connection between the bereft and the deceased.

In relation to embalming and preparing the body for a wake, the body is cared for by providing some measure of physical comfort. Physical comfort is generally demonstrated in the clothing and casket chosen for the wake and funeral. These are both visible acts of care in *Cookie in Her Casket*. As we can see in *Cookie in Her Casket*, caskets in America are lined with some form of soft material, often satin.³⁴⁵ Even in the 19th century image *Young Girl Sleeping* from the previous chapter, the body is laying in bed with a pillow, showing the body in comfort. While originally coffins were plain pine boxes, comfort began to take a greater role in burial and soon they were lined with silk, satin or any other material requested. As chronicled in the first complete historical assessment of funeral homes and directors in America, *The History of American Funeral Directing*, advertising and casket design evidences a trend towards comfort and aesthetics moving into the twentieth century. Even the shift from the term coffin to casket in the 1890s indicated a desire for display, as the casket is traditionally a case for housing jewels.³⁴⁶ Caskets went from being plain wooden boxes into items of luxury: lined in satin or silk and padded, encased in rich woods such as mahogany, and could include pillows. The design appeared much like a fine bed with a lid and the body in it

³⁴³ ‘Care’, Def. 1a and 1b, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2013. 17 May 2013.

³⁴⁴ ‘Care’, Def. 3, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2013. 17 May 2013.

³⁴⁵ Habenstein and Lamers.

³⁴⁶ Habenstein and Lamers, 273. While not relevant to the statistical information or the timeline, it is worth noting that this was commissioned by the NFDA and may therefore be biased in their representation of funeral directors and their practices within the community. It does remain a well-referenced book as it includes reproductions of period advertisements and images as well as providing a thorough examination of the industry’s growth. Their comment that the casket is housed for jewels is etymological and therefore should not be effected by the relationship with the NFDA, however, the comment clearly feeds into a certain view of the funeral industry.

was arranged to appear comfortable. The body itself does not need this extra element of comfort, but it is apparently of significance to the bereaved.

Dressing the dead for burial is another form of care, one that offers different kinds of comfort. As discussed in relation to *Cookie in Her Casket*, the choice of clothing and jewellery for Cookie's wake were carefully chosen to fit with Cookie's image of herself. They are also a way to cement bonds between the living and the dead through the choice of clothing. In their historical survey of English ceremonial costume, *Costume for Births, Marriages & Deaths*, Phillis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas relayed an example in Oxford in 1938 of a mother who wanted her daughter buried in a coat "to keep her warm".³⁴⁷ The authors noted that the mother's request for a jacket followed a tradition of using clothing to care for her lost child. The concern for the child being cold shows a motherly concern that she would have had if the child were alive. This example demonstrates how the desire for comfort reinforces a pre-existing relationship between the deceased and the bereft. Furthermore, in *The American Way of Death*, Jessica Mitford argued that the funerary industry prayed on this familial relationship for monetary gain. She particularly disparaged the funeral industry insistence that 'Burial footwear demonstrates "consideration and thoughtfulness for the departed"' because shoes are not seen in the viewing.³⁴⁸ While Mitford considered the comfort of the dead to be a commercial facade to fill the pockets of the funerary industry, the act of dressing the corpse can allow the family to take care of their loved ones.

For example, in *Grave Matters: A Journey Through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial*, Mark Harris began by relaying a story from his experience observing a funeral director discussing the viewing of a girl recently killed in a car crash.³⁴⁹ The funeral director suggested that the mother bring clothing to the funeral, recommending something special, along with the girl's makeup, without mentioning his own stock of clothing and cosmetics.³⁵⁰ Harris noted that despite selling funeral clothing and makeup, funeral directors suggest personal items as common practice.³⁵¹ With no commercial advantage, the parlour is taking into account the desire

³⁴⁷ Phillis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas, *Costume for Births, Marriages & Deaths*. (London: Adam & Charles Black Limited, 1972) 126. In their chapter dedicated to burial clothing, the authors acknowledge that 'The custom is universal for wrapping the body in what would promote comfort if alive and give it decorum in death' (125).

³⁴⁸ Mitford, p. 25.

³⁴⁹ Harris, as an environmental journalist, focused the majority of the book on the environmental impact of burial presented for the lay audience.

³⁵⁰ Mark Harris, *Grave Matters: A Journey Through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial* (New York: Scribner, 2007), p. 9.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

of a family to be involved in preparing the deceased for the viewing. The mother's agreement to the choice of a prom dress is an example of care for her dead daughter, because prom is a culturally significant experience in America. While some people rebel against the traditions, the majority of girls attending prom take great pains in choosing their ideal gown. The prom dress assures that the daughter is wearing something that made her feel beautiful. It also means that the parents can remember their daughter in a specific light. First, the dress allows parents to persist with the image of a beautiful daughter rather than collision victim. Second, the prom dress represents a milestone in the young girl's life, allowing the parents to maintain her in a space where she was moving into adulthood while still their little girl. The prom dress therefore supported the parent's view of their child. In this way, the parents extend their familial bond into death. In the case of *Cookie in Her Casket*, we can read the care taken in dressing the body as a way for her friends – particularly Sharon – to demonstrate care and reassert their relationship with Cookie.

While embalming makes possible certain forms of caring, *Cookie in Her Casket* demonstrates that taking a photograph also presents the opportunity for additional layers of care. In the first instance, a photograph can be a way of asserting a relationship after death: Goldin's insistence that her photographs are like a 'caress', in which Kaplan notes the subject is caught 'in a state of emotional attachment to the photographer', ensures that the relationship between Goldin and Cookie is maintained.³⁵² If the act of photographing was a way for Goldin to caress, viewing and displaying these images is a way to maintain that caress, holding onto the friendship in Cookie's absence. While the subject, Cookie, is no longer present in a living relationship, her 'emotional attachment to the photographer' remains in the photograph. One might consider the photograph, in this light, a surrogate that allows for an enduring relationship between the bereft and the deceased. A photograph can be returned to when the friend or family member wishes to remember their loved one, in some cases even speaking to or touching the photograph as a way of feeling close to them.³⁵³ These photographs can also offer a reference for the relationship between the deceased and the bereft, as in Barthes' discussion of 'The Winter Garden Photograph' in *Camera Lucida*. The Winter Garden Photograph, discussed in the introduction, provides Barthes a form

³⁵² Kaplan, p. 87.

³⁵³ Psychologist Vamik Volkan has done extensive work examining linking objects, including the use of photographs of those who passed, taken during his/her lifetime. For more, see: Vamik D. Volkan, 'More on Linking Objects' in *Perspectives on Bereavement*, Irwin Gerber ed. Manchester New Hampshire: Ayer Publishing, 1979; Vamik D. Volkan, 'Not letting go: from individual perennial mourners to societies w/ entitlement ideologies' in *On Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia"*. London: International Psychoanalytical Association, 2007. pp. 90-109.

of ‘photographic performance’ after his mother’s death that is not of *her*, but of his *relationship* with her.³⁵⁴ Recall that Barthes clarifies that the sensation the photograph gave him was more significant than its content: ‘For once, photography gave me a sentiment as certain as remembrance.’³⁵⁵ It is not a remembrance, for Barthes was not alive at the time of the photograph, and yet it recalls his mother. It is as though the photograph creates a new memory, or ‘sentiment’ by connecting Barthes after his mother’s death with a photograph of his mother before his birth. The new ‘sentiment’ is connected to the past of the photograph, though it exists in the moment of recognition by Barthes. It is a ‘sentiment’ rather than a ‘remembrance’, but one that holds the weight (certainty) of a memory. The power and complexity of this ‘sentiment’ is far too complex to debate in this chapter, though Barthes certainly relays that a photograph of a loved one can spark deep emotional connections across time and death.

While Barthes writes of an image taken before his mother passed on, the same can be reasonably asserted about post-mortem portraits, as they were originally included in family albums and kept with other photographs of important events. Considering the housing and display of a photograph is an important way to demonstrate care when considering a publicly circulated work like *Cookie in Her Casket*. Housing the image offers a way to care for (protect) the photograph, and by extension, the subject contained within it. Daguerreotypes were treated as precious objects, padded and carefully bound in order to protect the plates. Elaborately cases were influenced by miniature portrait making: plates were bound with a border, predominantly brass, and placed in the same cases as miniatures, padded with velvet or silk. Each element could be customized to suit the buyer’s request.³⁵⁶ These choices were symbolically linked with how the dead were remembered and mourned. This remains true today, where an image of a deceased loved one can be framed on a wall or mantel to show that the family still takes a care for them.³⁵⁷ The way in which casing represents care is particularly evident in jewellery containing post-mortem images, because of the precious nature of jewellery and the public display of the image. In his text on the hybrid objects inspired by the intersection of photography and memory, *Forget Me Not: Photography and Memory*, Geoffrey Batchen commented: ‘No longer seen in isolation,

³⁵⁴ Barthes, p. 64.

³⁵⁵ Barthes, 70.

³⁵⁶ For example, velvet could be embossed with initials, as noted in McClinton, 230. Daguerreotype cases interested collectors in America as early as the forties. See: McClinton, p. 229-233; Newhall, p. 127-133; and Batchen p. 14.

³⁵⁷ In America today, the photograph is usually selected from among pictures taken during the life of the deceased, rather than a post-mortem image. For example, I have several photographs of my parents around my house taken at various stages of their life to assert their enduring place in my life and acknowledge that remembrance.

the photograph becomes an extension of the wearer' acknowledging the effect of mourning jewellery on both the wearer and deceased.³⁵⁸ Batchen suggested that the wearer might also be prosthesis for the photograph. I underscore that jewellery integrates the photograph is part of the presentation of their mourning process. By wearing a post-mortem photograph, the bereft displayed their loss and demonstrated that they still actively cared for and thought of the dead. Discussing the photographs in lockets, Batchen noted that even a century later the viewer can tell the importance of relationships by their placement in a locket: 'Thus the locket gives material form to what is usually unseen, to emotional and dynastic bonds.'³⁵⁹ The same can be said of albums, which physically protect the photograph and placed images of the dead alongside weddings and births. Today, post-mortem photographs are generally a discreet practice, but photographs of a late relative taken during their lifetime are often framed and given a public space in the home, as I do myself, to show that the deceased are still thought of and cared for.

Cookie in Her Casket is different from personal post-mortem portraits because of its size and presentation. Personal post-mortem photographs are often small enough to be handled; placed in cases, jewellery or albums intended for interaction. Handling a photograph, even within an album, creates a personal sensory relationship between viewer and photograph. In contrast, the setting of *Cookie in Her Casket* as an artwork ensures distance between viewer and photograph. Nonetheless, the photograph is presented with care. Printed on rich Cibachrome and presented in a gallery, and later in a museum, which affords the photograph a level of respect, the photograph elevates *Cookie* through demonstrable care.³⁶⁰ The gallery setting in which the image was originally displayed – which ensures a physical distance between the viewer and the image – has the effect of putting *Cookie* on a metaphorical pedestal. *Cookie* and Goldin were outsiders during most of *Cookie*'s life, but placing an image of *Cookie* in a museum injected her into the mainstream. The image proclaims that *Cookie* has a right to be on that wall, an honour to her memory. In the 1990s the gallery space held significance with the avante garde and the rising art market, as opposed to museums, which were felt by young artists to be stagnating. As *Cookie* wrote in her column 'Art and About' for the *East Village Eye*: 'Only gallery art has remained pure' implying that museums were more concerned with appeasing the tastes of rich board members and

³⁵⁸ Batchen, p. 35.

³⁵⁹ Batchen, p. 32.

³⁶⁰ At the Pace/MacGill 1991 exhibition, the prints were 33 x 50.2 cm.

collectors to take an interest in genuinely interesting and new art.³⁶¹ The gallery space was an odd mix of the mainstream art world and the bohemian underground. Exhibitions evolved from the private showing of work in one's home or studio into the thriving art world alongside giants like Basquiat.³⁶² The gallery openings were filled with a mix of friends, other artists, and collectors making it a central outlet in the art community. Exhibiting *The Cookie Portfolio* at Pace/McGill meant that people who knew Cookie, either as a dear friend or a member of the art scene, were in attendance. In public circulation, the entire *Cookie Portfolio* allows a public memorial space where Cookie can be remembered, both by those in her circle and by a wider audience than she was known in life. As *The Cookie Portfolio* continued to circulate outside New York City, Cookie became immortalised in the image and reviews.³⁶³

Care is also lavished on Cookie through Cibachrome's rich colours, which enhance the contrast of the dimly-lit room, making the deep orange appear to emanate from Cookie. The detail of the photograph and the depth of colour are ways of caring for Cookie's representation, making sure to present her as beautiful in death. When reproduced in a catalogue or as a photo-essay in magazines, *The Cookie Portfolio* is extended further care by the editors who, in addition to the work already put in by the artist, are concerned with page arrangement, accurate colour reproduction, and the overall effect of the book or magazine that contains the images. Catalogues and other documents are also collected and archived, which would add another level of care. This is not true of every issue of a magazine, for example, but my own research has relied on the archives of a magazine keeping careful records and high-resolution scans of their back issues, in order to ensure the magazine is preserved physically and digitally in the optimal condition for viewing. Cookie is cared for by the quality production of the photograph, its reproductions, collection, preservation and in the spaces in which it is presented, but she is also cared for in the narrative that surrounds *Cookie in Her Casket*.

The Cookie Portfolio frames *Cookie in Her Casket*, giving a narrative to the viewer and encouraging them to take on a 'familial gaze' when looking at the photograph. The familial gaze is the act of looking by the family, but also applies to the awareness by removed viewers that an image was taken for or viewed by the family. The familial gaze was described by Hirsch in her introduction to *The Familial Gaze* as

³⁶¹ Cookie Mueller, 'Art and About' in *Ask Dr. Mueller: The Writings of Cookie Mueller*, ed. by Amy Scholder (London: High Risk Books, 1997), p. 272.

³⁶² Cookie eventually befriended Basquiat, and was a champion of his work.

³⁶³ The connection between Mueller and the votive image is explicit in *Ten Years After: Naples 1986-1996*, comprised of images taken in 1986, when Goldin visited Mueller and Vittorio, and 1996 when Goldin and Costa returned in memory of Mueller. The 1996 images have a recurring image of the Madonna and of votive scenes. Guido Costa and Nan Goldin, *Ten Years After: Naples 1986-1996* (New York: West Zone Publishing, 1998).

‘the conventions and ideologies of family through which they [the family unit] see themselves’ highlighting the internal relationships of the family and the convergence of public and private identity.³⁶⁴ Outside of the family, the familial gaze lingers, though it becomes compounded with additional gazes relating to the social, cultural and political contexts in which ‘the family’ and individual designations within that family are viewed. Hirsch argued: ‘the camera has become the family’s primary instrument of self-knowledge and self-representation – the primary means by which family memory is perpetuated, by which the family’s story is told.’³⁶⁵ Therefore, photography can serve as self-definition for the family while propagating what Hirsch called ‘the mythologies of family life’ through reproduction or rejection of myths within the photograph.³⁶⁶ Neither resistance nor propagation of the family myth was of particular interest to Hirsch, who outlined her interest as ‘the emotional power of the looks that circulate in the family’.³⁶⁷

My concern with examining the family gaze relative to viewers of *The Cookie Portfolio* highlights the attempt to control perception of the family through the representation of its individual members. This concern relates to Hirsch’s aforementioned description of family photography as the medium ‘by which the family’s story is told’, and specifically how the familial gaze is read by viewers outside the family. For example, the familial gaze can be indicated to dissociated viewers through display in the home or in albums to be viewed by the family and guests alike, a tradition that has evolved from Victorian album practice.³⁶⁸ In the nineteenth century, some images might have been hidden in private spaces, but many family images and albums were intended for public display. Batchen clarified that albums were once housed to entice viewing: ‘Some nineteenth-century albums were built into decorated stands, from which they folded down to reveal mirrors (presumably to let viewers compare their faces to the representations on the page).’³⁶⁹ The invitation to compare one’s self to the images of the family advertised the accuracy and detail of a photograph, but also allowed the viewer to compare the image of themselves with photographs of the family. This indicates the extent to which the family unit and

³⁶⁴ Marianne Hirsch, ‘The Familial Gaze’, in *Familial Looking* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1996), pp. xi–xxiv (p. xi).

³⁶⁵ Hirsch, p. xvi.

³⁶⁶ Ibid. Images of the family unit have been present in painting from the Renaissance. For information on the family portrait in America, see Ruth Lines, *The Visual History of the American Family*, Thesis (Flint: University of Michigan-Flint, 1987).

³⁶⁷ Hirsch, p. xxiv.

³⁶⁸ For more on the social dimension of family albums, see: Elizabeth Siegel, ‘Society Cutups’ *Playing with Pictures: The Art of Victorian Photocollage* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2009) 21.

³⁶⁹ Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), p. 49.

individuals within a family invited comparison and scrutiny.³⁷⁰ The viewer of the album would have also been encouraged to temporarily insert themselves into the album by way of the mirror, becoming part of the family or at least judging themselves against the family image. Photographs in albums or displayed throughout the home offered an image of family life to friends and less familiar guests, making family photographs a subtle way of making a familial impression on visitors.³⁷¹

In the case of *Cookie in Her Casket*, the size and separation of images reject the intimacy of touch. Further, their display in a gallery or a book places them in the realm of commodities with a financial transaction attached to the image (even if purchased by a museum for free public display) that is not present in a family album. All of these factors should help one dissociate entirely from the familial aspects of the photograph, but in practice, they do not. While the status afforded an image that is part of the art market helps to support an elevation of Cookie after her death, which I have discussed, the financial associations did not hinder the photograph's potential to elicit an emotional connection. In person or in a book, the images themselves invite comparisons, similar to an album, between the viewer and the subject, in particular, it encourages empathy on behalf of the viewer. Some images invite the viewer to take on the familial gaze, even momentarily.³⁷² *The Cookie Portfolio* in its entirety encourages viewers to step into Goldin's shoes. Ruddy argued in a feminist analysis of *The Ballad*, that Goldin's photographs are part of an 'affective documentary' where all of Goldin's images encourage the viewer to see through Goldin's eyes.³⁷³ Ruddy notes that 'Rather than vainly attempting to negate loss by producing a representation of the lost object, Goldin's images deny this negation by enacting loss' and in enacting loss they reproduce the sense of loss in the viewer.³⁷⁴ Similarly, Costa argued 'When we look at the photographs [...] it is almost as if a small piece of our own past were falling back

³⁷⁰ Albums could also be arranged and decorated by one individual, often the mother, increasing power to tell a story and present her family. Batchen noted that the Cantor family albums used trompe l'oeil to reflect their personal taste and creativity. Batchen, p. 56.

³⁷¹ See: Ruby, p. 110. While Ruby argued that post-mortem portraiture became a principally private practice after the turn of the century, albums included post-mortem portraits of infants and young children into the interwar period.

³⁷² This is particularly poignant in post-mortem images of children, where viewers often take on the perspective of the child's parents or other family members, empathising with the magnitude of their loss. Thanatos archive's online member comments demonstrate sympathy for the mourner. In the case of the postcard of a young boy in a casket, for example, members remarked on the intensity of the grief they might feel if it were their grandson. Comments toward adults tend to identify with the subject rather than the bereft, suggesting children to incite viewers to take on the familial gaze. 'Frankie' *Thanatos Archive: Early Post-mortem and Memorial Photography*, <http://thanatos.net/galleries/details.php?image_id=1111&mode=search> [accessed 6 August 2014]

³⁷³ Sarah Ruddy, 'A Radiant Eye Yearns From Me: Figuring Documentary in the Photography of Nan Goldin', *Feminist Studies*, 35 (2009), 347–380 (p. 349).

³⁷⁴ Ruddy, p. 352.

into place.³⁷⁵ As the viewer takes on the familial gaze, they are encouraged to consider Goldin's mind-set. *The Cookie Portfolio* is presented as a memorial to Cookie and Goldin's friendship, with text about their relationship accompanying the images. Additional interviews, also relayed Goldin's realization of loss when creating the portfolio.³⁷⁶ Knowing that Goldin realised the finality of loss through the portfolio engages the viewer in Goldin's experience of the images.

In order to invite others to take on the familial gaze, it makes sense that the image of Cookie would not jar drastically with existing conceptions of imaging death. With a generic presentation of Cookie, viewers can more easily accept and appropriate the image, even though it does not fit in with earlier images from the portfolio. Conformity is unusual in the context of Goldin's work, which broke from the dominant tradition of professional photography to embrace the snapshot, and documented the lifestyles of her social group that were considered radical or outsiders. Her images included less common subjects such as drug culture and the transgender community, so why would Goldin refrain from pushing away from the traditional in her images of death? I believe that Goldin was responding to a crisis in her time. In the 1980s and early 1990s, there was a desire to push away from the medicalised death because hospitals and doctors were seen as too distanced from the patient – they did not extend an appropriate level of care.

Because the intimacy of the images in addition to Goldin's text and interviews on Cookie emphasise their friendship, one might overlook Goldin's role as photographer and artist in the creation of *The Cookie Portfolio*.³⁷⁷ In post-mortem portraits from the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the photographer was usually not one of the bereft. As such, the photographer focused on issues of lighting and practicality, where the family could concern themselves with how they wished to represent their lost relative.³⁷⁸ Gradually, personal cameras made post-mortem portraiture into a largely private, amateur practice.³⁷⁹ In Goldin we have a mixture of photographer and 'client', with the additional blend of amateur and professional. The emphasis on her relationship with Cookie encourages the viewer to limit Goldin to the position of 'client' and 'amateur' (an association also supported by her use of the 'snapshot' style) however, she is a professional photographer. Goldin took the image of

³⁷⁵ Costa, p. 15; See also: Maria Walsh, 'Nan Goldin: Whitechapel Art Gallery, London', *Art Monthly*, 2002, 19–20 (p. 19).

³⁷⁶ Goldin, 'Nan Goldin on Cookie Mueller'.

³⁷⁷ This is supported by the ongoing narrative that discounts Goldin's professional role from as early as *The Ballad*.

³⁷⁸ As described in Linkman, *Photography and Death*; Linkman, *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits*; Ruby; Batchen; Burns.

³⁷⁹ Ruby; Linkman, *Photography and Death*.

Cookie in Her Casket for herself, along with several other images of Cookie's funeral that have remained private, so the image is at once a private and public image: taken for Goldin as 'client' and presented by Goldin as 'photographer'. This further encourages a familial sense of looking, but does not address the question that I have briefly raised throughout this chapter: Why put so much effort into this kind of personal care in a public art context?

3.2 Cookie in Context

When *Cookie in Her Casket* was first exhibited as part of *The Cookie Portfolio* in 1990, there was a great deal of concern surrounding care of the deceased. In fact, the overall societal relationship with death was at a crucial junction. As explained in the introduction, the ideal theory of a 'good death' was clashing with the increasingly open reality of what Tercier described as the 'hi-tech death' of medical apparatuses.³⁸⁰ Before Tercier, the sixties and 1970s saw books calling for a change in the medical response to terminal patients. Three years before Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's *On Death and Dying* was published, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss's *Awareness of Dying* encouraged American doctors to rethink their strategy of keeping patients in the dark with regard to deadly diseases.³⁸¹ Perhaps in response to this feeling, the first hospice in the United States, the Connecticut Hospice, was established in 1973.³⁸² These changes were slow to develop: it was not until 1982 that President Regan boosted hospice awareness and funding with the declaration of National Hospice Week.³⁸³ However, in part due to the healthcare system in America, there would not be significant numbers of hospices until the 1990s.³⁸⁴ In the meantime, there was a mix of responses to dying patients, and the stigma of dying remained.

HIV positive patients were largely overlooked by the healthcare system, as hospitals and hospices often refused patients care, uncertain how the disease spread.³⁸⁵ Those lucky enough to get treatment in a facility would find themselves in hospitals

³⁸⁰ John Anothony Tercier, *The Contemporary Deathbed: The Ultimate Rush* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 10. Discussed in the introduction, p.22-24.

³⁸¹ Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *Awareness of Dying* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1965); Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (London: Tavistock and Routledge, 1973).

³⁸² The hospice was designed to meet more than the physical needs of the patient, making space for the spiritual and mental concerns of the ill and dying. See: 'About the Connecticut Hospice' *The Connecticut Hospice, Inc.* <<http://www.hospice.com/pages/about/about.html>> [accessed 20 May 2013].

³⁸³ National Hospice Week ran from 7 – 14 November. Ronald Reagan, 'Proclamation 4966-National Hospice Week, 1982' (University of Texas) <<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1982/91382h.htm>> [accessed 18 May 2013].

³⁸⁴ According to the NHPCO, by 2012 44% of deaths occurred in the hospice.

³⁸⁵ On the quarantine of AIDS patients, see: 'The impact of AIDS on people and societies', *2006 Report on the global AIDS epidemic* (Geneva: UNAIDS, 2006) <http://data.unaids.org/pub/GlobalReport/2006/2006_GR_CH04_en.pdf> [accessed 10 May 2013]

rather than hospices, for what Sontag, Tercier described as a cold, medicalised death.³⁸⁶ Cookie spoke out against her own isolation and that of fellow HIV positive individuals in rallies and her health column ‘Ask Dr. Cookie’ for the *East Village Eye*. In one tirade Cookie insisted that her readers not approach the American Medical Association (A.M.A.) if they contracted AIDS because: ‘Like some bizarre sci-fi C.I.A. plot the A.M.A. seems to be trying, albeit unwittingly to obliterate the following groups: queers, voodooers, drug fiends, haemophiliacs who need transfusions often, and straights who share Sabrette hotdogs with gays.’³⁸⁷ The anger Cookie expressed at the A.M.A. was shared by ACT UP, who targeted the A.M.A. for their lack of accountability.³⁸⁸ Wojnarowicz’s ‘Postcards from America: X-Rays from Hell’ echoed the pervading sentiment of distrust and disgust. Wojnarowicz acknowledged that although ‘my life at times has a nightmarish quality about it because of the society in which I live and that society’s almost total inability to deal with this disease’ it would be worse to be on the street, faced with the threat of rape, death and ‘the overwhelmed clinics and sometimes indifferent clinic doctors’.³⁸⁹ The extent to which the medical community fostered clinical and inhumane treatment of AIDS patients was expressed by Sontag when relaying her experience with cancer in *Illness as Metaphor* and in discussing the social exclusion of AIDS in *AIDS and Its Metaphors*.³⁹⁰ This compounded with the political lack of response to AIDS and its social exclusion to make an AIDS death feel like a sin.

In *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, Sontag updated her earlier essay describing the metaphors surrounding cancer that alienate patients to consider the language surrounding and alienating HIV positive patients. Sontag argued that the militaristic and science-fiction terminology used in discussing and diagnosing AIDS turned the disease into a judgement.³⁹¹ In considering the level of fear and secrecy surrounding the epidemic, Sontag noted: ‘The most terrifying illnesses are those perceived not just as lethal but as dehumanizing, literally so’ and *Cookie in Her Casket* rejects the

³⁸⁶ See: Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Doubleday, 1990); Tercier.

³⁸⁷ Cookie Mueller, *Ask Dr. Mueller: The Writings of Cookie Mueller*, ed. by Amy Scholder (London: High Risk Books, 1997), p. 235. See also: Curley; Tina Jackson, ‘Arts: Elegant and wasted’, *The Guardian* (May 25, 1998) [Accessed: 15 Feb 2013]; Cookie Mueller, ‘One Percent’, *Ask Dr. Mueller: The Writings of Cookie Mueller* (London: High Risk Books, 1997) pp. 71-77.

³⁸⁸ For more on the ACT UP campaign targeting the A.M.A. in 1991, see: Stockdill, Brett C. *Activism Against AIDS: At the Intersection of Sexuality, Race, Gender, and Class*, (Boulder, CO: Lunne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2003) pp. 136-139.

³⁸⁹ David Wojnarowicz, ‘Postcards from America: X-Rays from Hell’ in *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1991) pp. 111-123 (p. 118).

³⁹⁰ Sontag deplored the ‘large insufficiencies of this culture’ including ‘our shallow attitude toward death’. Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), p. 87.

³⁹¹ Sontag followed this terminology from the Victorian response to tuberculosis. While other diseases were similarly isolating, Sontag’s *AIDS and Its Metaphors* focused in on how AIDS received a particularly strong social isolation. Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*, p. 131.

dehumanizing effects of AIDS in its presentation of the beautiful dead.³⁹² Cookie's death from AIDS-related pneumonia, combined with social concern about the disease and groups such as ACT UP, put AIDS at the forefront of viewers' minds in the late 1980s.³⁹³ The same year that Goldin first exhibited *The Cookie Portfolio*, the Red Ribbon Project was created in response to the World Health Organization's press release that estimated 40 million individuals would be afflicted with HIV by 2000.³⁹⁴ The incidence of AIDS deaths, in the meantime, was sharply rising until 1993, when it peaked.³⁹⁵ *Cookie in Her Casket* was yet another death and, at the same time, a symbol of all of these deaths. Goldin's curation of *Witness: Against Our Vanishing* (Nov 1989 – Jan 1990), referenced previously, spoke to her interest in re-visioning AIDS victims.³⁹⁶ Specifically examining *Cookie In Her Casket* in relation to AIDS, one can see how a peaceful image of the dead contradicts the derision surrounding the disease.³⁹⁷

The beauty of Cookie within *Cookie in Her Casket* relies on the composition and traditions of post-mortem portraiture.³⁹⁸ Because of this, it is tempting to downplay the beauty of *Cookie in Her Casket* as part of a tradition.³⁹⁹ After all, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, beauty has long been a method of detracting – or distracting – from the abjection of the corpse. However, beauty is also a choice made by Goldin in how she wished to represent Cookie. Beauty as an artistic implement was brought into central discussion in this time by Hickey, whose *The Invisible Dragon* (1993) argued that in the late 1980s art had re-engaged with the notion of beauty. Hickey particularly referred to the sensual beauty of Mapplethorpe, noting that bringing beauty to something not normally considered beautiful was a way of subverting expectations.⁴⁰⁰ Hickey focused on the sensuality of beauty and beauty that had a wider agenda, and

³⁹² Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*, p. 126. This sentiment is also described by a volunteer at St. Cabrini: Rose McGovern, "Love and Death in the Time of AIDS," *Rosy Cheeks Blog*, 2010 <http://open.salon.com/blog/rosycheeks/2010/11/15/love_and_death_in_the_time_of_aids_nyc_1980s> [accessed 13 March 2013].

³⁹³ In 1988 ACT UP had formed into a 3,000 member group and was spreading the slogan "Slince-Death" indicating the dangers of social and political disinterest in AIDS victims. Thomas Morgan, "Mainstream Strategy for AIDS Group," *New York Times*, 22 July 1988 <<http://www.nytimes.com/1988/07/22/nyregion/mainstream-strategy-for-aids-group.html>> [accessed 10 June 2013].

³⁹⁴ Altman, Lawrence K. 'W.H.O. Says 40 Million Will Be Infected with AIDS Virus by 2000', *New York Times*, June 18 1991.

³⁹⁵ 'HIV and AIDS – United States, 1981-2000', *Center for Disease Control*, June 01, 2001, <<http://www.cdc.gov/MMWR/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5021a2.htm>> [accessed 1 Feb 2013]

³⁹⁶ *Witness* opened the day that Cookie died, adding to the poignancy for Goldin.

³⁹⁷ Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*, p. 140.

³⁹⁸ Discussed in, among others, Jay Ruby, *Secure the Shadow: Death and Photography in America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995); Audrey Linkman, *Photography and Death* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011); Phoebe Lloyd, "Posthumous Mourning Portraiture," in *A Time to Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth Century America*, ed. by Martha V Pike and Janice Gray Armstrong (New York: The Museums at Stony Brook, 1980), pp. 73–75.

³⁹⁹ Which, as Danto argued, came out of the Enlightenment association of beauty with learning. A Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty* (Peru, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 2003), p. 147.

⁴⁰⁰ David Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1993), p. 24.

Goldin fits within this discussion. Similar to how Hickey describes the work of Mapplethorpe, in *Cookie in Her Casket*, Goldin brought beauty to a subject that was ravaged with anger and misunderstanding: AIDS. True, Goldin's beauty breaks from Cookie's unique sense of beauty, but that artificiality reveals the beauty of *Cookie in her Casket* to be an artistic choice to engage with the social discourse on AIDS. This artificiality, which Danto notes is the purview of art, is what spurs its social agenda. Danto argues that a good work of art need not be beautiful, but any beauty within painting is artificially created by the painter.⁴⁰¹ While Danto speaks of painting, the interjection of the artist is equally visible in photography, and was the source of inspiration for Hickey who wrote about Mapplethorpe's photographs as a new engagement with beauty.⁴⁰² *Cookie in her Casket* does not relay the suffering visible in photographs from Cookie's life, focusing instead on loss and the love bestowed upon her in death. As a result, *Cookie in her Casket* equalises, displaying Cookie as any other dead loved one, rather than highlighting the differences (real or imagined) of AIDS sufferers.

Cookie in Her Casket denied the isolation and distance of AIDS and the medical profession, showing care for Cookie: she is beautiful, appears at peace, and is decorated with jewellery and flowers. The photograph presents us with a 'good' death, or at least a memory of Cookie looking good in death. Townsend's *Art and Death* saw Goldin's beautified image of the dead as a counter to the view of death at the time:

In her response to death, in asserting the need to represent it, Goldin counters the discourse that marginalizes human mortality. More importantly, I would suggest that she counters the refusal to accept death's significance to individual and social life by representing death within a community and death as a lived experience that is part of a life, rather than as an unspeakable limit.⁴⁰³

His argument that Goldin captures 'death as a lived experience' draws on the documentary associations of her snapshot images, which he argued is similar to a family album.⁴⁰⁴ Townsend's comparison of Goldin's images and a family album supports my argument of the inclusive familial gaze, highlighting Goldin's snapshot style and use of the series. Townsend suggested that this familial documentary style accepts death as another aspect of life, photographed as part of the narrative of her community.⁴⁰⁵ My argument is akin to Townsends in the familial reading of Goldin's work, and the argument that this encourages a normalising representation of death.

⁴⁰¹ Danto, pp. 36–37.

⁴⁰² Hickey, p. 22.

⁴⁰³ Townsend, p. 71.

⁴⁰⁴ Townsend, p. 66.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

However, Townsend's argument refers to the role of dying and mourning in Goldin's work, where I focus on the physical manifestation of death (the corpse). Townsend highlighted the way in which Goldin demonstrates death as part of lived society. Nonetheless, I will demonstrate that within this representation, the abject reality of the dead body is mediated through the camera.

Goldin has exhibited several photographs of the ill or dying, however images of the dead are rare. *Cookie in Her Casket*, *Cookie at Vittorio's Funeral*, *Giles Arm* and *Gotscho Kissing Giles (Deceased)* are the sole post-mortem images in Goldin's opus, and they only span four years.⁴⁰⁶ *Giles Arm* depicts his emaciated arm against a white hospital sheet, not showing the face or relaying his death in the title.⁴⁰⁷ Among the remaining images that capture the body of the dead, only *Cookie in Her Casket* focuses on the dead body: the body of Vittorio is in the background of a distressed Cookie in *Cookie at Vittorio's Funeral* and Gotscho obscures Giles' face as he kisses him on the forehead in *Gotscho Kissing Giles (Deceased)*. The deceased are depicted surrounded by loved ones, turning attention towards the sense of loss and bereavement as part of life rather than facing the cold materiality of death. Further, the photographs demonstrate the enduring desire to present the corpse as comfortable, laying in pillows or a satin lined coffin. These elements of comfort, as previously argued, reflect on the desire of the bereaved to care for the dead. The image of Giles in the hospital shows his emaciated body resting on two large pillows, in a decorated t-shirt, being kissed by his partner. Vittorio is captured in a lined coffin behind his grieving widow. In both the sense of love and loss dominates the image of death. In photographs that show the corpse, Goldin focuses on love, loss and comfort, idealising the deceased and focusing on the bereft in the tradition of post-mortem photography. The image of Cookie's beautified death is integrated into society, but while her dying is expressed as part of life, her corpse is idealised. Rather than focus on the material reality of death, the rare glimpses of dead captured by Goldin focus on the sense of loss, caring, and idealisation of those now departed. *Cookie in her Casket* and *The Cookie Portfolio* present the dead as part of a caring community, deserving of and requiring care and as subject to the treatment of the living. By comparing Serrano and Goldin later, I will demonstrate that this more beautiful and generic representation of the dead Cookie encourages the viewer

⁴⁰⁶ Vittorio and Cookie's viewings were in 1989 and Giles died in a Paris Hospital in 1993. Giles' hospital stay was chronicled by Goldin.

⁴⁰⁷ When discussing Cookie in a twenty year AIDS memorial, Goldin draws a direct similarity between the creation of *The Cookie Portfolio* and her series of images following Gilles' illness and death: 'He and his lover, Gotscho, understood that it was important that I make the same kind of record of Gilles's life so that he wouldn't be lost'. Goldin. However, the image of Gilles' arm is not as striking as that of *Cookie in Her Casket*, in part because his arm is so alienated from his body by the white sheet and gown.

to feel empathy, and ultimately the beautification of the dead body fosters a social acceptance of death, but an idealised – or at least mediated – interaction with the dead.⁴⁰⁸

Section Conclusion

In these chapters, I have examined Nan Goldin's *Cookie in Her Casket*, an example of one side of the photographic portrayal of the dead by New York artists at such a crucial time in the social relationship with death. This case study allows an opportunity for an in-depth look at the complexities and artistic choices that come with photographing a subject when one is intimately acquainted with them, and then putting those photographs out for public scrutiny. Within the context of Goldin's work, *Cookie in Her Casket* is a turning point where the life (and photography) of excess, drug addiction and danger turns to the experience of addiction, death and a need to hold on and remember. The ethos of living hard and dying young switched to a desire to die well and take care with life, a shift that is palpable in the contrast of *Cookie in Her Casket* to Goldin's other photographs. I focused on the disjuncture between the representation of Cookie in life and her post-mortem image within *The Cookie Portfolio* and examined why Cookie was portrayed so differently, and how it fit within wider traditions of burial and post-mortem portraiture. I then considered the effect of this more universal and conventional image as a publicly circulated art work, both in the context of Goldin's work and in the context of a crisis of medical care and the crux of the AIDS epidemic in New York City. This allowed me to explore the familial gaze as it was used in *Cookie in Her Casket* and the importance placed on displaying the dead with care.

It is easy to slip into the familial gaze when looking at post-mortem images: provides the viewer with a narrative and history to attach themselves to, it is a way to create sympathy between the viewer and the image. However, outside the familial gaze, it becomes difficult to personalize the dead without a narrative. Without the understanding that this is Goldin's friend, the connection between viewer and subject is one of sympathy rather than empathy. Sympathy encourages distance by situating the viewer superior to the subject, the very thing that Rosler was warning against with the post-World War II use of documentary photography. By putting those suffering, dying and dead as the subjects of photographs, captured by a photographer who has power over their representation, there runs the risk, in Rosler's words, of being 'a little like

⁴⁰⁸ In the conclusion, my comparison of Goldin and Serrano demonstrates how important the familial discourse is to encouraging this empathy. Goldin's work is, and was, more positively accepted by viewers than Serrano's because of the way she presented Cookie.

horror movies, putting a face on fear and transforming threat into fantasy, into imagery.⁴⁰⁹ Distance allows photographs to turn threat into fantasy. The framework of the familial gives the dead a personal framework that closes down the distance Rosler chastised in documentary photography. However, the dead are not always the subject of the familial, as today it is common to encounter an image of a corpse on the news or in media before a member of one's own family dies.⁴¹⁰ In some cases, such as forensic and medical imagery, the photographer *must* keep a distance in order to uphold their supposed 'objectivity'. These practices not only insist on the impersonal nature of photography, a discourse that began with the mechanical replacement of the artist's subjective hand, they require it. Andres Serrano's *The Morgue* will be examined in the Part Two as an example of artistic engagement with this genre of post-mortem photography, seemingly in opposition to the personal, empathetic photography of Goldin.

⁴⁰⁹ Rosler, "In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)", p.307.

⁴¹⁰ The sensational use of corpse images is explored in detail in Christine Quigley, *The Corpse: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, & Company, Inc., 1996). Even with the pervasive use of images of corpses in the media, it was rare for an individual to see their dead family members outside of the viewing. Görer's survey in May 1963 of deaths occurring in the hospital, with less than 1/8 were accompanied by a loved one. Görer, 17-19.

PART TWO:

The Dead Outside Portraiture in Andres Serrano's *The Morgue*

Introduction

In contrast to Goldin's familial approach to photographing the dead, Serrano's is detached and impersonal. As a photographer, he did not have any relationship with his subjects, the various bodies of an unidentified morgue. Aside from the choice of subjects, the photographers have very different histories, both of which inform their reception. I have argued in the previous section that Goldin develops and supports a narrative for herself as a photographer within a group of close friends, her 'tribe', in order to establish a narrative of familial looking around her work. By comparison, Serrano's narrative is less personal, because he is associated with politics and religion and because of the framework of the morgue. As noted in the introduction, to photograph from within a morgue was not a new idea, and indeed in other parts of the world, Sue Fox and Joel-Peter Witkin were working within morgues of Manchester and Mexico City respectively. While following from the same tradition, Serrano's *The Morgue* is dramatically different from Jeffery Silverthorne's *Morgue Work*, the first major work of photographs from within a morgue.⁴¹¹ The colour and composition immediately separate *The Morgue*'s large-scale, vibrantly coloured, and dramatically lit photographs from the stark black and white images of *Morgue Work*. Where Silverthorne's work focused on the upper body and included the faces of the deceased, Serrano's *The Morgue* ensured that no corpse could be identified. The hidden identities of the deceased were part of the condition of Serrano photographing within the morgue, and the location of the morgue was also kept secret.⁴¹² As a result, the photographs present fragments of the bodies ranging from the upper torso of a woman to a small patch of burnt skin, and any inclusion of faces are cut off by the composition or obscured by a piece of cloth. This lack of identity, I assert, combines with the setting and titles – which, like that of Silverthorne, relay the cause of death – to create a more detached framework for viewing these bodies that befits the forensic and medical ambiance of a morgue.

⁴¹¹ These are included in Jeffrey Silverthorne, and Annie Proulx *Directions for Leaving: Photographs, 1971-2006* (Copenhagen: Fotografisk Center, 2007).

⁴¹² Robert Hobbs, "Andres Serrano: The Body Politic," in *Andres Serrano: Works 1983-1993* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1994), pp. 17–45 (p. 42); Anna Blume, "Andres Serrano," *Bomb*, 43 (1993) p. 37.

Additionally, religion and politics feature in the reading of Serrano's wider oeuvre, which further distance the subject from the photographer.⁴¹³ While Goldin also uses religious references and icons in her work, her Jewish heritage is not a prominent theme in her critical reception. Serrano's Catholicism, by contrast, is often evoked with regard to his overt and regular use of Catholic iconography and symbology, in some cases considered blasphemous. The mix of religion and politics comes out of this contentious point: the reception of his work, and indeed much of his fame, is related to the NEA controversy with the United States Senate.⁴¹⁴ Central discussions on American art in the 1990s were fuelled by the NEA scandal, in which one of Serrano's early pieces played a central role. The NEA scandal fundamentally affected public funding of the arts in America and, subsequently, the roles of curators and galleries. In a keynote speech at the ICA in Philadelphia, Michael Brenson expressed that 1989 was a 'decisive' year for the American art world because of the NEA controversy, the ripples of which still linger.⁴¹⁵

As Brenson notes, the NEA controversy has roots as far back as the removal of a public sculpture by Richard Serra in 1985, but was defined in 1989 by an NEA funded exhibition that included Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ*.⁴¹⁶ Missouri reverend and head of the conservative religious group The American Family Association, Donald Wildmon denounced the NEA in a letter, distributed throughout congress, insisting that Serrano's work was disrespectful and blasphemous.⁴¹⁷ Wildmon demanded that Christians reject the use of public tax dollars for support in what he viewed as an anti-Christian agenda. Though the exhibition itself had already run through ten cities without raising a negative response, Serrano's *Piss Christ* became the centre of heated political debate in congress. Sen. Jesse Helms of North Carolina and Sen. Alfonse D'Amato of New York rallied behind Wildmon to belittle Serrano, the artistic merit of the work, and the NEA for

⁴¹³ Religion and beauty are discussed, however, in Rabuss' work, which I mention later. Richard Rambuss, "Sacred Subjects and the Aversive Metaphysical Conceit: Cranshaw, Serrano, Ofili," *ELH*, 71 (2004), 497–530.

⁴¹⁴ The NEA controversy is mentioned in catalogues and interviews; see, for example: Diane Hanson, *Andres Serrano: America and Other Work* (London: Taschen, 2004); Bruce Ferguson, "Andres Serrano: Invisible Power," in *Andres Serrano: Body and Soul* (New York: Takarajima Books, 1995), pp. 8–13; Blume; Olivia Maria Rubio, "Salt on the Wound," in *Andres Serrano: El Dedo en la Llaga* (Madrid: La Fàbrica, 2006), pp. 180–184; Marcia Ticker, "Andres Serrano: Retrospect," in *Andres Serrano: Works 1983-1993* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1995), pp. 97–100; Piotr Piotrowski, "From the Blasphemous History of Art," in *Andres Serrano* (Slovenia: Moderna Galerija Ljubljana, 1994), pp. 3–15; Eleanor Heartney, *Postmodern Heretics: The Catholic Imagination in Contemporary Art* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 2004).

⁴¹⁵ Michael Brenson, "1989: Battleground Year," in *Imperfect Moments: Mapplethorpe and Censorship Twenty Years Later* (ICA Philadelphia, 2009), p. 1.

⁴¹⁶ Brenson, p. 4.

⁴¹⁷ For more, see Vilis R. Inde, *Art in the Courtroom* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1998), pp. 100-103.

offering a grant for the exhibition.⁴¹⁸ Amongst this uproar was a great deal of confusion. The NEA, for example, had not funded the photograph, which was first exhibited in 1987, two years before the NEA grant was awarded. There was also debate about the money distributed, as the \$15,000 award given to each artist covered future work, and the money for the exhibition itself included several other artists and other works by Serrano, all completed before the grant was given. Despite the NEA's explanation that they had neither commissioned nor funded that particular work and their arguments in support of the artistic merit to the piece, the work has experienced vandalism as recently as 2011 and inspired a protest in 1990.⁴¹⁹

Because of this upheaval, the NEA was reprimanded and there was considerable concern for displaying controversial artists. In particular, Robert Mapplethorpe was dragged into the Congressional discussion and his work defamed. As a result, exhibitions of his work were cancelled. Benson argues that galleries and public exhibition spaces reliant on NEA funding in any capacity responded with fear to this debate. Not wishing to lose valuable funding, curators had to reconsider all of their exhibitions and the artists in them.⁴²⁰ David Wojnarowicz was outspoken about the situation in the exhibition *Witness: Against our Vanishing*. His essay 'Postcards from America: X-Rays from Hell' described the loss, suffering, and emotional turmoil of the HIV positive in a world where the government and general population fail to offer support. Wojnarowicz attacks the lack of response by the A.M.A. and other governmental institutions before turning to 'the hysteria surrounding the actions of the repulsive senator from zombieland who has been trying to dismantle the NEA for supporting the work of Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe.'⁴²¹ His language expresses the degree of outrage felt by artists at the time, particularly in Goldin's circle, to the NEA controversy.⁴²² He calls out the museums of New York for having the same kind of censorship of Helms and D'Amato – particularly censorship of sex – and makes clear that these are attacks on freedom as well as art. This controversy ignited debate and strong responses from all sides, changing what it meant to be a museum, a curator, a

⁴¹⁸ The congressional record of Helms and D'Amato's comments along with other denunciations of Serrano's work and the NEA have been collected on: Julie Van Camp, "Comments on Andres Serrano by Members of the United States Senate," *Congressional Record*, 1997 <http://www.csulb.edu/~jvancamp/361_r7.html> [accessed 20 December 2013].

⁴¹⁹ For more on the 1990 protests, see: 'Protesters arraigned' *United Press International*, June 21, 1990, Thursday, BC cycle. Nexis. [Accessed: 1 January, 2014].

⁴²⁰ Brenson, p. 9.

⁴²¹ David Wojnarowicz, 'Postcards from America: X-Rays from Hell' in *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991) p.119.

⁴²² In fact, Goldin refused an NEA grant in 1991, declaring 'I don't believe in following illegal laws. You can't sign away your constitutional rights'. Goldin was referring to the changes in NEA grants that insisted artists not depict certain things, including any homoerotic imagery.

gallery, and an artist.⁴²³ At the crux of the NEA controversy was the question of funding, but the initial upset was raised around Serrano's work *Piss Christ*, which was denounced as disrespectful and blasphemous.⁴²⁴ Wildmon called for all American Christians to reject the governmental NEA funding in support of what he viewed as an anti-Christian agenda.

The NEA controversy followed Serrano's work from that point forward, but it has not overshadowed his professional art training. Serrano dropped out of high school to pursue a career as an artist, and attended the Brooklyn Museum of Art School at seventeen (1967-69). Like Goldin, Serrano was involved in the drug scene in New York, but achieved sobriety at twenty-eight and began to work in the mainstream as an art director at an advertising firm. At this time, Serrano created photographic tableaux influenced by religious painting, Dada, and surrealism.⁴²⁵ In 1983, Serrano had his first exhibition, *Memory*, a semi-autobiographical series of arranged photographic tableaux. As Wendy Steiner noted in the catalogue for Serrano's retrospective at the Philadelphia ICA, *Andres Serrano: Works 1983-1993*, the themes in *Memory* such as religion, the carcass, and blood continue to reappear in Serrano's work.⁴²⁶ When *Memory* was first exhibited, Serrano was involved with Group Material, a group that focused on the social and political impact of art. Three years before *Memory*, Serrano married Julie Ault, one of the original members of Group Material, which aimed to create new avenues for the presentation and consumption of art.⁴²⁷ Group Material began with a storefront on the Lower East side, where the collection of artists (many from the School of Visual Arts) joined together in 'a constructive response to the unsatisfactory ways in which art has been conceived, produced, distributed and taught in New York City, in American Society.'⁴²⁸ The strength of this message was one of change and openness, trying to move art to the whole of 'American Society', and break from the traditions that made it seem elitist. Over the years, Group Material engaged with relevant social issues and tried to create a space for outsider artists and viewers who were not familiar with the

⁴²³ For more on the NEA controversy, see, among others: Michael Brenson, *Visionaries and Outcasts: The NEA, Congress, and the Place of the Visual Artist in America* (New York: New Press, 2001); Kathleen M. Sullivan, *Art on Trial: The Nea and the Battle for Free Expression* (New York: Norton, 1993).

⁴²⁴ For more, see: Vilis R. Inde, *Art in the Courtroom* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1998), pp. 100-103.

⁴²⁵ Hobbs, p. 19.

⁴²⁶ Wendy Steiner, 'Introduction: Below Skin Deep', in *Andres Serrano: Works 1983-1993* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1995), pp. 11-16 (p. 12).

⁴²⁷ Julie Ault, 'Chronicle: 1979-1996', in *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material* (London: Four Corners Books, 2010), pp. 7-208 (p. 8). This is the definitive work on Group Material because it coincides with the creation of a Group Material archive, and thus includes photographs, meeting minutes, exhibition plans and notes, letters between members and photographs of various exhibitions.

⁴²⁸ Ault, 'Chronicle: 1979-1996', p. 22.

popular art market.⁴²⁹

Serrano consistently exhibited with Group Material, though not an official member, from 1983-1990 in politically engaged exhibitions including *Liberty and Justice* (New York, 1986), *Constitution* (Temple University, 1987) and *AIDS and Democracy: A Case Study* (New York, 1988-9).⁴³⁰ Serrano's link with Group Material firmly situates his early work within a political context. There is a sense of foreshadowing to Serrano's inclusion in the *Constitution* exhibition where Serrano's *The Rabble* (1984), a photograph of chicken feet arranged as though reaching up to a model crucifix, hangs on the exhibition wall painted with the words of the Constitution.⁴³¹ While this work was never brought up during the NEA crisis, it is an apt sign for Serrano's critical reception, for the mix of political and religious has followed his work. Aside from his personal involvement with Group Material's political exhibitions, in an interview with *Musée*, Serrano expressed that Ault was a significant influence on his career.⁴³² This evidences the importance of Ault, and her role in Group Material, in influencing and exhibiting his work. The political leanings of Group Material meshed with Serrano's modern engagement with religious stories and icons. However, he distinguished himself from the group with beauty as a focal point in his work.⁴³³

Two years after *Memory*, Serrano was the only photographer in a group exhibition at P.S. 1, which featured thirty-five artists, the majority of whom engaged with political topics in their work. In the *New York Times* Serrano was singled out briefly in the group as a political voice who 'uses a bittersweet theatrical style suggestive of Spanish Old Master painting to attack religion'.⁴³⁴ The references to Old Master paintings, Spanish and Italian, are conscious Baroque aesthetics used by Serrano to aestheticize and reconsider the subjects of his photographs. Serrano retained a tableaux style before turning to fluids as both form and content in his work. His 1987 *Immersion* series, first exhibited at Stux Gallery in New York, changed his career. The

⁴²⁹ Founder Tim Rollins explained that having gone to popular gallery shows, he and the other SVA artists realized there was not a place for political engagement already existent in the art market, so they created one. Tim Rollins, 'What Was to Be Done?', in *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material*, ed. by Julie Ault (London: Four Corners Books, 2010), pp. 217–219 (p. 218).

⁴³⁰ The full list of Group Material exhibitions including artists is collected in Ault, *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material*.

⁴³¹ For more see: *Constitution: October 1–November 14, 1987* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple Gallery, 1987).

⁴³² Serrano named the other major influence as his second wife, Irina Movmyga. 'Meet the Photographer: Andres Serrano' *Musée*, (March 16, 2012), <<http://museemagazine.com/art-2/features/interview-with-andres-serrano/>> [accessed 24 Feb 2013]. Serrano has been with Movmyga since 2010.

⁴³³ Hobbs, p. 20. Hobbs noted 'Unlike many members of Group Material, Serrano was reluctant to give up the hook of beauty, which is a key tool of his art.' Beauty remains a key consideration in the reception and reading of Serrano's work. As I will argue later, the beauty of the images in *The Morgue* elevate the subjects to an iconic status and also combat the inherent abjection of the corpse.

⁴³⁴ Michael Brenson, "Art: P.S. 1 Shows work of 35 Younger Painters" *New York Times*, (December 6, 1985), C26.

series consisted of Cibachrome photographs featuring various plastic, religious statuettes submerged in Plexiglas vats of blood, urine, water, or milk. The series included the contentious *Piss Christ*, which was initially received, along with the rest of the series, favourably.⁴³⁵ Some of these works were also included in group shows, and Serrano's work was recognised with an NEA grant and inclusion in the 1988 *Awards in the Visual Arts 7* exhibition, which exhibited at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Carnegie-Mellon University Art Gallery and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. The catalogue accompanying the exhibition at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts found its way to the desk of Reverend Donald Wildmon, and the NEA controversy began.⁴³⁶

The next year, Serrano's *Immersion*s were exhibited at Stux gallery with new additions from his *Bodily Fluids* series, which included a Plexiglas cross, filled with blood and the abstract *Ejaculate in Trajectory* triptych. The *New York Times* review of the 1989 Stux exhibition begins 'One of the few, unintended benefits of the Congressional outrage against Andres Serrano is that it has brought widespread attention to a good artist.'⁴³⁷ The favourable review begins with a mention to the ongoing NEA controversy, which was still being debated in Congress in December 1989. The review introduced Serrano's work by referencing the controversy, emphasizing how encompassing the effects of the controversy were on Serrano's reception and on the art world at large. In fact, Serrano's *Immersion*s caused another uproar in 1993 when the University of Alabama's art department purchased *Pieta II* – a photograph of a statuette of Mary holding Jesus submerged in urine and cow's blood. There was fierce debate among the students who protested the purchase of the work, followed by an outcry against the "most offensive" work at the state level.⁴³⁸ The University President insisted that the work fostered deliberation on the role of art and religion in society, but the school accepted that they would not put the work on display any time soon.⁴³⁹ While the controversy eventually died down, Serrano's work continues to be framed by this

⁴³⁵ See: Vilis R. Inde, *Art in the Courtroom* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1998), pp. 100-103; Robin Cembalest, 'Serrano Strikes Out Again' *Art News* 93, pp. 50-52.

⁴³⁶ For more on the history of the NEA controversy, see, among others: The congressional record of Helms and D'Amato's comments along with other denunciations of Serrano's work and the NEA have been collected on: Julie Van Camp, 'Comments on Andres Serrano by Members of the United States Senate', *Congressional Record*, 1997 <http://www.csulb.edu/~jvancamp/361_r7.html> [accessed 20 December 2013]. Michael Brenson, *Visionaries and Outcasts: The NEA, Congress, and the Place of the Visual Artist in America* (New York: New Press, 2001); Kathleen M. Sullivan, *Art on Trial: The NEA and the Battle for Free Expression* (New York: Norton, 1993).

⁴³⁷ Michael Brenson, 'Review/Art; Andres Serrano: Provocation and Spirituality' *New York Times* (December 8, 1989).

⁴³⁸ Robin Cembalest, 'School for Scandal', *Art News*, 92, 33. The student petition to have the work removed was formulated by the student council before the work was ever displayed.

⁴³⁹ The article noted that the work would not be put on display in the next two years, but implied it may be longer. The President also openly admitted to finding the work offensive while defending its place in the school's art department. Cembalest, "School for Scandal."

past.

Serrano's 1990 works, *Nomads* and *The Klan*, made use of a traditional studio portrait composition that remains dominant in Serrano's oeuvre. While photographs for both *Nomads* and *The Klan* were taken outdoors, Serrano provided a backdrop in order to reproduce a studio setting. The effect is one of disconnect, while at the same time eschewing respect. In an interview, Serrano explained, 'I'm able to alienate the subject from its environment and put it into a studio context' and the alienation of his subject has the effect of separating but also elevating.⁴⁴⁰ For the *Nomads* series, the studio setting took the homeless of New York and linked them with the prestige of an artist's studio, the (otherwise be unaffordable) commercial exchange of a prominent artist, and the historical tradition of studio portraiture. As curator Rubio argued in the catalogue for Serrano's 2006 Madrid exhibition *El Dedo en la Llaga* (The Nail on the Head): 'Putting a face and a name to these people whom we come across on a daily basis [Nomads] but whose poverty makes them invisible, the author returns them their dignity and obliges us to look them in the eyes.'⁴⁴¹ By photographing the *Nomads* subjects at eye level, or from slightly below – as in *Nomads (John)* (Figure 18) – the viewers must face them as equals, if not superiors. They are presented in rich colours that bring out the texture of their clothing, they are presented in larger than life-size scale which monumentalizes them, and they are privileged enough to be the subject of work by an internationally recognized artist.⁴⁴² Similarly, with *The Klan* Serrano noted in an interview that one of his friends commented that his images looked like 'recruitment posters for the Klan'.⁴⁴³ While he acknowledged that he, as a mixed-race artist, had to 'grapple with the idea', Serrano accepted that alienating the subjects within a studio context could elevate them because of the prestige and history of studio photography.⁴⁴⁴

Despite this new composition and style, Serrano's work was still approached within the context of the NEA controversy, which was viewed as an insentive for

⁴⁴⁰ Blume, p. 38.

⁴⁴¹ Rubio, p. 183.

⁴⁴² Serrano has been likened to the subjects of both the *Nomads* and *The Klan* series as an outsider. While Hobbs linked the NEA controversy to Serrano's sentiment as an outsider, the connection has also been made because of Serrano is from a mixed-race heritage. He has also said he has always identified with the sense of being an outsider. See: Hobbs; Anna Blume and Lucy Soutter, 'Andres Serrano', *Bomb*, 43 (1993) <<http://www.tate.org.uk/>> [accessed 2 December 2012]; Bell Hooks, 'The Radiance of Red: Blood Work', in *Andres Serrano: Body and Soul*, ed. by Brian Wallis (New York: Takarajima Books, 1995), pp. 3–7.

⁴⁴³ Blume, p. 39.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

Serrano's choice of 'taboo' subjects.⁴⁴⁵ Serrano, happily casting himself as an 'outsider', is consistently linked to his unusual subjects through the notion of their being social outcasts.⁴⁴⁶ Hobbs specifically links the NEA controversy to Serrano's sense of being an outsider, leading him to potentially align with other outsiders in society.⁴⁴⁷ Even if it cemented Serrano as an outsider, the NEA controversy opened doors for him, offering him access to contacts that lead to photographing *The Klan* and *The Morgue*.⁴⁴⁸

In 1991, Serrano returned to photographing religion more explicitly in *The Church*, which took from the studio style he developed with his 1990 works. I will argue in the coming chapters that *The Morgue* plays on the expectations of the portrait, but the effect of a portrait style in *The Church* is more straightforward. In *The Church*, Serrano turned to camera on figures of the Catholic Church – such as sisters, deacons and priests – and the symbols and spaces of the church in a studio portrait setting in order to alienate them from the locus of their power and question the validity of that power. For example, in *The Church (Monseigneur Jacques Bishop of Chartres)* three fingers of a white hand can be seen grasping the staff that takes focus against a the blood-red backdrop (Figure 19). While the portrait claims to photograph the Bishop of Chartres, it is not the man, but an emblem of the bishop, that is the focus of the portrait. Replacing the face with a symbol plays on the viewer's expectations of the portrait. While today a portrait is associated with the physical representation of an individual, the portrait was originally defined as 'something which represents, typifies, or resembles the object described or implied; a type; a likeness'.⁴⁴⁹ In portrait painting, symbols would be painted into the background of the portrait, or clothing and scenery would be painted to imply something about the character, skill, or occupation of the subject.⁴⁵⁰ In the case of *Monseigneur Jacques Bishop of Chartres*, the bishop's staff is part of the

⁴⁴⁵ In the catalogue for *The Morgue* exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art, *The Klan* and *Nomads* were linked with *The Morgue* as 'hautement tabou' (highly taboo). Réal Loussier, *Andres Serrano: La Morgue* (Montréal: Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal, 1995), p. 4. *The Klan*, *The Morgue*, and *Piss Christ* are all tied together as controversial because of their 'disturbing' subject matter by Eleanor Heartney in her review of *The Morgue* at Pace/MacGill. Eleanor Heartney, "Andres Serrano," *Art News*, 92, 132. Hearney notes that these emotive topics are subdued by the formal elements of Serrano's work, as I will address later.

⁴⁴⁶ In his interview with Soutter, Serrano casts himself as an outsider, saying this is a position he prefers. Blume and Soutter. See also: Julie Ault, 'An Interview with Andres Serrano', in *Andres Serrano: America and Other Work*, ed. by Diane Hanson (London: Taschen, 2004); Hobbs; Hooks, 'The Radiance of Red: Blood Work.' Hobbs specifically ties the NEA controversy to the sense of an outsider.

⁴⁴⁷ While there may be an element of sympathy between photographer and subject as 'outsiders' it is more likely related to Serrano's heritage. Having a Cuban mother and a Honduran father, Serrano was mixed-race and from a confusing heritage which would have put him as an outsider in the Italian community of Brooklyn where he grew up.

⁴⁴⁸ Serrano acknowledges this in Blume, p.38.

⁴⁴⁹ 'Portrait' def 2a. *Oxford English Dictionary* 2012. <<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/view/Entry/148230?rskey=MnJadF&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 20 December 2012].

⁴⁵⁰ Iconography is a vast field in art history. My own work has veered toward the relationship between this relationship between painted portraits and post-mortem portraits as typifying the individual. For more on this line of interrogation, see: Lloyd; Linkman, *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits*; Ruby.

trappings of his position as bishop. When Serrano turns the camera towards the object rather than the man, he highlights that the power and trappings of the office, rather than the individual who holds the title, defining the role of Bishop of Chartres.⁴⁵¹ Focusing on the staff calls into question the power of these symbols – both the power imparted onto the man who holds the staff and the origin of the power to make such a staff so important.⁴⁵²

The Church does not seem to follow the pattern of the outsider that bridged across *The Klan*, *Nomads* and *The Morgue*, though there is an argument for a Catholic feeling like an outsider among the other denominations of Christianity and an increasingly agnostic world populace. However, it does recall Serrano's early works, both the tableaux and *Immersion*s, in their critic of Catholic symbology, iconography, and the questioning of religious power and doctrine.⁴⁵³ The NEA similarly declined support for *The Church* and Serrano's 1992 series *The Morgue*. In 1994, a grant application by Serrano to the NEA included ten works – five from *The Church* and five from *The Morgue* for consideration. While the application was initially approved to go forward in April, the NEA reconsidered and rejected it in August.⁴⁵⁴ An *Art News* article relaying the story interviewed curator Andy Grundberg about the rejection of Serrano's work, to which he replied that the subject of his photographs were not objectionable and that “The only possible thing I can think of is that they were taken by Andres Serrano, who once caused a large fuss in Congress.”⁴⁵⁵ While Grundberg insists the photographs themselves are tame, the combination of Serrano's past with Congress and the religious nature of half of the photographs submitted was likely to add fuel to the fire of concern within the NEA, even five years later.

The role of the NEA in the trajectory of Serrano's career was perpetuated in his 1994 retrospective at the Philadelphia Institute of Contemporary Art. The catalogue described the NEA controversy as the foundation of Serrano's photographic career,

⁴⁵¹ Serrano acknowledges this in comparing *The Church* with his later (2011) series *Holy Works*. Selina Ting, ‘Interview: Andres Serrano’ *InitiArt Magazine* (5 April 2012) <www.initiartmagazine.com/interview.php?IVarchive=87> [accessed 1 Feb 2014].

⁴⁵² There is also an element of irony to the importance placed on such decadent symbols. Like the story of the Golden Calf in Exodus, modern Christians worship the elaborate gold and jeweled icons of the positions of power within the church. In these photographs, the grandeur of these symbols embodies the absurdity of the golden calf.

⁴⁵³ On Serrano's on-going engagement with religion and the Catholic Church, see, among others: Hooks, “The Radiance of Red: Blood Work”; Amelia Arenas, “The Revelations of Andres Serrano,” in *Andres Serrano: Body and Soul* (New York: Takarajima Books, 1995), pp. 8–13; Paul Elie, “Andres Serrano In View: Icon Maker or Breaker,” *Commonwealth*, 122, 18–19; Piotrowski.

⁴⁵⁴ Cembalest, “Serrano Strikes Out Again”, p. 50. The article noted two other photographers whose work was rejected, assuming all of the photographers were rejected out of concern for negatively impacting the Congressional debate to further cut NEA funding. The article focused on Serrano, but it is worth noting that the NEA was still under scrutiny for its support other photographers and sexually explicit content.

⁴⁵⁵ Cembalest, “Serrano Strikes Out Again”, p. 52.

though it was careful to reframe his *Piss Christ* image within a wider political context.⁴⁵⁶ This subtle change was indicative of the future critical engagement with Serrano. The NEA controversy was present in any analysis of Serrano's future work, but there was also a conscious effort to consider other political influences. In effect, the NEA controversy became a pillar by which critics would situate Serrano's work. In the introduction to the retrospective catalogue, Wendy Steiner introduces Serrano's work through *The Morgue* and in this way is able to mention his *Immersion* series as part of an artistic engagement with the duality of form and content.⁴⁵⁷ Avoiding the controversy, her introduction indicates the promise of viewing Serrano's work outside his political history. However, the catalogue later includes Hobbs' essay 'Andres Serrano: The Body Politic', which summarises the NEA, and uses the controversy as a background for his own reading of Serrano's work in relation to political crises of his time. For example, Hobbs addresses the correlation between the *Bodily Fluids* series and the AIDS epidemic and between the use of piss and the emergence of drug testing.⁴⁵⁸ By re-framing the NEA controversy in the catalogue, the retrospective ensures that Serrano remains a figure of political engagement and social friction, but looks beyond the limits of one incident.

The effort to re-frame the NEA controversy, while offering new readings of Serrano's work, only relaxed the tie between *Piss Christ* and his later work. In the 1995 catalogue *Andres Serrano: Body and Soul*, Ferguson embraces Serrano's history with the NEA as a context, and argues that works such as *Piss Christ* should be viewed as a response to the political climate of the time.⁴⁵⁹ Ferguson champions the instable reality of *Piss Christ* as a way to view all of Serrano's works: 'And, despite the title and Serrano's assurance that it really is piss that the crucifix floats in, there is no way to tell by looking. It is the combination of the instability of language with the instability of the photographic image that sustains the frisson.'⁴⁶⁰ While Ferguson highlights a valuable point on the interplay between title and photograph that I will bring up in relation to *The Morgue*, his insistence on framing Serrano's current work within the confines of the NEA controversy, specifically by considering all of Serrano's work as a jettison from *Piss Christ*, is limiting.

⁴⁵⁶ The retrospective includes his tableaux works, but suggests that Serrano's fame is due to the NEA controversy. As Serrano's work was awarded an NEA grant, this is a questionable assumption. See: Patrick T Murphy, *Andres Serrano: Works 1983-1993* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1995).

⁴⁵⁷ Steiner, p. 13.

⁴⁵⁸ Hobbs, p. 29.

⁴⁵⁹ Ferguson. This aligns particularly with Serrano's history with Group Material, which was particularly interested in how art functioned within society. In support of this, the inclusion of *Piss Christ* in a gallery in the size of an altar piece calls on the historical display of art and draws a connection between the gallery and church space.

⁴⁶⁰ Ferguson, p. 13.

In the 2004 catalogue for Serrano's *America* series, the introduction acknowledges the effect that the NEA controversy has had on critical reception of Serrano's work, noting 'Critics and commentators sometimes forget that he is an artist, not a journalist – and as such is at ease with symbols, metaphors and multiple readings.'⁴⁶¹ Downplaying the NEA controversy could, in part, be related to the very topic of the series. Martin Herbert suggested in his review of *America* at Gimpel Fils in London:

[...] it would be nice to think that Serrano, who knows all about being misrepresented, had decided to turn the tables himself and, in making a body of work that feels secretly fissured and problematic but is ostensibly patriotic, to ensure he never again gets called a jerk by Jesse Helms.⁴⁶²

Herbert's response to the *America* series was to highlight the irony between the series and the NEA controversy fourteen years previous. Given Herbert's response, it may be that the focus away from Serrano's early career in the *America* catalogue was intentional because the irony would take centre stage in the critical reception of the work, if not the minds of the viewers.⁴⁶³ However, the absence of a reference to the NEA in the catalogue only ensured critics would ask why it was not there. The *America* series thus demonstrates the extent to which the NEA controversy has haunted Serrano's work.

Throughout his career, Serrano has considered the religious and the political, and certainly been read in that light. Serrano's early work with Group Material gives a historical link that allows the politics surrounding the NEA crisis to remain the context through which his work is read. His continued engagement with taboo subjects – in 2008 his exhibition *Shit* adds faeces to this list – encourages such critical correlation between his contemporary work and his early struggle with the NEA. Critical acknowledgement of Serrano's engagement with beauty have existed alongside the political strands of discussion, but overall, beauty is underappreciated as it inroads into his work. These are not the snapshot style of Goldin. Serrano carefully composes his shots with lighting and camera angle, finished with the rich colours of Cibachrome. The beauty in his images, often referring to painting, warrants more direct engagement and the same attention given to his NEA controversy.

In the next chapter, I review existing critical work examining Serrano's pieces

⁴⁶¹ Eleanor Heartney, "Looking for America," in *Andres Serrano: America and Other Work*, ed. by Diane Hanson (London: Taschen, 2004), pp. 1–3 (p. 2).

⁴⁶² Martin Herbert 'Andres Serrano' *Frieze* 73 (March 2003) <http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/andres_serrano1/> [accessed 1 Oct 2013].

⁴⁶³ Stylistically, the *America* series is more comparable to *Nomads* and the *Klan*, which would make for equally compelling critical consideration.

in relation to beauty. While beauty is not ignored, I argue that this aspect of Serrano's work has been largely overlooked, or too easily ignored as a crucial entry-point into the works themselves. Chapter 5 engages in a direct analysis of Serrano's *The Morgue* (1992), opposing the contemporary rejection of his work as too detached, arguing instead that Serrano deliberately presents the corpse as an object, separated from its living history. The absence of subjectivity allows what Barthes called the *studium* – the formal elements that relay to the viewer the intention of the photographer – to dominate over personal connection to the photograph or the subject. In Chapter 6, I contend that within this *studium*, beauty transforms these corpse fragments from mere objects to religious allegories, touching on the sublime as Kristeva described it, the sublime that exists on the borders of the abject.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶⁴ See Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

Beauty in Serrano's Photographs: A Painter with a Camera

Given Serrano's history with Group Material, it would be imprudent to suggest that political engagement is irrelevant to his work. However, in focusing away from the political, this chapter will open to further investigation the notion of beauty as it analysed in relation to Serrano's photographs. As I have noted, beauty was not ignored within Serrano's oeuvre. This chapter will outline how it has been used, and overlooked, in order to argue that Serrano uses beauty as a tool within his work. Beginning with an analytical overview of the role beauty has played in critical engagement with Serrano's work, I demonstrate areas of exploration which would be valuable in considering *The Morgue*. My analysis employs the work of Arthur Danto, Elizabeth Prettejohn and David Hickey, who have written on the relationship that wider art history and criticism has with beauty. I further consider the writings of Wendy Steiner and Mieke Bal, who engage critically with beauty in Serrano's wider oeuvre, in order to flesh out the existing relationship between beauty and art within Serrano's work. I then turn Richard Rambuss's essay on the sacred and the abject in relation to Serrano's *Piss Christ*, which specifically considers the abject in relation to the beautiful. Steiner, Bal and Rambuss' analysis informs my own, though Rambus' consideration of the abject in relation to the beautiful is a larger influence on my analysis of *The Morgue*. The transformative power of beauty, and its use as a tool by the artist, will offer a way of reading the otherwise detached photographs of corpse fragments in relation to the crisis surrounding death in New York at the time.

Beauty is not completely ignored in critical reception to Serrano's work, though as I will demonstrate, references to beauty often remain unexplored. Serrano's use of beauty throughout his oeuvre is regularly associated with painting, referencing both his technique and his initial education. When attending the Brooklyn Museum of Art School, Serrano initially studied painting and sculpture, turning to photography in the 1980s.⁴⁶⁵ For some critics and curators, such as Arenas and Loussier, a brief mention of this past and a reference to the painting of Old Masters covers the extent of their engagement with beauty.⁴⁶⁶ Such critics focus on the political engagement of his work as though they are unrelated to the formal choices Serrano made. For example, in

⁴⁶⁵ Serrano's engagement with sculpture and painting is read in relation to his photography in, among others: Ferguson; Arenas; Loussier.

⁴⁶⁶ See Arenas, p. 122; Loussier, p. 1.

the catalogue for the Paris opening of *The Morgue*, Réal Loussier discussed the political prominence of death at the time, but the brief mention of beauty was considered only in relation to Serrano's training.⁴⁶⁷ For other critics, the beauty of Serrano's images is aligned with his advertising career, undermining the formal aesthetic. For example, Michael Kimmelman's review of *The Morgue* when first exhibited in New York City, rejected the beauty of the images. As he considered the beauty of *The Morgue* distasteful, associating it with slick advertising as a ploy to shock.⁴⁶⁸ Unlike my research, neither Loussier nor Kimmelman considered that the politics of the time were related to the use of beauty within *The Morgue*.

Within such underdeveloped analysis of beauty, there exists a strong connection between beauty and painting. Serrano's background practicing painting is a contributor to this correlation, but even within photography there are direct references to painting. His early tableaux works included airbrushed backdrops that give the sense of brushstrokes, and Serrano has discussed the tableaux with reference to surrealist painting and religious art.⁴⁶⁹ Flat backdrops would replace the painterly technique, but the scale and display of his works continue to draw correlations with religious and surrealist art. The scale of his photographs are monumental, and he likens this to altarpieces – for example, he famously commented that the ideal location to display *Piss Christ's* would be in a church.⁴⁷⁰ The size and religious references have ensured connections between his early work and altarpieces.⁴⁷¹ Furthermore, Serrano acknowledged in an interview that he 'attempted to mimic painting' in his 1986-7 works with blood, urine and milk.⁴⁷² In this instance, Serrano was talking about his attempt to flatten the picture plane and use of abstraction in his photographs as a 'mimic' of painting, but he also acknowledged the influence painting has had on his work overall.⁴⁷³ His past as a

⁴⁶⁷ Loussier instead makes a connection between Serrano's work and medical photography to relate *The Morgue* to contemporary medical relationship with the dead. Loussier, p.1. This another issue I address in the following chapters.

⁴⁶⁸ Michael Kimmelman, 'Serrano Focuses On Death' *The New York Times*, 2012 <<http://www.nytimes.com/1993/02/05/arts/review-art-serrano-focuses-on-death.html>> [accessed 22 November 2012].

⁴⁶⁹ Hobbs particularly emphasizes the relationship between his early works and surrealism because of Serrano's insistence that he 'to take the pictures in my head'

⁴⁷⁰ Serrano's comment that *Piss Christ* should be hung in a church was referenced in: Piotr Piotrowski, "From the Blasphemous History of Art," in *Andres Serrano* (Slovenia: Moderna Galerija Ljubljana, 1994), pp. 3–15.

⁴⁷¹ See, among others, Piotrowski, p. 8; Michael Brenson, 'Review/Art; Andres Serrano: Provocation and Spirituality' *New York Times* (December 8, 1989) <<http://www.nytimes.com/1989/12/08/arts/review-art-andres-serrano-provocation-and-spirituality.html>> [accessed 9 Nov 2013]; Donald Cosentino, 'Andres Serrano: Photographs' *African Arts* 23.4: Special Issue: Portraiture in Africa, Part II (Oct, 1990), pp. 84–5.

⁴⁷² Anna Blume and Lucy Soutter, "Andres Serrano," *Bomb*, 43 (1993) <<http://www.tate.org.uk/>> [accessed 2 December 2012].

⁴⁷³ See, for example: Peter Schjeldahl, "Art After Death," in *Columns & Catalogues* (Great Barrington, MA: The Figures, 1994), pp. 80–82; Robert Hobbs, "Andres Serrano: The Body Politic," in *Andres Serrano: Works 1983-1993* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1994), pp. 17–45; Andrea D Fitzpatrick, "Reconsidering the Dead in Andres Serrano's", 1992.

painter and continued open relationship with painting, both in referencing other painters and in using the tropes of painting, reappears in critical engagement with his work. However, perhaps because he has been so open about this relationship, the painterly aesthetic has entrapped existent analysis of beauty.

Associating beauty purely with painting and its techniques risks devaluing the role of beauty in photography. In the catalogue for the *America* series, Diane Hanson described Serrano as ‘an artist who uses camera and film as a painter uses brush and pigment. He does not try to document reality but to create carefully constructed, often cinematic tableau in vividly saturated colours.’⁴⁷⁴ Here Hanson establishes a dichotomy between ‘document[ing] reality’ and the ‘constructed [...] tableau’ in which reality is associated with photography and construction with painting. Rather than differentiating photography from painting, Hanson relays constructing a work as the role of a painter, and further associates reality with the camera. Within the history of photography, there has existed a struggle between the supposed verisimilitude of the camera and the subjectivity of the photographer. The history of medical and criminal photography reveals a consistent battle against the subjectivity of the photographer, perpetually trying to remove any influence or flaw in the act of photographing in order to present an objective image.⁴⁷⁵ As Norfleet explained in the catalogue for *Looking at Death*: ‘The medical and police photographers who took these images were mute witnesses making a record. They were concerned with evidence and truth, not with art, not with sensation.’⁴⁷⁶ This dichotomy, for Norfleet, exists within photography, however Hanson’s description places ‘art’ on the side of painting, and the ‘documentary’ on the side of photography. This fissure is problematic in relation to beauty because the act of construction, and thereby the references to painting, form the backbone for the discussion of beauty. This uncertain association implies that beauty in photography is read through its painterly aspects, or at least within the discussion of Serrano’s work.

Further, Hanson’s description of Serrano as akin to a painter is at once a reference to Serrano’s training as a painter, and an insistence on reading his photographs in the frame of painting, a nostalgic art form compared to photography.

⁴⁷⁴ Diane Hanson, *Andres Serrano: America and Other Work* (London: Taschen, 2004), p. 82.

⁴⁷⁵ See Stanley Burns and Joel-Peter Witkin, *Masterpieces of Medical Photography: Selections from The Burns Archive* (Pasadena, C.A.: Twelvvetrees Press, 1987); Martin Kemp, “A Perfect and Faithful Record: Mind and Body in Medical Photography before 1900,” in *Beauty of Another Order: Photography in Science*, ed. by Ann Thomas (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 120–149; Stanley Burns, *Early Medical Photography in America: 1829–1883* (New York: The Burns Archive Press, 1983); William S Smock, “Forensic Photography,” in *Handbook of Medical Photography*, ed. by Lawrence Stack and others (Philadelphia: Hanley & Belfus Inc., 2001), pp. 397–408; Sanford Weiss, *Forensic Photography: The Importance of Accuracy* (Indianapolis: Prentice Hall, 2008).

⁴⁷⁶ Barbara Norfleet, *Looking at Death* (Boston, MA: David R. Godine, 1993), p. 30.

Serrano is not presented as a photographer who introduced new use of light to photography; nor is he considered in relation to his contemporaries – Hanson brings up Louis Bruñel and his contemporary Salvador Dahli as the most contemporary comparisons. Instead, he is associated with painting, and masters from generations before his own. That is not to contest that Serrano was influenced by the work of these painters. However, the question of *beauty* is often restricted to this discussion of painting, formalism, and the past, where Serrano’s choice of subject is seen in contemporary political and social contexts (such as the NEA).⁴⁷⁷ This split between nostalgia of style and contemporary content results, for the most part, in addressing beauty in Serrano’s work separately from content.⁴⁷⁸ The questions and issues raised by such critics, even though they acknowledge and discuss beauty in relation to Serrano, differentiates beauty from photography, from the subject of the photographs, and from the present. Beauty becomes a separate entity, which belittles the effect of Serrano’s use of beauty as a tool, because its effects are limited to formal discussion, or nostalgia.

When critics like Arenas compare Serrano to Baroque master painters, they evoke such nostalgia. This particularly engulfs a reading of the strong, directed lighting Serrano is known for. Critics, including Bal, Arenas, and Piotr Piotrowski, have described Serrano’s use of light as akin to chiaroscuro, comparing the rich colours and religious symbology of his work to that of Goya and Bruñel.⁴⁷⁹ In considering beauty in relation to painting, critics and art historians relate the beauty of Serrano’s images to the formal qualities of the work.⁴⁸⁰ For example, curator of *Andres Serrano: el Dedo en la Llaga*, Olivia Rubio, acknowledges that ‘beauty is an essential component in [Serrano’s] creation’ highlighting beauty as a means for Serrano’s work to reveal ‘splendor’ in the taboo. However, Rubio’s justification of Serrano’s work as beautiful lies in establishing his ties to Baroque painting.⁴⁸¹ When done carefully, there is validity to this association. However, connecting beauty solely with painting undermines the

⁴⁷⁷ There is not always a separation between Serrano’s subjects and the discussion of beauty. In Bal’s essay, as I will examine in the next chapter, Bal argued that the Baroque beautification of the corpse elevated the corpse and ‘inscribed [them] into monumental time’. Mieke Bal, “Baroque Bodies and the Ethics of Vision,” in *Andres Serrano: El Dedo en la Llaga* (Madrid: La Fàbrica, 2006), pp. 185–199 (p. 59).

⁴⁷⁸ I have demonstrated this with relation to Loussier, Kimmelman and Hanson, but is also evident in: Paul Elie, ‘Andres Serrano In View: Icon Maker or Breaker’ *Commonwealth*, 122, 18–19; Arenas; Eleanor Heartney, ‘Looking for America’ in *Andres Serrano: America and Other Work*, ed. by Diane Hanson (London: Taschen, 2004), pp. 1–3.

⁴⁷⁹ These artists are particularly discussed in Arenas; Piotrowski; and Mieke Bal, “Baroque Bodies and the Ethics of Vision,” in *Andres Serrano: El Dedo en la Llaga* (Madrid: La Fàbrica, 2006), pp. 185–199. The references to Bruñel are additionally considered in Loussier.

⁴⁸⁰ In fact, Marcia Ticker specifically uses the term ‘formal beauty’. See: Marcia Ticker, “Andres Serrano: Retrospect,” in *Andres Serrano: Works 1983-1993* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1995), pp. 97–100 (p. 97).

⁴⁸¹ Rubio specifically aligns Serrano with ‘the great masters of painting, especially the Baroque.’ Olivia Maria Rubio, “Salt on the Wound,” in *Andres Serrano: El Dedo en la Llaga* (Madrid: La Fàbrica, 2006), pp. 180–184 (p. 181).

role of photography and risks the further association between beauty and the past. In her examination of the relationship between beauty and art since the 1700s, Elizabeth Prettejohn argued that formalism, established by Roger Fry in early half of the twentieth century, worked to replace ‘beauty’ with an idea that encompassed the aesthetic of a work, the skill of the painter, and the challenging nature of producing a work.⁴⁸² Prettejohn explained that Fry re-defined beauty in relation to art, claiming beauty in art was unrelated to general aesthetics and relied on formal qualities or, later, socio-political relevance.⁴⁸³ This dangerous assumption that beauty was simply a natural part of what defined an artwork undermines beauty as a tool of art, as Serrano wields beauty in his photography. Prettejohn noted that at this time there was a clear separation of beauty into the histories of art. As she warned: ‘there is a danger, here, of reinforcing the perception that beauty is a thing of the past, and that an art that aspires to beauty must therefore be merely nostalgic, if not positively reactionary’.⁴⁸⁴ While Rubio acknowledged that beauty had the effect of adding ‘splendour’ to the subject, the analysis goes no further than relating beauty to Baroque aesthetics. This is a step beyond Fry’s formalist aesthetic, but demonstrates how photography struggles to engage with beauty on its own terms.

Danto similarly focuses on painting in *The Abuse of Beauty*, where he argued that when abstract expressionism took an interest in the representing the sublime, artists saw their work as going beyond the beautiful.⁴⁸⁵ While Danto recounts the separation of beauty and art as a reflection of the post-war era painters, and particularly abstract expressionists, his discussion solely of painting and painters in relation to beauty affirms Prettejohn’s concern that beauty – even the rejection of beauty – is viewed in relation to painting. Danto is not, on the other hand, as concerned that beauty is under threat of being nostalgic, for he ultimately argues that ‘beauty is an option for art, not a necessary condition’ making beauty relevant to artists of any era because they can choose to use beauty or to reject it in their work.⁴⁸⁶ Danto’s statement allows for my reading of beauty alongside political concern, where both are at the discretion of the artist. However, it should be noted that Danto’s work came after *The Morgue*. When the

⁴⁸² Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Beauty & Art 1750-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 158–175. Prettejohn draws on Roger Fry, *Vision and Design* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁴⁸³ As Prettejohn insisted: “‘Beauty’ can give us more than “art” and more than “formalism”.’ Prettejohn, p. 191. Prettejohn referenced Greenburg’s championing of Pollocks work as an example of ‘beauty’ in art allowing for a viewer to be challenged by the apparent ‘ugliness’ of a painting.

⁴⁸⁴ Prettejohn, p. 202.

⁴⁸⁵ Danto uses Barnett Newman’s *Onement I* to demonstrate that artists began to feel the attainment of the sublime was so much more than beauty, to the point that they became polarized. A Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty* (Peru, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 2003), pp. 143–4.

⁴⁸⁶ Danto, p. 160.

exhibition first opened, critics were still wary of the notion of beauty in this kind of photography. In Kimmelman's review of *The Morgue*, he derided Serrano's images as 'decorative' rejecting their beauty as anything other than a detractor from the work.⁴⁸⁷ This follows from the Greenburgian championing of the apparently 'ugly' as proof of challenging and valuable artwork, which Danto noted was also of value to abstract expressionists who saw beauty as a detractor from art attempting to reach the sublime.⁴⁸⁸ Kimmelman even compared the images to raw documentary photographs of deformed babies by Diana Michener, suggesting he found more value in photography that turned away from beauty.⁴⁸⁹ This, again, raises the issue of photography documenting 'reality' where a beautiful photograph is constructed, but also demonstrates how beauty was conceived as a detractor from the images in *The Morgue*.⁴⁹⁰

Danto's argument stands on the back of Hickey's *The Invisible Dragon*, published ten years earlier. Hickey argued that the 1990s would see the return of beauty as a central concern within the art world, noting that before the late 1980s it was sequestered to the notion of being visually appealing, but that the beauty could be used as a mechanism for presenting meaning in art and possibly affecting change.⁴⁹¹ *The Invisible Dragon* was published the same year *The Morgue* was exhibited, making Hickey's argument appropriate as a gauge of how beauty was discussed within art at the time. Unlike Pettejohn and Danto, Hickey brought beauty into discussion with relation to photography, which further broke from the notion of beauty as a nostalgic affect of painting.

Using Serrano's words, Hobbs argued that even when working with Group Material, it was clear that Serrano was separate because of his belief that "When one works with difficult subjects [...] it is necessary to put beauty back into the accomplished work."⁴⁹² The *necessity* of beauty in Serrano's mind is reason enough to consider beauty a keystone to his work, but Serrano's insistence that he 'put[s] beauty back' into his work notes that it is not about finding something beautiful but about

⁴⁸⁷ Kimmelman, 'Serrano Focuses on Death'. I specifically engage with Kimmelman's review in the next chapter, arguing that his narrow-minded view of photographing the dead caused him to ignore a central concern of the exhibition.

⁴⁸⁸ Danto also noted that philosophically, beauty was associated not with a quality of the artwork but as a reflection of one's taste and preference for certain paintings or works of art. This belittled the value of beauty as something merely learned and limited to the impression of the viewer or art market value of the work. For more, see: Clement Greenberg, and John O'Brian, *The Collected Essays and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty* (Peru, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 2003).

⁴⁸⁹ Kimmelman, 'Serrano Focuses on Death'.

⁴⁹⁰ In fact, Kimmelman does describe the photographs as 'artificial' and 'mannered'. Kimmelman.

⁴⁹¹ David Hickey, 'Enter the Dragon: On the Vernacular of Beauty' in *The Invisible Dragon* (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1993), pp. 11–26.

⁴⁹² Hobbs, p. 20.

making it beautiful. This was the central argument Hickey made in relation to photographer Robert Mapplethorpe in *Enter the Dragon*: that beauty incites the viewer to discover meaning in a work, therefore beauty is a method, not a result.⁴⁹³ The combination of beauty with subject matter, as Hickey pointed out, is central to understanding beauty in photography. Hickey's argument allows for the possibility that beauty can be used to indicate the sublime, or re-present the sublime in a subject, though he does not directly address the issue. In this framework, beauty is a tool of the artist, used to engage with, and possibly mediate or elevate the subject. This idea, which I will use in my analysis of *The Morgue*, is rarely confronted in relation to Serrano's work. For those that consider beauty within Serrano's work, Bal and Wendy Steiner are the few that do not frame beauty as either a consequence of Serrano's advertising background, or an unexamined reference to Baroque painting.⁴⁹⁴

Bal's 'Baroque Bodies and the Ethics of Vision' comes closest to challenging the danger of limiting beauty to the past. Comparing Serrano to Caravaggio, Bal argues that Serrano's work redefines the Baroque 'as a relevant aesthetic for today'.⁴⁹⁵ By drawing a comparison between the lighting and colours within *The Morgue* to the Baroque master painters, Bal establishes a notion of beauty in relation to painting; however, she uses this connection to argue that Serrano 'redefines' the notion of Baroque for contemporary culture.⁴⁹⁶ Her argument establishes the connection between Serrano and artists like Caravaggio as an ongoing historical reimagining, rather than a nostalgic affect. As a result, her work denies the nostalgia of painting, instead demonstrating that the photograph can add a new dimension or consideration to traditions of painting. As the title of her essay implies, Bal presents the aestheticization of the corpses as a way to combat voyeurism.⁴⁹⁷ Related to my own argument, by freeing the formal choices from a sense of nostalgia, Bal is able to historicize the dead. She demonstrates that by using a style that visually mimics Baroque painting, in *The Morgue* 'the dead are inscribed into monumental time'.⁴⁹⁸ Rather than nostalgic, the correlation to master paintings elevates the subject.⁴⁹⁹ Like Bal, my work reads beauty

⁴⁹³ Hickey argued '[...] the vernacular of beauty, in its democratic appeal, remains a potent instrument for change in this civilization'; David Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1993), p. 24.

⁴⁹⁴ Hobbs frames beauty in Serrano's images as a consequence of his advertising background, making a correlation between beauty and the seduction of the image, which is not part of my analysis. Piotrowski rities who mention beauty in relation to the baroque, but do not analyse this relationship beyond Serrano's education within a museum. Piotrowski; Hobbs, p. 22.

⁴⁹⁵ Bal, p. 185.

⁴⁹⁶ Bal explains: 'the power of Serrano's photographs lies [...] in the way they redefine for contemporary culture the a concept that, for lack of a better word, I term *Baroque*.' Bal, p.185.

⁴⁹⁷ Bal, p. 191.

⁴⁹⁸ Bal, p.192.

⁴⁹⁹ Bal's argument informs my argument on the elevation of the corpses as a form of care in Chapter 6

through the studium of the photograph, and reconsiders the nostalgia of the Baroque as a historical and monumental representation of the subjects. Nonetheless, Bal's focus on the Baroque limits her argument to a discussion on the effects of art on the subject, which is then self-reflexive. I broaden the scope to take into account the historical period in which the work was created, and its contemporary impact. Bal also limits her analysis of beauty to those formal elements akin to the Baroque, which are present in *The Morgue*, but this curtails an analysis of the effects of beauty on an abject subject matter, and therefore the relation of the sublime and the abject.

Steiner's consideration of beauty in *The Morgue* highlights this tension between the beauty of the photograph and the abject subject matter. In the catalogue for Serrano's 1994 retrospective at the Institute of Contemporary art in Philadelphia, Steiner began by insisting 'I walked out of the *Morgue* exhibition distressed' because the corpses presented were at once 'not a pretty sight. But of course, that is just what they were; Serrano had made them very pretty indeed.'⁵⁰⁰ Using the term 'pretty', Steiner refers to the aesthetics of the photograph, recalling the historical tension between aesthetics and reality in a photograph.⁵⁰¹ She acknowledges that photography evolved and as a result, artists like Serrano have embraced the visibility of the artist's hand within the photograph through colour, composition, lighting and angle.⁵⁰² Steiner sees the beauty in Serrano's work as 'an aesthetics of content' where the very act of making something beautiful, and making it art, alter the subject of the image.⁵⁰³ This leads Steiner to consider the relationship between form and content throughout Serrano's oeuvre. By taking into account voyeurism, Bal similarly melds form and content, but the primary concern of her argument was the way in which Serrano reproduces techniques of Baroque painting in photography in order to update the notion of Baroque. Steiner's argument, in contrast, focuses on the content of the images. Discussing one of Serrano's early tableaux works, *Cabeza de Vaca* (1984) Steiner explains: 'Here is the artwork: a severed cow's head mounted on a marble base. In this picture, art makes a trophy out of slaughter', outlining a pattern wherein art transforms the subject matter.⁵⁰⁴ The transformative power of form on content is revisited in my analysis of *The Morgue* in Chapter 6.

⁵⁰⁰ Steiner, p. 11.

⁵⁰¹ While Steiner acknowledges elements of the religious sublime in Serrano's oeuvre, the term 'pretty' is not associated with the sublime. Steiner instead focuses on the form-content relationship, which allows the space for the sublime to be beautiful, but does not directly address the idea that beauty can indicate the sublime of the subject.

⁵⁰² Steiner includes in this list of photographers Robert Mapplethorpe, Cindy Sherman, and Sally Mann. Steiner, pp. 11–12.

⁵⁰³ Steiner, p. 12.

⁵⁰⁴ She also notes that this 'elevates' the cow's head, transforming the work into a monument. Steiner, p. 12.

Comparing Steiner's comments to Bal, Steiner also argues that Serrano elevates his subjects through form. Though Bal established the monumentalizing effect of form within the historical grandeur of Baroque and Steiner did not historicize Serrano's formal choices, they both compared the formal strength of Serrano's work to painting. Steiner was more contemporary in her comparisons within *the Morgue*, likening the close-up photographs of skin to abstract painting.⁵⁰⁵ Bal and Steiner's mutual assertion of beauty in the photograph through painting relays a struggle within art history to find a description of beauty rooted solely in photography. Perhaps because of the documentary history of photography, and its initial association with objectivity, relaying the beauty of a photograph is challenging without references to painting techniques or styles. My own analysis will also reference painters as an assertion of the beauty within *The Morgue*, but it does not always accurately relay the awe within photographic beauty. In relation to *The Morgue*, for example, I discuss the awesome beauty of the detail the camera is able to capture. Still, Steiner references abstraction to illustrate how a segment of burnt skin can be magnified into a beautiful wash of colour and texture. Making such a comparison, however, can limit the notion of beauty to being painterly. This is a struggle that I have been unable to find a suitable alternative to, but I attempt to demonstrate the detail of the camera as an additional demonstration of beauty.

Though Steiner looks beyond the Baroque, her analysis informs an internal debate on the meaning and value of symbols within art. For Steiner, beauty is framed as an artistic exercise that elevates or denigrates the subject on the basis of its beauty *as an artwork*; the two are inextricably linked. Further, while Steiner makes the point that the corpses in *The Morgue* are unexpectedly 'pretty' she does not expand on the effects of beauty on the abject corpse.⁵⁰⁶ Considering that the abject body is a recurrent theme in Serrano's wider oeuvre, its analysis is rare in relation to beauty. The most relevant analysis would be Richard Rambuss' essay examining *Piss Christ*. Rambuss examines the mix of aesthetic and abject in the formal beauty of the illuminated amber urine, in which the statuette of Christ is submerged. Immersed in a beautiful but base material, the crucifixion scene recalls the human, material body within the divine body of Christ. The urine similarly recalls the human, but in the photograph the purity of colour offers a

⁵⁰⁵ Discussing *Burnt to Death III*, a detailed image of burnt, bloodied, flesh, Steiner explained 'As in so many of Serrano's reversals, the pure content switches back into pure form: The burnt flesh flips over to a color-field abstraction'. Steiner, p. 16.

⁵⁰⁶ She instead uses the body to refocus on the dual concerns of art (form and content): 'In the body, as in art, form and content are at war.' Steiner, p. 11.

counter to instinctual notions of urine as unappealing, if not abject.⁵⁰⁷ This contrast, he explains highlights the debate within Christian mythology of the question of Jesus' body as both sacred and human.⁵⁰⁸ This conflict stems from the religious purification of the abject, which Kristeva also granted in her discussion of abjection.⁵⁰⁹ Rambuss' analysis of *Piss Christ* marries form and content through religion.

Beauty and abject substances, specifically bodily fluid, was of concern in Serrano's 1986-87 series using blood, milk and urine, where the purity of colours and abstract composition made striking the already symbolically potent liquids. In the catalogue of *Body and Soul*, Hooks expressed that viewers found the beauty of the images 'starling' because 'The blood that we associate more and more with a world of impurity, violation, and death, is spectacularly transformed in these photographs.'⁵¹⁰ Hooks associates the beauty in the photographs with transformation, where beauty elevates base and taboo bodily fluids (blood and urine are generally hidden in society, but milk he associates with the controversy of breast feeding). Blood, urine, milk, and later semen are all secretions from the body that remind us of our human nature.⁵¹¹ However, the beauty of the photographs, their abstract composition and luminescent colour, make them beautiful and the viewer must confront this beauty in the very things they consider base. It is as though Serrano is drawing on French philosopher George Bataille's theory of base materialism.⁵¹² Bataille's base materialism was designed specifically as a way to counter what he viewed as the existing dialectical hierarchy society developed in order to entrap man with the ideas of right or wrong. 'Base' referring to both a building-block and the low, Bataille described base materials as those things that society deems degrading, disgusting or primitive but are nonetheless necessary: from blood, bile and piss to vermin, sex, and the body.⁵¹³ As Benjamin Noys explained, 'The "logic" of base materialism is that whatever is elevated or ideal is actually dependent on base matter, and it is that dependence that means the purity of the ideal is contaminated'.⁵¹⁴ The dependency of the ideal on the base was the reason it was

⁵⁰⁷ Kristeva noted that fluids from the body were abject in a similar way to decay – they remind one that their body is deteriorating. Kristeva, p.3.

⁵⁰⁸ Richard Rambuss, "Sacred Subjects and the Aversive Metaphysical Conceit: Cranshaw, Serrano, Ofili," *ELH*, 71 (2004), 497–530 (pp. 515–16).

⁵⁰⁹ Kristeva, p. 17. This is discussed at length in Chapter 6.

⁵¹⁰ Hooks, p. 6. Hooks focuses his analysis purely on what he calls the blood series, which includes *Blood and Milk* (1986) and *Blood Stream* (1987)

⁵¹¹ Kristeva, p.3.

⁵¹² While Serrano makes no direct comments about Bataille, Bataille also influenced Julia Kristeva, whose theory of abjection in *Powers of Horror: Essays on Abjection* was published in 1982 and of considerable influence at the time. See: Kristeva. Serrano was also read in context of Bataille's *L'Histoire de 'Oeil* by Kyle Message, as I point out later.

⁵¹³ Georges Bataille, 'Base Materialism and Gnosticism' in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, ed. by Allan Stoekl (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 45–52 (p. 50).

⁵¹⁴ Benjamin Noys, 'Georges Bataille's Base Materialism' *Cultural Values*, 2 (1998), 499–517 (p. 500).

belittled. For example, the body is the base material of the spirit: without the body the spirit would not exist, but major religions preach the body as an earthly thing that keeps one from purity and thus should be cast aside – through fasting, denial of sex for pleasure, meditation, and other endeavors.⁵¹⁵ The spirit's reliance on the body is what makes the hierarchy of spirit-over-body unstable, and ultimately false. Bataille suggested that in order to break these false dichotomies, humanity needed to see these base materials in an honest light that dragged their opposites down with them. This act of subversion allows for a new perspective where the base material is truly seen with eyes wide open.⁵¹⁶

By making beautiful through photography the supposedly base materials of blood, milk, semen and urine, one can see Serrano enlisting the same concerns as base materialism, though he would not have framed it as such. Serrano would have a connection to Bataille primarily through Julia Kristeva, discussed in Chapter 4, who drew on Bataille's base materials in her theory of abjection.⁵¹⁷ As I will discuss further in Chapter 6, Kristeva acknowledged that the body within religion was no longer abject. Rambuss' argument takes from both the notion of base materialism in Serrano's work and the notion of the purified body in religion, revealing the complexities of beautifying the crucifixion by using the base material of urine. Rambus focuses on the religious message of this type of depiction, but it opens the avenue of considering how beauty and religion alters abject in Serrano's work.

Serrano's addition of beauty to difficult subjects recalls the darker side of beauty, as noted by Freud. Freud suggested in his work on the death drive that beauty was laced with a fear of death, and even functioned as a substitute for the acknowledgement of death.⁵¹⁸ Drawing on the mythical gods Eros and Thanatos, Love and Death, for his formulation of the death drive, Freud associated beauty with art and

⁵¹⁵ This is not limited to Judeo-Christian religions; for example, Buddhism and Hinduism rely on bodily restraint and uplifting of the spirit.

⁵¹⁶ The existing limits were imposed, in his opinion, by man's desire to establish his superiority from everything else on earth, a superiority based on his being erect. In *The Penal Eye*, Bataille described man as having a solar anus, or a hole in the top of his head that 'blinds itself like a conflagration, or like a fever that eats the being, or more exactly, the head.' This fever was a sort of intoxication that seduced man, leading him to a state of constant expenditure, or excess. However, like any intoxicating substance it also made man want more and constantly attempt to get closer to the sun by moving away from the animal life that was focused on the earth, or the 'horizontal', in pursuit of the sun, or the 'vertical'. Bataille saw the vertical – hierarchy in particular – as man's attempt to get too close to the sun. He expected that, like Icarus, this would lead mankind to its doom and rather than elevating man, Bataille strove to bring man back down to a horizontal perspective of animals. Bataille felt that animals lived in the moment, indifferent to the humans concerns of social order, the future and morality. Georges Bataille, "The Pineal Eye," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, ed. by Allan Stoekl (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 79–90 (p. 82).

⁵¹⁷ Kristeva, p. 12.

⁵¹⁸ Freud calls beauty 'intoxicating' in its ability to distract from death. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 29.

with love.⁵¹⁹ In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud expresses that ‘happiness in life is predominantly sought in the enjoyment of beauty’.⁵²⁰ In the context of mourning, Foltyn, drawing on Freud, Lacan and Kristeva, noted that beauty was a pleasant distraction, playing mediator or just as likely allowing one to externalise their grief.⁵²¹ Freud and Foltyn hint at the danger of beauty as a way to make us blind to a reality – in this case our mortality, which is relevant to an analysis of *The Morgue*, but it is possible to consider beauty in a wider context as a mask or shield against other realities. By merging the beautiful with the ‘difficult’ Serrano challenges both – drawing on the darker undertones of beauty and presenting beauty in the base. Beauty at play in art need not be a stable entity – this is too aligned with the notion of beauty as lying within formality of proportions and brushstrokes – but can instead be a way to challenge what we see, and even to challenge the affected aspects of beauty.

In relation to one another the works of Steiner, Bal and Rambuss may appear disparate. Where Steiner and Bal focus more broadly on Serrano’s work as a whole, Rambuss’ focus on a single series allows for a more thorough analysis of the body in relation to beauty, which is also my concern in addressing *The Morgue*. Additionally, Rambuss’ argument, unlike Bal’s, does not correlate beauty to a nostalgia or art historical reference, though these elements are there. However, Rambuss relates the works he examines to a wider Christian context, dismantling the works from their historical context. However, combining the work of Rambus, Steiner and Bal forms a basis on which my own analysis of beauty in *The Morgue* stands. Steiner, Bal and Rambuss all view beauty as tool wielded by the artist, however each present a different potential within their arguments. From Bal, I will take on the historical and monumental effects of reproducing Baroque technique in *The Morgue*, which combines with Steiner’s marriage of form and content to help address the effect of beauty, and religion, on the abject body. The one area that neither Bal, Steiner nor Rambus address, however, is the historical context in which the works were made. This is a particularly surprising absence in relation to *the Morgue*, because it was a time when the role of beauty in art was changing.

Hickey’s declaration that beauty would be the focal concern of the 1990s, relayed in *Invisible Dragons*, outlined how crucial beauty was in the transition into the

⁵¹⁹ For more on this dualism see: Sigmund Freud ‘Instincts and Their Vicissitudes’, *The Major Works of Sigmund Freud* (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1955). See also: Sigmund Freud, James Strachey, and Gregory Zilboorg *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York: Norton, 1975).

⁵²⁰ Freud, p. 29.

⁵²¹ Jacque Lynn Foltyn, “Dead Body: The Preservation, Memorialization and Destruction of Beauty in Death,” in *Rest in Peace: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 72–83 (p. 72).

1990s. As Hickey notes, in the 1980s a discussion of beauty in art was a discussion about what sells rather than about how beauty was considered by the artist.⁵²² However, the NEA controversy, he argued, was an opportunity to revive the discussion of beauty within the art world because, ‘It was exactly their [Mapplethorpe and Serrano’s photographs] beauty that had lit the charge’.⁵²³ In other words, once again the artists were being responded to for having made something beautiful. Not only that, Hickey highlights how significant it was at the time to make beautiful something that was not traditionally accepted as beautiful. While Hickey focuses on Mapplethorpe’s work, Serrano similarly made beautiful the traditionally repellent, and in the case of *The Morgue*, the ultimately threatening and abject rotting corpse was beautiful.

The shift in beauty in the 1990s makes it an important part of the discussion, and in the case of Serrano, his choice of the corpse was no mistake. This was a time when beauty was being re-introduced to the mainstream art world, and a time when dignity was being fought for by AIDS patients, cancer patients, hospice centres and within the euthanasia debate. The connection between the beautiful and the dead is topical and essential to *The Morgue*, despite the consistent neglect of beauty and abjection within the analysis of Serrano’s work. For some beauty has been neglected in favor of political message, even ignoring that beauty plays a role in the message of the work, or is relevant to anything other than a painterly nostalgia.⁵²⁴ For others, beauty is considered purely within the parameters of an art historical discussion, unable to break free from the limits of formalism and art history.⁵²⁵ In the coming chapters, however, I will hold onto Hook’s earlier notion that the beauty in Serrano’s work is ‘transformative’, looking at how beauty transforms the subject and the consequences of this transformation.⁵²⁶ The notion of beauty as transformative is particularly powerful in conjunction with the above comment by Serrano that beauty was a necessary addition when engaging with what he called ‘difficult subjects’.⁵²⁷ The question immediately comes up: is beauty simply there to transform the ‘difficult subjects’ into manageable ones? This implies that beauty is a static thing that has an effect, but is not affected. This is an assumption that is also made by those who felt that beauty was a characteristic of art: for how can beauty be synonymous with art if it is a fluid or confrontational notion?

⁵²² Hickey saw ‘beauty’ in the 1980s as a term that only brought on discussion or consideration within the art market. Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty*, p. 13.

⁵²³ Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty*, p. 22.

⁵²⁴ This is clear in Steiner, as I have noted above.

⁵²⁵ Formalism is particularly strong in Bal.

⁵²⁶ Hooks, p. 6.

⁵²⁷ Hobbs, p. 20.

In relation to *The Morgue*, the additional darker side of beauty allows one to consider that beauty is being used not merely for its ability to transform the base human body, but instead draw on the tension between beauty and death that is inherent to the complexity of abjection. In the coming chapters I will draw on beauty as a way to reconsider *The Morgue*, at once helping provide a way to consider the photographs as detached images of a corpse-thing (rather than dead person) and bringing in a consideration of beauty in relation to the abject. My analysis will not answer all of the questions raised in this chapter, but will be sure to engage thoughtfully with them in order to reconsider the role of beauty in *The Morgue*.

CHAPTER 5

Andres Serrano and the Crisis of Forensic Looking

‘I photographed these people after the moment of death. I never knew them as human beings. I never knew what languages they spoke, what their religious or political beliefs were, how much money they had, or who they loved. All I know about them is the cause of death. And, as they say, you cannot judge a book by its cover.’ - Andres Serrano *Bomb* 43 (1993)

Were it not for Bal and Steiner, highlighting beauty within Serrano’s *The Morgue* would be an uneasy task. Not because there is a lack of beauty within the series, but because *The Morgue* relies on the medical and forensic detachment of a clinical morgue. On display in France in 1992 and New York in 1993, *The Morgue* received a varied and more negative response than Goldin’s *Cookie Portfolio* three years earlier. While both imaged death at a time when it was re-entering social discourse it, was not the topic but the approach that made the reception of Serrano’s work more volatile. By removing names, careful cropping, and rejection of the viewer’s gaze, Serrano strips the corpse of its living identity, leaving the dead metaphorically (and, on balance, literally) faceless. As a result of these techniques, the initial response to *The Morgue* was largely negative, with critics noting Serrano’s detachment as a negative. In this chapter, I argue that Serrano intentionally isolates the corpse from its living past – a choice that engages with the detachment of forensic looking – in order to present the corpses as objects, rather than remains. Asserting the corpse as an object in its own right, Serrano then subverts the forensic gaze in the beauty and iconography of the photograph. As a photographer, Serrano’s work is known for striking colours, strong lighting, iconographic Catholic references, and painterly style.⁵²⁸ As a result, in contrast to the style and intention of forensic photography, his images are overwhelming in their beauty. My argument reveals that rather than the emotional impact of a connection between viewer and subject, greater insight can be offered to a reading of *The Morgue* in what Barthes called the *studium*, the formal elements of the photographs and the visible hand of the photographer.

When *The Morgue* had its US opening in New York City, *New York Times* critic Kimmelman disparaged the ‘mannered’ and ‘decorative’ quality of the images,

⁵²⁸ Piotrowski, p. 14; Olivia Maria Rubio, ‘Salt on the Wound’, in *Andres Serrano: El Dedo en la Llaga* (Madrid: La Fàbrica, 2006), pp. 180–184 (p. 181); Lucy Soutter, *Andres Serrano*, TATE Interviews <<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/audio/andres-serrano>> [accessed 2 December 2012]; Diane Hanson, *Andres Serrano: America and Other Work* (London: Taschen, 2004); Bruce Ferguson, ‘Andres Serrano: Invisible Power’, in *Andres Serrano: Body and Soul* (New York: Takarajima Books, 1995), pp. 8–13 (p. 12).

and denounced Serrano's failure to 'convey a life in death.'⁵²⁹ While reviews of the show were mixed, the negative critiques hinged on the same argument Kimmelman presented: Serrano's photographs did not offer a meaningful commentary on death. Peter Schjeldahl bitterly concluded, 'Serrano's show is not about death at all. It is only about art', a premise he belittled as 'iffy'.⁵³⁰ Kimmelman and Schjeldahl make an important point: the series does not attempt to capture or represent 'life in death'.⁵³¹ However, neither critic takes this point further in order to discover why *The Morgue* purposefully isolates the corpse. If one accepts that *The Morgue* is not about trying to find or represent life in death, then the works present an alternative interpretation of the image of a corpse. As Arenas pointed out, 'one might be tempted to see the series as a kind of memento mori for our apocalyptic age, a sign of our collective self-destructiveness', though she acknowledges that this interpretation is immediately limiting.⁵³² Seeing *The Morgue* as a memento mori puts more weight on the titles of the images than the visual. This would undermine any reading of the beauty in *The Morgue* and the iconography within the images, though the notion of memento mori does highlight the importance of viewing *The Morgue* as a series, rather than individual images. That aspect of Arenas' argument will be relevant to Chapter 6 in particular, but I will focus on the visual in conjunction with the titles rather than limit my interpretation to a memento mori.

As a series, *The Morgue* can be overpowering. The 49.5 in x 60 in photographs bombard the viewer with colour: deep reds, lurid purples, bright whites and soft yellows fill the gallery space, to the point of overwhelming the viewer.⁵³³ After the seductive hit of colour, the eye settles on the details of the corpse. Because the images present the body larger than life-size, the details of the skin take precedence over the body. This level of detail is unlikely to be encountered anywhere but in the photograph. In one image, purple veins become a smooth grid broken by moles and tags, details which would be barely visible in a smaller format or when encountering the corpse directly. In another, Serrano focuses in on a patch of burnt skin, enhancing the details to the point of abstraction. The majority of images are close cropped, revealing only a section of a

⁵²⁹ Kimmelman.

⁵³⁰ Peter Schjeldahl, 'Art After Death', *The Village Voice* (New York, 16 February 1993), p. 91.

⁵³¹ The idea that a corpse should be viewed with respect to its living history is common, but ignores the reality of death in Western culture. As noted in the previous section, Airès concluded in *The Hour of our Death*, and Görer before him, Western society has pushed death to the outskirts, tucking it away in very exclusive and sterilized corners of medicine, forensics and the care home. Tercier further highlighted the medical reality of death. When seen from this perspective, it is reasonable and important to reconsider an objectified view of the corpse, as Serrano has done.

⁵³² Arenas, p. 123.

⁵³³ The strength of colour in the series is commented on by: Bal; Heartney, "Andres Serrano"; Kimmelman.

torso or a partial head, with some images focusing in on the detail of a wound. The wider shots still segment the body, generally showing from the waist down or up. As a result of this closeness, the bodies are monumental, and feel awe-inspiring, if not suffocating.⁵³⁴ Every shot is set against a black backdrop, with strong, directed lighting creating a noticeable contrast between shadow and light on the body. There is only one corpse captured in each photograph and only a few photographs hint at their placement in a morgue through the presence of a scalpel or a glimpse of the metal table on which the body lays. When a face might be captured in the photograph, it is fragmented or obscured by cloth. The sole exception to this is *The Morgue (Jane Doe, Killed by Police)* whose heavily decomposed face is visible, but as I argue further on, is ultimately anonymising. The addition of cotton cloth in white, black or red turn the images into blocks of colour, and brings out the variation of textures that run through the series: I often found myself thinking that skin seemed less smooth than the cloth. The lush images are contrasted by sparse titles, all following the format of *The Morgue (Cause of Death)*. The variations in cause of death throughout the show suggest the morgue was attached to a hospital, but that is all the information one can decipher from the title.⁵³⁵ In some instances, the gender or race of an individual might be distinguishable, but in the absence of any such information, the title offers nothing.

While every image is unique, the series flows together with consistent use of strong lighting, rich colours, and black backdrop beyond the obvious continuity of the morgue. However, over time, the diversity of the subjects becomes apparent. There are photographs of men and women, predominately white or black, spanning from the legs of an infant to the wrinkled face and grey hair of an older woman. Despite their assortment of ages, gender and races, the images begin to blend into each other, perhaps more powerful together than they were individually, because as a series, the images are no longer isolated traumatic incidents. It was not death, but the beauty of the images that dominated my impression of *The Morgue*. The Cibachrome's deep colours were entrancing: the red of a cloth or the soft pink of tissue revealed beneath burnt, blackened skin turned the corpses into alluring colour palettes.⁵³⁶ Ultimately the images captured me because I found them beautiful; I was seduced by colour and strong lighting and

⁵³⁴ In fact, Steiner referred to the experience as an 'immersion in the physical'. Wendy Steiner, 'Introduction: Below Skin Deep', in *Andres Serrano: Works 1983-1993*, by Patrick T. Murphy (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1995), pp. 11–16 (p. 16).

⁵³⁵ The morgue itself is never identified, and while Fitzpatrick assumes the morgue is attached to criminology, a disproportionate number of the deceased succumbed to diseases – including pneumonia, AIDS, cancer and meningitis – suggesting the morgue was attached to a hospital. Such morgues would perform autopsies for both criminal and non-criminal deaths.

⁵³⁶ Serrano has stated that he chose to work with Cibachrome for the depth of colour; see: Soutter.

even mentally picked one I would keep in my home. And I was not the only one; in the catalogue for *Andres Serrano: Body and Soul*, Arenas revealed: ‘I can’t think of another instance in which death confronts us as directly as it does in Serrano’s morgue pictures. They are too elegant for the police photographer, and too relentlessly factual for the artist.’⁵³⁷ Arenas points to ‘elegance’ as an interjection moving away from the forensic and into the artistic, and my argument refines ‘elegance’ to the formal elements of the image including Serrano’s use of beauty.

Before moving forward, the tension within *The Morgue* between beauty and detachment needs to be properly addressed. The fundamental problem that critics like Kimmelman and Schjeldahl had with Serrano’s presentation of the corpse is the ‘failure to convey life in death’ – essentially, the corpse was treated like an object.⁵³⁸ In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes outlines the relationship between photography and death, noting that a photograph captures the death of a moment and, consequently, the death of the subject’s living presence in that moment. In the instance where the subject does not have a living presence, Barthes offered:

In photography, the presence of the thing (at a certain past moment) is never metaphoric; and in the case of animated beings, their life as well, except in the case of photographing corpses; and even so: if the photograph then becomes horrible, it is because it certifies, so to speak, that the corpse is alive, as corpse: it is the living image of a dead thing.⁵³⁹

Barthes argues for a literal presence in the photograph; a ‘living image’, where the photograph can ‘certify’ life, an act that occurs between photograph and spectator rather than subject and photographer. The ‘living image’, therefore, is the image produced in the viewer by the photograph. In referring to the image as ‘living’ and the corpse as a ‘dead thing’, he reveals that for the corpse that which certifies life in the photograph can only ever be the absence of life. Yet Barthes does not discuss the possibility that a photograph could certify the presence of the corpse as mere ‘thing,’ that is, a corpse devoid of the impression of ‘life’ for the spectator.

In the context of such a reading of Barthes, the lack of personal history in *The Morgue* should not be viewed as a failure, but explored as a mode of representation. Serrano intentionally presents the corpse as a ‘thing’, devoid of personal history. He ensures a level of distance between the viewer and the photographed corpse through anonymity. Serrano explained that his initial idea was to photograph the unclaimed and unidentified dead in a morgue, and while he ultimately photographed every body in the

⁵³⁷ Amelia Arenas, ‘The Revelations of Andres Serrano’, in *Andres Serrano: Body and Soul* (New York: Takarajima Books, 1995), pp. 8–13 (p. 122).

⁵³⁸ Kimmelman.

⁵³⁹ Barthes, p. 79.

morgue, his initial idea reinforces the importance of anonymity in the production of the series.⁵⁴⁰ Anonymity is further reinforced by the careful cropping of each image, where only a section of the body is captured often obscuring the gender, age, race or other identifiable aspects of the corpse. Comparing *The Morgue* to the other portrait series done around the same time – *The Church*, *Nomads* and *The Klan* – the anonymity of *The Morgue* is obvious. The backdrop and strong frontal lighting of the other three portrait series are evident in *The Morgue*.⁵⁴¹ While each photograph focuses on a single subject with a black backdrop to remove them from the morgue setting, the key difference is that *The Morgue* images do not represent an individual. These photographs are not likenesses. They do not capture anything singular to avoid creating the sense of a likeness, and they do not represent an individual identity, or any particular group beyond the collection of bodies that came into the hospital morgue. This group formed through an element of chance and location, but little else, as the bodies would have come from crime scenes, homes and hospital beds (it is standard practice in the United States to send hospital deaths to the morgue before they are sent to a funeral director or other arrangements are made by the family).⁵⁴² The group is designed to be ambiguous, Serrano photographed every corpse in the morgue that day, and he specifically avoided likeness and encouraged universality when showing generic sections of the body that could belong to anyone.

The lack of individuality is congratulated as part of Serrano's effort to protect the identities of the deceased, one of the stipulations for his access to the morgue.⁵⁴³ Serrano explained in an interview with Blume that he was granted access to the morgue with the understanding that he would safeguard the identity of the morgue and of the individual bodies.⁵⁴⁴ However, this is an insufficient explanation for the composition and titles of *The Morgue*. Especially because Serrano has previously captured anonymity in a different way. In *The Klan* (1990) and with certain subjects of the *Nomads* series (1991), anonymity was upheld by obscuring the face of the sitter. Later, in the *America* series (2002), *Cowboy Randy* was made anonymous through his costume:

⁵⁴⁰ Serrano in Blume, p.37.

⁵⁴¹ Julie Ault, 'An Interview with Andres Serrano', in *Andres Serrano: America and Other Work*, ed. by Diane Hanson (London: Taschen, 2004), p. 4. Serrano explained 'I chronicle and document the real in an unreal environment: the studio. Even when I shoot outdoors, I make it look like a backdrop in a studio.'

⁵⁴² See: Atul Gawande, 'Final Cut: Medical arrogance and the decline of the Autopsy', *The New Yorker*, March 19, 2001. Gawande explains that despite hospital pressure he recently started using his discretion when asking families for permission to autopsy their loved ones. However, while he has decreased his practice, it remains the standard in America. For insurance reasons hospitals are at risk when they do not perform an autopsy on any death that has occurred on hospital grounds or in an ambulance to ensure there was nothing more they could do for the patient. Some hospitals require autopsy for sudden or unexpected deaths, and only encourage it for deaths related to diagnosed illnesses.

⁵⁴³ Hobbs, p. 42.

⁵⁴⁴ Blume, p. 37.

dressed in full regalia, Randy hides his face with a gloved hand, with only his first name is given in the title. Rather than ensure anonymity, the close-up used throughout *The Morgue* has the effect of cropping the body to the point where we are no longer seeing the individual, and the lack of name further alienates the subject.⁵⁴⁵ I address later that the isolating perspective falls in line with a forensic way of looking at the body as the cause of death takes the place of a name or identity.⁵⁴⁶

The strongest assertions of anonymity throughout the series are the titles. In a review of the exhibition at Pace/MacGill, Heartney emphasises the disjuncture between the ‘coldly objective’ titles and the emotive and beautiful images that accompany them.⁵⁴⁷ This disjuncture is key to detaching the deceased from a lived history. This series – consistent with Serrano’s preference for concise, descriptive titles – follows the basic formula *The Morgue (Cause of Death)*, for example, *The Morgue (Death By Drowning II)* (Figure 20). In this image, the subject is cropped from just below the nose to just above the armpit. The corpse’s mottled purple and green skin, discoloured as a result of drowning, is strongly lit, highlighting the pattern of veins and surface texture of the skin. The title does not contain clues to the corpse’s identity, but rather offers this section of corpse as a referent for ‘death by drowning’, neither a commonplace nor a truly exceptional death. Being the second *Death by Drowning* in the series, the viewer is aware that there is another image referring to the same signifier. This makes both *Death By Drowning* images dependant upon each other. The black backdrop further reduces the potential for identifying with the corpse by removing it from any spatio-temporal reference.⁵⁴⁸ The closely cropped photograph offers minimal information to the viewer about the deceased: there is no indication of gender, race, age, social class or fashion preference.⁵⁴⁹ Revealing, for example, the gender of a subject does not relay a particular identity, and in practice further emphasises the overtly attributive, but impotent, influence these traits have in signifying said identity. This is evident in instances where several corpses are used to denote the same cause of death. For example, there are a

⁵⁴⁵ This was pointed out in Loussier, p. 4.

⁵⁴⁶ Foucault noted that the subjectivity of the patient is eschewed in the desire to seek out the disease, in this case the cause of death takes precedence over the identity. Because these are people, there may be an inclination to read into the disease certain traits of the deceased which is also curtailed by the presentation of multiple cadavers and images labelled with the same cause of death.

⁵⁴⁷ Heartney, “Andres Serrano”, p. 132. Heartney highlights the ‘stunning’ formal elements of the work, shifting the focus of the review to a comparison between Serrano and the paintings of Montagne and La Tour. I will return to the impact of this formal beauty.

⁵⁴⁸ This backdrop is described by Message as ‘a spaceless and groundless void’ mirroring Serrano’s acknowledgement that the backdrop ‘seems to suggest a void, which is appropriate’. Kylie Rachel Message, “Watching Over the Wounded Eyes of Georges Bataille and Andres Serrano,” in *Images of the Corpse: From the Renaissance to Cyberspace*, ed. by Elizabeth Klaver (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), pp. 113–132 (p. 116); Blume, p. 38.

⁵⁴⁹ This is also noted in Loussier, p.4.

variety of pneumonia-related deaths presented in *The Morgue*, represented by several distinct corpses. *Pneumonia Death* and *Infectious Pneumonia* capture the half-covered head of a black male and older white female respectively. *Pneumonia Drowning I* and *II* similarly present an infant of unknown gender and a white male. Here, gender serves only as a reminder that the cause of death reveals very little about the deceased. Throughout, there is no information about who the deceased was, refusing a reading of the corpse through its living identity, and the title, particularly as the cause of death replaces a name, encourages the separation of the corpse from its living counterpart.

In the photographs, the cause of death may not reveal anything personal, but it colours every visual cue. Critics like Andrea Fitzpatrick, whose argument I will respond to at a later stage, considered the redefinition of the corpses by their cause of death demeaning while others embrace it as a cue for investigation.⁵⁵⁰ However, neither reading takes into account that the titles, while taken from the morgue's official records, were shaped by the photographer: Serrano admits to keeping honest about the cause of death, though altering terms for some of the victims.⁵⁵¹ It was suggested in the catalogue for *El Dedo en la Llaga* that Serrano's experience writing copy for an advertising agency gives him a flair for words, arguing that he knows how to 'craft precise titles and how to use words sparingly but eloquently'.⁵⁵² The use of the term 'craft' is crucial in considering the titles of *The Morgue*, for while viewers may find the titles shocking in their seemingly cold, detached phrasing, one must remember that they are words carefully chosen by the artist to be more accessible to the viewer than an official cause of death. In a medical scenario, the cause of death can often be counter-intuitive, as the CDC guidelines strictly require that 'the terminal event (e.g., cardiac arrest or respiratory arrest) should not be used' which means that if one died of a heart attack it is not enough to say 'cardiac arrest' one must have an underlying cause such as, to take directly from the CDC examples 'coronary artery atherosclerosis'.⁵⁵³ While a lay person would expect the cause of death to be straight-forward, the underlying cause has precedence, meaning that the less colloquial, and arguably less accessible, medical terminology appears on death certificates.

In my own experience, the official cause of death can be so exacting that it

⁵⁵⁰ Hobbs, p. 43; Fitzpatrick, "Reconsidering the Dead in Andres Serrano's *The Morgue*."

⁵⁵¹ Serrano explained: 'While I have tried to be accurate with the causes of death, they are by no means scientific or medical.' He further acknowledged they are not what is listed on the medical certificate, but they are accurate to the cause of death. Blume, p. 38.

⁵⁵² Rubio, p. 181. The density of colour of Cibachrome is also associated with advertising, as mentioned in Elie, p. 18.

⁵⁵³ 'Instructions for Completing the Cause-of-Death Section of the Death Certificate', *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Centres of Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics* (August 2004), www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/dvs/blue_form.pdf [accessed 25 March 2014]

seems alien to anyone outside the medical and forensic field. For example, on the death certificate of a 2005 murder victim, the official cause of death is listed as ‘shotgun wound to the head’, which initially struck me as redundant and insensitive.⁵⁵⁴ A wound is something that could be recovered from, and the term did not do justice to the stark and gruesome reality, for this particular victim’s skull was completely shattered by the blast.⁵⁵⁵ The cause of death seemed trivial, and while accurate, was more medical than expressive. Serrano’s titles maintain a clinical distance but are also sensitive to the average viewer. The title *Heart Failure*, for example, reads as clinical, but the official medical cause of death would have to be more exacting, indicating if it was hypertensive heart disease, or if the cause of death was suffocation though the underlying cause was congestive heart failure.⁵⁵⁶ Altering the cause of death results in what critic Bruce Ferguson called ‘the poetic use of titles’ that is consistent along Serrano’s oeuvre.⁵⁵⁷ These poetic titles, it can be argued, also make the cause of death poetic: a way of dying that has been depicted and described with refinement.⁵⁵⁸ Ferguson argued that the poetic titling in *The Morgue* caused a disjuncture in interpreting the image, where the viewer was unable to combine title and photograph in a way that maintained a distance between the spectator’s place in society and the institution of the morgue.⁵⁵⁹ One can infer from Ferguson that hyper-clinical and detached official causes of death would have better suited the clinical nature of the photographs. Instead, the titles engage the viewer with colloquial terminology, such as *Death By Drowning*, which is one way of placing the victims within the viewer’s space rather than the clinical imagined space of the morgue.⁵⁶⁰

If Serrano had medically accurate causes of death for the titles, it would invite

⁵⁵⁴ *Certificate of Death: Alison Powell Sapikowski*, Filed May 14, 2005. State of North Carolina, County of Orange, Dept. of Health, Div. of Vital Statistics. Informant: Miss Lauren Sapikowski [daughter of the deceased].

⁵⁵⁵ The Oxford English Dictionary defines a wound first and foremost as a ‘hurt’ and ‘injury’ rather than something fatal. “wound, n.” *OED Online*, (Oxford University Press, March 2014)
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/230431?p=emailAgOABZWF5fqo&d=230431>> [accessed 2 March 2014]

⁵⁵⁶ In the NHS “medical certificate of cause of death: Notes for Doctors” there is a section which clarifies that the cause of death should not include ‘modes of dying’, which would be more commonly used in daily life. Terms on the examples list (Table I) include Heart/Lung/Brain/Kidney/ etc. Failure, Shock and Asphyxia. ‘Medical Certificate of Cause of Death: Notes for Doctors’, *NHS*, <<http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/media/suhtideal/doctors/medicalpersonnelinduction/yourinductionday/medicalcertificateofcauseofdeath-notesfordoctors.pdf>> [accessed 25 March 2014]

⁵⁵⁷ Ferguson, p. 13.

⁵⁵⁸ In an open interview at the TATE, an audience member commented ‘I get up close, I read the titles, the cause of death, and it’s like a double punch’ following which, Serrano responded that he envied the Victorian ability to capture death without it being shocking. This testifies that while Serrano is being mediating with the titles, they still produce the effect of a distanced conception of the dead. See: Blume and Soutter.

⁵⁵⁹ Ferguson, p. 13.

⁵⁶⁰ These causes of death are also moderately a-temporal, each death would be as possible today as it was a century ago, and the generic titles give a sense that these deaths could have occurred decades ago, or the very day you look at them. Granted, the infectious pneumonia deaths must have occurred since the disease was discovered, but they are not dated, like tuberculosis which is heavily associated with the Victorian era, or hanging which has long since been outlawed. Sontag discusses the strong association between tuberculosis and the Victorian era in: Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*.

a detached reading of the corpses as specimens, placing the images in an entirely medical and forensic paradigm, if not a historical one. Instead, the crafted titles force the viewer to consider the images from *The Morgue* within their own society: it is a careful balance in order to keep the viewer alienated without becoming detached.⁵⁶¹ This balance struggles closer to the side of forensic looking because of the location of the photographs, which is also constantly referenced in the series. While Serrano's interpretation of the titles keeps the images from becoming a distanced spectacle, the cause of death establishes a constant reference for the image, stripping the corpses of their living identity and creating a new framework for thinking about the corpse through its death. When the photograph constantly refers to the cause of death, it establishes the history of the corpse as originating in the moment of death, securely locating its existence post-mortem. The removal of a name removes the corpse from a living identity, both social and individual.⁵⁶² Once this relationship is severed, it becomes more difficult for the viewer to penetrate the photograph and connect with the corpse that is, as Barthes argued, 'alive as corpse'.⁵⁶³ This kind of distance exists within the space of the morgue, but the morgue is not a space that everyone can feel involved in, therefore the titles and the formal elements of the images keep the viewer engaged.

To understand the impact of Serrano's titles and composition we must consider the one image in the series where the corpse is given a name, even if it is generic: *The Morgue (Jane Doe, Killed by Police)* (Figure 21). While Jane's gender is given to the viewer through the title, it is by no means an invitation to explore her identity. In the first instance, we are presented with a corpse deep in decay, where the gender is not implicit. The addition of 'Jane', which clearly identifies the corpse as female, is not discussed as an aspect of her identity, which would create a sense of memorial or history as it would in a death portrait.⁵⁶⁴ Instead, her gender references the history of female representation, where she can be an allegory rather than an individual.⁵⁶⁵ Unlike the other corpses in the series, anonymous through the exclusion of their faces and names, *Jane Doe* is made anonymous by their inclusion. To begin with, the name is

⁵⁶¹ One might feel the work to be suitable for the 1990s, as in Arenas's musing 'one might be tempted to see the series as a kind of memento mori for our apocalyptic age'. While it is very important to consider these images in the 1990s, even Arenas agrees that the works have a broader impact that speaks to earlier decades. Arenas, p. 123.

⁵⁶² For more see: Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁵⁶³ Barthes, p. 79.

⁵⁶⁴ Serrano specifically discusses the ambiguity of Jane Doe's race: with her bleached hair and sections of white and brown skin, both results of decay, the race is difficult to identify. Blume, p. 38. See also: Andrea D Fitzpatrick, "Reconsidering the Dead in Andres Serrano's *The Morgue*: Identity, Agency, Subjectivity," *RACR*, 32, 28–42; Message.

⁵⁶⁵ This is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 6.

synonymous with anonymity: the title of ‘Jane Doe’ is given to thousands of people a year in the United States and Canada to refer to the unidentified dead. Not only are they unknown, they will not become known if they are left unclaimed and unidentified in the morgue. In his essay, ‘Reconsidering the Dead in Andres Serrano’s *The Morgue*’, Fitzpatrick insisted that the title *Jane Doe* is derogatory, and ‘reduces her to the realm of those unloved bodies that remain in the morgue freezer for months, lacking figures to gather their remains or to advocate on their behalf.’⁵⁶⁶ Fitzpatrick noted that *Jane Doe*, as with all of the unidentified dead, is also the unclaimed: permanently removed from any relations they had as living beings. This obvious social dissociation in the case of *Jane Doe* reflects outward to the removal of all the corpses Serrano photographed from the social sphere. None of the corpses, as Serrano presents them, have ‘figures to gather their remains or to advocate on their behalf’, that is, except Serrano. It is not that Serrano was intervening; many of the bodies he photographed would go on to be buried and collected by families.⁵⁶⁷ However, the way they are photographed dislodges the corpses from this living and social history with families, and takes them into Serrano’s realm.⁵⁶⁸ The photograph embalms them in the state of homelessness, where Serrano is the figure responding to their remains, rather than the family or another ‘advocate’. This appropriation has raised ethical questions around Serrano’s work, a debate which is far too rich and wide ranging to relay here, that highlight the importance of these photographs as removed from their previous identity and viewed under the careful control of the photographer and his camera.⁵⁶⁹

Fitzpatrick took a singular view of these anonymous dead by assuming every corpse was involved in a crime, which he used to extrapolate that the name ‘Jane Doe’ speaks to the criminal identity of the corpses photographed for *The Morgue*. However, *Jane Doe* sits within the series including children, illness and heart failures, creating a broad spectrum of deaths rather than a post-mortem mug shot. The ‘reduction’ of Jane Doe to the anonymous dead does not enhance the small criminal element in the series, but rather highlights the overarching anonymity of every photograph. Ironically, Jane Doe’s face adds to her anonymity, frustrating any attempt at identification because of the corpse’s severe state of decay. As noted by critics and the artist, the process of decay has discoloured her skin and rotted away the surface layers to reveal patches of

⁵⁶⁶ Andrea D. Fitzpatrick, ‘Reconsidering the Dead in Andres Serrano’s *The Morgue*: Identity, Agency, Subjectivity’, *RACR*, 32, 28–42 (p. 40).

⁵⁶⁷ Serrano explained the only unidentified or unclaimed body was Jane Doe: Blume and Soutter.

⁵⁶⁸ Fitzpatrick’s assumption that all of the bodies are unclaimed, when in fact only one was, is a testament to the power of Serrano’s alienating composition.

⁵⁶⁹ For more on the ethics surrounding *The Morgue* see, among others: Fitzpatrick, “Reconsidering the Dead in Andres Serrano’s *The Morgue*”; Van Camp; Piotrowski.

white, making her race unclear.⁵⁷⁰ Decay is not only physical; as Baudrillard pointed out, the decay of the corpse is also a voiding of significance, making the corpse ‘nothing but flesh, and ceases to be a sign’.⁵⁷¹ Baudrillard noted that this symbolic significance helped to further separate the body from the realm of the real and the world because the symbolic voiding of identity was excess to the functionality of living and dying.⁵⁷² As mentioned in Chapter 3, losing one’s identity was effectively a reminder to the mourner that their own identity is fluid and open to threat. The advanced state of decay reveals Jane Doe to be ‘nothing but flesh’, because the eye is drawn to the variations of colours, texture and layers of her flesh.

Whereas in the Enlightenment the skin was redefined as a communicative organ – transmitting information and emotions – in *Jane Doe*, like the rest of *The Morgue* series, the skin is a textured solid wall that cannot receive or reveal.⁵⁷³ This is not the medical skin that was considered by doctors to be the ‘sensitive limit’; medically it is no longer sensitive because the body is not living and artistically it is no longer sensitive because it is the harsh surface on which light and colour play though nothing is revealed from beneath.⁵⁷⁴ The body is lacking humanity due to its advanced state of decay, and in its photographic representation. What might be able to attest to Jane Doe’s humanity is her eyes, as the gaze is a certification of subjectivity. Being several months dead, Jane’s eyes have sunk into the skull until a dried contact stuck to her cheek is the only indication that she has eyes at all. Discussing *The Morgue* in relation to French philosopher Bataille’s *Story of the Eye*, anthropologist Message pointed out that the unbalanced gaze of the corpse ‘evokes a fear in the spectator due to the fact that this object, which once had a gaze equivalent to theirs, is now *reduced to an absence*’ (my emphasis).⁵⁷⁵ The absence of the subject halts the viewer, unable to have their gaze returned; it is as though they are looking at an inanimate object. The corpse’s face taunts the viewer with the possibility of relaying something, but ultimately it can and will never do so. Such is the anonymising effect of the missing gaze. The absence of a gaze forces the viewer to accept that the corpse is unable to represent themselves.

In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes describes his awareness of the photographer’s gaze

⁵⁷⁰ See: Fitzpartick, Message, Soutter.

⁵⁷¹ Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, p. 180. Baudrillard is also discussed in relation to Goldin in Chapter 3.

⁵⁷² Jean Baudrillard, ‘Death in Bataille’, *Bataille: A Critical Reader*. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), p.141.

⁵⁷³ Fend’s work examines the effect of the Enlightenment on the medical perception of skin and its subsequent artistic representation. Methchild Fend, ‘Bodily And Pictorial Surfaces: Skin In French Art And Medicine, 1790–1860’, *Art History* 28.3 (2005): 311-339. Academic Search Complete [accessed 29 Oct. 2013] p. 13-14.

⁵⁷⁴ Fend, p. 315.

⁵⁷⁵ Message, p. 127.

through the camera lens when being photographed: ‘In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art.’⁵⁷⁶ Before the camera there are a multitude of selves under consideration, each attempting to respond to a different gaze. The sitter must contend with the gaze of the photographer, the gaze of the ‘others’ who will see the photograph, and the artistic gaze, which is influenced by the gaze of the photographer, but will ultimately be tailored towards the ‘others’ who will interpret and respond to the photograph. Caught in the crossfire of these gazes, Barthes highlights the problems with presenting oneself to the camera, insisting that he is ‘imitating’ himself, performing for the photographer and the presumed others who will view the image.⁵⁷⁷ The pose before a camera is active and passive: subject to the gaze of the photographer while engaging that gaze, if not attempting to block it, and allowing the gaze to penetrate, if only so far. Further, in ‘Posing’, photographic theorist Craig Owens argued that the subject poses to combat the photographic eye: ‘If, posing for a photograph, I freeze, it is not in order to assist the photographer, but in some sense to resist him, to protect myself from his immobilizing gaze.’⁵⁷⁸ However the dead cannot pose; unable to assert themselves as ‘I’ they are left open to the photographer’s ‘immobilizing gaze’, which itself loses some of its power when faced with an already immobile corpse. The body is usually photographed as a living individual, and the subject is able to choose how to adjust his or her body and face, in order to present ‘themselves’.⁵⁷⁹ Even in a candid photograph, the body is caught in the act of something; there is the implication of life for the viewer, who predicts that the facial muscles will always move from the stillness captured by the camera back into animation once the photograph has been taken.⁵⁸⁰

The photographed corpse does not carry such a suggestion of life, but appears as though it could. Because the corpse is the *doppelgänger* of the living individual, it is

⁵⁷⁶ Barthes, p. 13.

⁵⁷⁷ Barthes, p. 13.

⁵⁷⁸ Owens was responding to Lacan’s argument that the gaze is both arresting and wounding. Craig Owens, ‘Posing’, in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power and Culture* (Los Angeles: University of California Press), pp. 201–217 (p. 211). Owen’s comments on posing draw on Barthes and Nancy. See: Barthes; Jean-Luc Nancy, “*Nous Autres*.” *The Ground of the Image* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005) pp. 100 – 107.

⁵⁷⁹ See also: Barthes, p. 11.

⁵⁸⁰ See: Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: The Athlone Press, 1986), p. 88.

expected to represent a living individual.⁵⁸¹ The same tendencies were apparent in death portraiture and wakes, for which the corpse is dressed and made up to present a suggestion, or a trace, of the life once lived.⁵⁸² Because of this, certain unnecessary expectations accompany the photograph of a corpse. One strong assumption is that the image of a corpse must bear a trace of life in death, as Kimmelman and Schjeldahl insisted in their reviews of *The Morgue*. Failing to present this trace is not a flaw: the series offers a re-presentation of the corpse that explicitly acknowledges its inability to pose. The corpse, unlike the living subject, cannot assert an imitation of itself; it is passive where an assertion of identity is expected. Such is the case with *Jane Doe*: she is unable to pose and as a result the viewer is startled, uncertain as to what is before them. As the deceased, there is not even an assumed submission to the camera: as both poser and subject, the deceased falls short of making an active stance against or submission to the camera.

Message argued further that the absence of subjectivity in the corpse is cemented when the viewer is offered a gunshot wound in place of Jane Doe's gaze.⁵⁸³ Message emphasised that the cause of death consumes *Jane Doe's* identity, consequently threatening the identity of the viewer.⁵⁸⁴ While one is immediately drawn to the mix of colours and textures on Jane Doe's decomposing skin in contrast to her curly bleached hair, just below centre of the image is a darkened patch on the line between her hair and skin. Unlike anything else in the image, this spot is reflective and the left edges of the circle are smooth crimson, though the texture of scar tissue and matted, bloodied, hair lends a graininess to the rest of the area. The actual gunshot wound has scarred over, and mixed with hair, making the exact entrance of the bullet unclear, but there is no mistake that this is a gunshot wound with a crimson halo of blood. The reflection of the strong lighting makes the blood appear fresh at the edges. However, the scar and clotted blood catch the light to bring out the roughness of the wound rather than the depth indicated by dried blood. While there is no doubt that the

⁵⁸¹ Freud notes 'To many people the acme of the uncanny is represented by anything to do with death, dead bodies, revenants, spirits and ghosts.' This is because the uncanny is linked to an infantile fear against dying. In fact, Freud notes, the creation of a double is originally to combat against the threat of death. The corpse, as a double of the living individual that, is uncanny because it does confirm death rather than defend against it. Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock, (London: Penguin Books, 2003) 148. The double of a corpse is particularly uncanny because it also blurs the magic with the real: the corpse is an individual without a soul or identity, as magical as – to borrow a metaphor directly from Freud – 'feet that dance by themselves'. Nicholas Royle's *The Uncanny*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) p.10.

⁵⁸² This was elaborated upon in the previous section on Goldin's *Cookie In Her Casket*. See also: Burns; Ruby; Cunnington and Lucas; Turner and Edgley; Harris; Metcalf and Huntington.

⁵⁸³ Message, p. 128.

⁵⁸⁴ 'The brutality of her death encroaches upon, and indeed encompasses, any subjectivity she may have had whilst living. This violent death that we must avert in order to live, not simply as continuous desiring bodies but so that our final moment of death is ecstatic.' Message, p. 128.

gunshot wound, as reflected in the title *Jane Doe, Killed By Police* becomes her identity, I would argue that the replacement of the gaze with the gunshot wound speaks to the impenetrability of the subject.⁵⁸⁵ The wound, rather than offering a means for the viewer to enter the image, is a flattened scar, where the shimmer of blood and texture of hair offer a surface that refers back to the title rather than providing an insight into *Jane Doe*'s character. Any information that she could provide would have been offered in the now-absent gaze, affirming that who she once was is also absent and could not have been captured in the photograph.⁵⁸⁶ The photographed corpse can offer nothing; when the viewer looks to the picture, he or she comes up against the surface of the photograph – an impenetrable wall. Without identity, what remains is the visible: image and text. The strong lighting, cropping and use of Cibachrome – known for its richness of colour – ensure that the viewer's focus is on the surface of the body.⁵⁸⁷ We are left with the image of a corpse-object. While Kimmelman and Schjeldahl denied the value of the corpse as an object rather than a trace, to ignore the reading of the corpse as an object is to refuse sensitive engagement with Serrano's photographs.

The intentionally objectified corpse, as I alluded to above, aligns *The Morgue* with a forensic way of looking at the dead body. The term forensic has a wide range of applications, but in relation to the body, the term forensic is generally applied to reference an overlap between medical practice and criminal investigation.⁵⁸⁸ 'Forensic' is derived from the Latin *forensis* and, even further, *forum*, in reference to a place of assembly, explaining its primary definition as 'pertaining to, connected with, or used in courts of law'.⁵⁸⁹ As a result, more recently, 'forensic' drew together the medical and legal, referring to 'medicine in its relation to law'.⁵⁹⁰ As a result, forensic looking in relation to the body, takes from the objectivity inherent in both the legal and medical fields. Defining a forensic gaze and its application to photography could be a book unto

⁵⁸⁵ This stands in contrast to Fitzpatrick's assertion that the gunshot would consume Jane with a criminal identity that pervades the series, and as a compliment to Message's concern with the gunshot wound as an absent, and blinded, gaze.

⁵⁸⁶ The lack of gaze furthers the viewer's reliance on the title, the dead cannot represent themselves, so they are represented by the photographer. Serrano remains the mediating factor, refusing a direct relationship between viewer and subject.

⁵⁸⁷ Arenas calls the richness of colour in a Cibachrome print 'assaulting' pushing a more violent association between colour and the viewer. Arenas, p. 120. I would not consider it so much assaulting as overwhelming.

⁵⁸⁸ William S Smock, "Forensic Photography," in *Handbook of Medical Photography*, ed. by Lawrence Stack and others (Philadelphia: Hanley & Belfus Inc., 2001), pp. 397–408; Janet S Barber Duval, Catherine M Dougherty and Mary K Sullivan, "Forensic Nursing," in *Forensic Science: An Introduction to Scientific and Investigative Techniques*, ed. by Stuart H James and Jon J Nordby, Third (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2009), pp. 25–41; Ronald K Wright, "The Role of the Forensic Pathologist," in *Forensic Science: An Introduction to Scientific and Investigative Techniques*, ed. by Stuart H James and Jon J Nordby, Third (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2009), pp. 13–24; Sanford Weiss, *Forensic Photography: The Importance of Accuracy* (Indianapolis: Prentice Hall, 2008).

⁵⁸⁹ 'Forensic' def. A. *Oxford English Dictionary* 2013.

⁵⁹⁰ 'Forensic' Def. A *Oxford English Dictionary* 2013.

itself, however the well-known aspects of forensic looking: objectivity and distance, are relevant to the consideration of forensic looking in Serrano's *The Morgue*. Both medical and legal photography were grounded in the verisimilitude of the photograph, reliant on the objective, mechanical eye of the camera. From its invention, the mechanical apparatus of the camera was imbued with what Cory Keller described as an 'aura of objectivity'.⁵⁹¹ In the catalogue for *Brought to Light*, an exhibition of medial photography, Keller explained that the camera's objectivity was essential to people's understanding of the photograph from the onset. Objectivity specifically linked photography with the sciences because the camera was seen to eliminate the subjectivity or authorship of the photographer. Eliminating human error, photography was seen to be the ideal medium for the accurate recording of both scientific and legal notes. In the case of police photography, the threat of having a guilty man go free or an innocent man locked up weighs heavily on the forensic photograph, and as such the images are scrutinized by the police, lawyers, judges and in some cases the media, in order to determine the outcome of a legal case which must rely on the 'fair' and 'balanced' execution of the law.⁵⁹² As such, the objectivity of the photograph is assumed, necessary, and yet deeply scrutinised.

In relation to the significance of objectivity, Michel Foucault's concept of the clinical gaze offers insight into aspects of the forensic gaze in relation to the corpse, because in criminal investigation the corpse is the purview of the medical examiner or forensic pathologists, both trained medical practitioners.⁵⁹³ In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault described *le regard* (gaze) unique to *la clinique*, which referred to a teaching hospital as well as clinical medicine.⁵⁹⁴ The gaze of the clinician, or clinical gaze, penetrates the body of the patient to reveal the invisible (internal) structures of the body and bring to light the 'truth' of a disease. The clinical gaze has today been applied outside the confines of the clinic in reference to any interaction between a patient and

⁵⁹¹ Cory Keller, 'Sight Unseen: Picturing the Invisible', in *Brought to Light: Photography and the Invisible 1840-1900* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2008), pp. 19–35 (p. 23).

⁵⁹² Herbert L Blitzer, Karen Stein-Ferguson and Jeffrey Huang, *Understanding Forensic Digital Imaging* (London: Elsevier Academic Press, 2008); Wright; Weiss; Marilyn T Miller, "Crime Scene Investigation," in *Forensic Science: An Introduction to Scientific and Investigative Techniques*, ed. by Stuart H James and Jon J Nordby, Third (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2009), pp. 167–192.

⁵⁹³ The history of medical training in the role of medical examiner and forensic pathologist is outlined in: Ronald K. Wright, 'The Role of the Forensic Pathologist', in *Forensic Science: An Introduction to Scientific and Investigative Techniques*, ed. by Stuart H. James and Jon J. Nordby, Third (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2009), pp. 13–24. Wright makes clear that the medical examiner role was not mandated to have medical training until after World War II, where the more recent role of forensic pathologist was born out of the medical field.

⁵⁹⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, trans. by A.M. Sheridan, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2003). The translator, Sheridan, noted: 'when Foucault speaks of *la clinique*, he is thinking of both clinical medicine and the teaching hospital. So if one wishes to retain the unity of the concept, one is obliged to use the rather odd-sounding 'clinic'. From this comes the terms clinical or medical gaze which both refer to the gaze discussed and examined by Foucault in this book.

surgeons, medical students, or physicians. The clinical gaze is described as ‘detached’ and ‘objectifying’ in that it transforms the patient from a living subjective individual into a site of medical investigation.⁵⁹⁵ The gaze has been considered objectifying by nature because its function is to distil the disease, therefore dismissing subjectivity for empirical knowledge.⁵⁹⁶ Foucault noted that the gaze disregards both the person of the doctor and the patient: ‘they are tolerated [by the gaze] as disturbances that can hardly be avoided: the paradoxical role of medicine consists, above all, in neutralizing them’ and in neutralising the patient, the doctor rejects the patient’s subjectivity.⁵⁹⁷ The subjectivity of the doctor also risks interfering, and so the gaze sees beyond it, accepting only what is visible and strips away any personal feelings or attitudes about the patient or disease that may be unique to the doctor.

The objectivity of the patient and doctor are key, but while the gaze objectifies the patient – who, Foucault assumed, would not counter the gaze – the doctor is in control of the gaze, and is therefore elevated to the status of specialist.⁵⁹⁸ With the disease as the focus of clinical investigation, the patient and his/her subjectivity are irrelevant; if consulted at all, the patient will offer a history or describe symptoms, but the doctor will still sift through the patient’s discourse for keys that support what the gaze revealed.⁵⁹⁹ With respect to the dead, the medical gaze can literally, rather than metaphorically, penetrate the patient during autopsy. One can demonstrate this through a comparison of the autopsy and a surgery. While there is always a necessary distance between a surgeon and a patient, once the patient is deceased there is a subtle but palpable shift in the relationship. Surgeon Gawande, writing about the stark difference between touch in surgery and in the autopsy, emphasised that while surgeons are very careful in touching the patient for any reason, whereas ‘in the dissecting room, where the person is gone and only the carcass remains, you find little of this delicacy, and the

⁵⁹⁵ Johanna Shapiro, ‘(Re)Examining the Clinical Gaze Through the Prism of Literature’, *Families, Systems & Health*, 20 (2002), 161–170 (p. 162).

⁵⁹⁶ The gaze has, conversely, been supposed as creative rather than objectifying when facing the non-autonomous and non-discrete body. See: David Armstrong, ‘Bodies of Knowledge/Knowledge of Bodies,’ in *Reassessing Foucault: Power, Medicine and the Body*, ed. by Colin Jones and Ray Porter (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 17–27.

⁵⁹⁷ Foucault, p. 8.

⁵⁹⁸ See also: Johanna Shapiro, ‘(Re)Examining the Clinical Gaze Through the Prism of Literature,’ *Families, Systems & Health*, 20 (2002), 161–170; Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, trans. by A M Sheridan, Routledge (London: Routledge, 2003); Daniel M D Fox and Christopher M D Lawrence, *Photographing Medicine: Images and Power in Britain and America Since 1840*, First (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988); Martin Jay, ‘In the Empire of the Gaze: Foucault and the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought,’ in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. by David Couzens Hoy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 175–204; Colin Jones and Ray Porter, eds., *Reassessing Foucault: Power, Medicine and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1995); Deborah Lupton, ‘Foucault and the Medicalisation Critique,’ in *Foucault, Health and Medicine*, ed. by Alan Petersen and Robin Bunton (London: Routledge, 1997).

⁵⁹⁹ Foucault, p. 71.

difference is visible in the smallest details.’⁶⁰⁰ Gawande gives as an example moving the body, done swiftly and delicately when transferring a patient to a surgical table, he notes in the autopsy room the body is ‘yanked’, and sections of the body are lifted out of the carcass ‘as if it were the hood of a car’.⁶⁰¹ In the autopsy room the body is clearly an object, where there appears an awareness or respect for the life of a living patient. However, while not identical, the importance of the visual – understanding and learning through sight – remains.⁶⁰² The objectivity and detachment necessary in the clinical gaze and medical and forensic photography are recognised traits of forensic looking, referenced in popular culture and media, and evident in Serrano’s *The Morgue*.

The absence of emotion or subjectivity is also expected in forensic images, which rely on the notion of reflecting fact without emotional subjectivity. When describing crime scene photography, Bond explained ‘Police photographers document and record scenes of crimes in a manner that is assumed to be scientific. The general approach is to work toward some kind of supposed neutrality.’⁶⁰³ Bond argued that the practice of the police photographer is like that of the scientific photographer in producing ‘neutral’ images. This photographic neutrality is also assumed to be objective. Bond explained that photographic records of the crime scene must be accurate, ‘photograph *everything*’ in order to put emphasis on nothing, and produce a faithful record that can be trusted by both sides of the legal case and the police officers, devoid of any influence.⁶⁰⁴ He further noted that this attempt to capture everything made crime photography a great equaliser because the photographer must consider everything is worth photographing, ‘an approach that may be described as one which *democratizes* the subject matter.’⁶⁰⁵

In *Evidence*, writing on a collection of crime scene photographs from the New York Police Department archives, Luc Sante explained the same phenomenon of objectivity more critically: ‘Somehow these [crime scene] photographs were supposed to represent the truth, some of the truth, some kind of truth.’⁶⁰⁶ His words express a central issue within forensic photography: forensic images are ‘supposed to represent

⁶⁰⁰ Atul Gawande, ‘Final Cut: Medical Arrogance and the Decline of the Autopsy’, *The New Yorker*, 2001, 2–9 (p. 2).

⁶⁰¹ Gawande, p. 3.

⁶⁰² As I am considering the use of forensic looking by an artistic photographer, the caricature of Foucault’s gaze as I have primarily engaged with it, is more readily understood by the public. This extreme and segmenting gaze is what we see reproduced in film and television as well as media depictions of the medical institution, and are blamed for scandals such as Alder Hey, where the Alder Hey hospital harvested the organs of deceased patients without express consent of the next of kin.

⁶⁰³ Henry Bond, *Lacan at the Scene* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2009), p. 21.

⁶⁰⁴ Bond, p. 11.

⁶⁰⁵ Bond, p. 12.

⁶⁰⁶ Sante, p. 97.

the truth', but which truth? The photographs are read as though there could be only one interpretation, but that does not mean that they relay any particular 'truth'. In fact, often detectives will have contrasting theories using the same evidence. In practice, the purpose of the photograph is to work in tandem with other evidence to eliminate other possible 'truths' to come up with one single truth, and yet the photograph is presumed to hold that essential truth entirely within itself. The assumed objectivity and neutrality of forensic and medical images was easily associated with a lack of style because the photographer was to have no influence on the image itself.⁶⁰⁷

In the Channel 4 programme *Vile Bodies: The Dead*, Townsend interviewed police pathology photographer D.C. Yearnshire alongside artists who photograph within the morgue. Yearnshire acknowledged that he has to remove any possible relationship he may have had with the corpse: 'the body must be treated as an object, no matter how much the photographer is affected by it', implying that the absence of the photographer is essential to his work.⁶⁰⁸ He goes on to explain 'The main thing is to get the facts, to show everything as it is, as it was found at the time of death', the 'facts' free from subjectivity or judgement rely on the camera's mechanical eye re-presenting reality at a later date, rather than any interpretation or reading of these 'facts' by the photographer.⁶⁰⁹ In this context, the dead body within a crime scene or autopsy photograph was part of the collection of 'facts' and therefore must give as neutral an impression as possible, of photographer and subject.

Serrano's work calls on this neutral, supposedly objective type of forensic photography by denying the viewer connection with the photograph through the known codes and signs of portraiture. Yet the artistic elements make Serrano's images distinct from the distanced forensic images taken in the morgue by pathologists. Recall the quote from Arenas in response to *The Morgue*: 'They are too elegant for the police photographer, and too relentlessly factual for the artist.'⁶¹⁰ I have demonstrated that these images are detached and emotionless, like police photography. However, as Arenas points out, the composition, colour, lighting, and display of the bodies makes them so much more than police photography. While Arenas uses the term 'elegant', this 'elegance' lies in the details by which one can see the hand of the photographer.

⁶⁰⁷ In his history of medical photography, Kemp dubbed this a 'non-style'. Kemp, p. 148. On the topic of an accurate and unbiased image, see: Sanford Weiss, *Forensic Photography: The Importance of Accuracy* (Indianapolis: Prentice Hall, 2008); Herbert L. Blitzer, Karen Stein-Ferguson and Jeffrey Huang, *Understanding Forensic Digital Imaging* (London: Elsevier Academic Press, 2008); Thomas Stubblefield, 'Between the Officer and the Artist: Arnold Odermatt's Aesthetic-Forensic Project', in *Photographs, Histories, and Meanings* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Bond; Sante.

⁶⁰⁸ James Kent, 'Vile Bodies: The Dead' (London: Channel 4, 1998).

⁶⁰⁹ Townsend, p. 132.

⁶¹⁰ Arenas, p. 122.

Referring back to *Vile Bodies*, while both Yearnshire and Serrano treat the corpse as an object, avoiding any relationship with the subject, Serrano is more present in the images than a police photographer could be.⁶¹¹ While in forensic images, the system of photography helps to remove the hand of the photographer, *The Morgue* is reliant on Serrano's creation of the images through composition, lighting and colour, all of which change the way the viewer interacts with the subject.

Townsend argued that the presence of *punctum* encourages the viewers to connect with the specificity of each dead body, and with each death.⁶¹² Punctum is a term developed by Barthes in *Camera Lucida* in contrast to the term *studium*, to describe two categories of signification he believed were present in every photograph. The studium are all the details that one can read and signify, like composition, colour, lighting, and arrangement.⁶¹³ In contrast, punctum is that which is not intentionally there, that thing that jumps of the page to 'prick' the viewer drawing attention and possibly redefining the photograph for the individual viewer, even long after the image is gone.⁶¹⁴ Punctum is defined as something that stands out and forms one's perception of the photograph but is also personal. It is the viewer's effect on the photograph as much as the photograph's effect on the viewer, because, Barthes insists, it is unintentional on behalf of the photographer. Townsend's examples of such punctum in *The Morgue* are the imprints left on the infant's legs by socks in *Fatal Meningitis*. While Townsend acknowledged that Serrano insisted on taking off the socks because they were "too identifiable", Townsend reasons that these marks encourage identification between viewer and corpse-object.⁶¹⁵ In support of Townsend's argument, punctum was noted by Barthes to be beyond the control of intent of the photographer, but it is worth emphasising that Serrano specifically was attempting to avoid identification between the viewer and the corpse-object. While Townsend was touched by this detail – and it is therefore a source of punctum – because punctum is always personal and unpredictable, it cannot be relied upon as a defining feature of *The Morgue*. While punctum reveals something about our relationship with photographs, as in *Camera Lucida*, in the case of *The Morgue*, Serrano's attempt to remove the personal makes the elements of punctum less revealing than the studium.⁶¹⁶ I suggest instead

⁶¹¹ Townsend, p. 132.

⁶¹² Townsend, p. 133.

⁶¹³ Barthes, p. 27.

⁶¹⁴ Barthes, p. 27.

⁶¹⁵ Serrano qtd in Townsend, p. 133.

⁶¹⁶ Barthes explained: "A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)"; in each description asserting the personal relationship with *punctum* rather than any universal application or unconscious social uniformity. Barthes, p. 27.

that, within the context of the series, details like the sock draw attention to the overarching theme of the body as a landscape of texture. The indents in the skin echo the threads of the material ribbon used to tie the morgue tag onto the ankle, in line with the consistent textural contrast of material and skin throughout *The Morgue*. I argue that rather than the punctum, the studium of the photograph adds significance to the sectioned corpses, distinguishing the photographs from the cold and objective eye of forensic photography.

In order to demonstrate how the studium distinguishes the detached images of the dead from forensic photography, a detailed examination is required of the lighting, colour, composition, and the method of printing and mounting the photograph. In the next chapter I will argue that within the studium, Serrano's photographs from the morgue take the corpse object and monumentalise them, turning them from objects to icons and allegories. Drawing on the work of Kristeva, I demonstrate how Serrano's conscientious use of beauty and religious iconography demonstrate care for the deceased and makes visible the sublime in the abject.

CHAPTER 6

The Religious Sublime

The previous chapter suggested that the essential difference between Serrano's work and that of the pathology photographer lies in the studium: the composition and materiality of the photograph. This chapter will explore these elements and argue that moving away from the indexicality of the photograph, Serrano uses the studium as a method of care to elevate the dead, and emphasise the sublime within the abject corpse. I first use the analogy of a stained glass window to demonstrate how beauty and religious iconography serve to purify the abject within *The Morgue*. Examining the notion of purifying the abject within Kristeva's work, I explore how purifying the corpse through photography is a transformation that visualizes the sublime within the abject. Drawing on an argument by Bal, I suggest that Serrano's stylistic choices as a kind of caress, one that he uses to ensure, as Bal argued, the viewer's gaze caresses the photographic image. I then consider the effect of this form of care at a time when the medical and clinical spaces, including the morgue, were under scrutiny for the lack of care shown to patients.

In *The Ontology of the Photographic Image*, Bazin asserted that unlike the painter, who is present in every aspect of a painting, 'The personality of the photographer enters into the proceedings only in his selection of the object to be photographed and by way of the purpose he has in mind.'⁶¹⁷ Unlike his posed tableaux, Serrano photographed almost every corpse that entered the morgue and did not touch or arrange the bodies, seemingly supporting Bazin's claim that the photographer merely picks the object and the 'purpose' for it (such as the titles).⁶¹⁸ However, Serrano's hand is clearly present in every aspect of the photograph. The use of a background to alienate the subject from the morgue space, intense directed lighting and vibrant colours ensured throughout the production of the image, led Serrano be described as a painter with a camera.⁶¹⁹ Serrano's careful and deliberate composition refocuses the viewer away from the indexical within the photograph, and toward the rich textures and lush colours of the

⁶¹⁷ Bazin, p. 13.

⁶¹⁸ Bazin, p. 10; Steiner noted that Serrano photographed ninety-five percent of the bodies that went into the morgue, Steiner, p. 42.

⁶¹⁹ Hanson, p. 10; Ferguson, p. 12; Arenas; Bal; Soutter. Serrano also studied and practiced painting before becoming a photographer.

body.⁶²⁰ For example in *Rat Poison Suicide I* (Figure 26) the strong lighting brings out the detail of each hair on the body, like the sharp spines of a porcupine on the goose-pimpled skin. This texture contrasts with the delicate lace of a partially visible bra, the black cotton cloth covering her face, and the smooth rigidity of seized elbows.⁶²¹ The variety of textures, explored through strong lighting, creates a dramatic corpse, a field of texture and light that guides the viewer across the surfaces of the body as a landscape. The variations in texture and surprising detail of the body relate to cause of death – muscles contract as a result of poisoning causing hairs to stand on end – but at the same time appeal to the tactile and the aesthetic. These bodies are more than just evidence; and they are elevated beyond the status of evidence through the use of colour and light.

To understand the way in which these bodies are elevated, it is helpful to begin with lighting, as Serrano's uniquely strong lighting in *The Morgue* is consistently referenced by critics. The angled and stark lighting throughout *The Morgue* enhances the contrast between colour and solid black background. As a result, the deceased appear illuminated. Bal argued, among others, that this lighting was a form of photographic chiaroscuro.⁶²² Bal drew the connection between the Baroque sensibility of Serrano's photographs and what she termed 'the "maternal love" of the camera' which elevates the dead and 'inscribed [them] into monumental time'.⁶²³ Bal was referring to Kristeva's description of a monumental time as an eternal existence associated with history, 'monumental' in its endurance and finality.⁶²⁴ The monumental endurance of the image, Bal argued, relied on the sensibility of the tomb, which defined Caravaggio's work, and Bal contended was present in *The Morgue's* strong contrast between shadow and light in a darkened space cut off by the black backdrop. By confronting the viewer with the dead body, something they do not normally see or wish to see, in the confined space of the tomb, the viewer becomes imprisoned by the partial object that is the section of corpse.⁶²⁵ This, Bal noted, empowered the subject of the photograph; the images 'venerate what they represent' in the space of history (for Bal, also the space of the tomb) and eternity.⁶²⁶ Her argument specifically connected the

⁶²⁰ This is supported by the titles, which are a mix of the forensic and the colloquial, yet still appear stark in comparison to the rich colours of Cibachrome prints.

⁶²¹ The scale of the image helps to bring out these details, particularly in a gallery setting. The Chanel Four series *Vile Bodies* captures *Rat Poison Suicide I* being posted on a billboard in New York City. Even from the ground angle of the camera, the goose pimples and hair are visible because they catch the light. Kent.

⁶²² Bal, p. 187.

⁶²³ Bal, p. 192.

⁶²⁴ Bal, p. 191.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ Bal, p. 185.

Baroque style with Arenas's argument that Serrano creates contemporary icons.⁶²⁷ Within the Baroque, however, there is an element of beauty that is not traditional to religious icons. Bal highlights that the Baroque aesthetics are a way to monumentalize the abject body in a 'loving' way, one that implies the beauty of the baroque style outweighs the sense of terror and shock in being confronted with corpse fragments. However, Steiner is the most explicit in the relationship to beauty, linking the artistry of Serrano's images with beauty.⁶²⁸ Because of Serrano's engagement with religious iconography, the iconographic and symbolic side of his images is often discussed, but Bal's argument enforces the space of the tomb and the Baroque style as essential factors in the monumentalising of *The Morgue's* partial cadavers.

The lighting, mixed with the intense colours of Cibachrome, gives the illusion that the light is not merely directed at the body, but is emanating from the photograph itself. The monumental size of the photographs gives them the appearance of windows set into the white walls of the gallery, and the black backdrop makes the photographic space appear punched out of the wall (Figure 23).⁶²⁹ There a sense that *The Morgue* is akin to a stained glass window. While Serrano's work has yet to be compared to a stained glass window, critics and the artist himself have compared his work to altarpieces.⁶³⁰ Serrano's use of catholic imagery and symbology, and the monumental size of the pieces make a comparison between his work and an altarpiece straightforward. However, the stained glass window also takes into account the process by which his work is created. Serrano mounts his Cibachrome prints on Plexiglas with a heat press, creating a smooth surface of luminous colour.⁶³¹ The Plexiglas, rich colour, and luminescent lighting recall the aesthetic of the stained glass window, and indeed Hobbs noted that the process amounts to 'an industrialized equivalent to the tradition of reverse painting on glass.'⁶³² The effect is enhanced by Serrano's compositional technique of presenting the colours in blocks. For example, in *Infectious Pneumonia*, the face of the woman is covered by a vibrant red cloth, which cuts the face off at the nose (Figure 22). The block of red cloth, in luminescent colour and block-format, resembles a pane of glass.

⁶²⁷ Arenas, p. 120; The argument for Serrano as a creator of icons is also supported in: Paul Elie, 'Andres Serrano In View: Icon Maker or Breaker', *Commonwealth*, 122, 18–19; Rubio.

⁶²⁸ Steiner, pp. 11–12.

⁶²⁹ More on this argument in Lauren Sapikowski, 'The Faceless Portrait: Anonymity and Identity in Andres Serrano's *The Morgue*', *HARTS & Minds* 1.3, <http://media.wix.com/ugd/3089fd_a97dc460d221446985053414c135b5d6.pdf> [accessed 22 July 2014]

⁶³⁰ Donald J. Cosentino, 'Andres Serrano: Photographs' *African Arts* 23.4: Special Issue: Portraiture in Africa, Part II (Oct, 1990) 84-5 (p.84); Brenson; Piotrowski, p. 3; Serrano qtd in Blume, p.40.

⁶³¹ Hobbs, p. 24.

⁶³² *Ibid.*

The allusion to stained glass windows resonates with Serrano's 1987 *Body Fluids* series. In these works, Serrano re-presented and redefined Christian symbolism using unconventional materials. Using religious symbology, Serrano highlighted the correlation between abject materials (for example, blood) with their religious ideals (the blood of Christ). A similar re-presentation takes place in *The Morgue* with regard to the stained glass window aesthetic. Traditionally, stained glass was made for churches, and depicted scenes from the Bible or images of key religious figures to aid comprehension of the Bible by the illiterate masses. The correlation between stained glass and *The Morgue* is clear in the two photographs *Knifed to Death I* and *II*, each of which show a different hand of the same corpse from beyond the finger tips to mid-way between the wrist and elbow (Figure 24). The hands of the victim have been fingerprinted and there are small incisions on both arms just past the wrist. The hands are presented in three colours – black, red and pink – and shown in blocks, moving from the ink-blackened fingertips to the pale pink of the skin, bringing out the red of the knife wounds and smudges of blood near the edge of the frame. The images are arranged next to one another, with black frames almost touching (as in Figure 24) – analogous to the interlocking pieces of glass separated by black lead strips in stained glass windows. The two hands belong to the same corpse, but rather than being splayed out away from each other as they were in life, Serrano has inverted the images so that the hands appeared to reach out to one another, mimicking a central scene from Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* (Figure 25).⁶³³ Instead of reaching out in life, the hands reach out in death, neither one able to resurrect the other. One can imagine that the corpse is much like the body before God gave the spark of life to Adam. Yet there is nothing in the photographs to engender hope in the viewer: instead, we recognise the gesture's futility. Here again, the photograph denies a connection between viewer and subject by refusing to associate the corpse with a life lived or to engage in a living relationship with the viewer. However, as an allegory, the gesture can have some positive associations. Serrano made a comparison to Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*, commenting: 'I like him [the deceased] reaching out in death because maybe he couldn't do it when he was alive'.¹ Rather than emphasise the futility of the gesture, the deceased is able to make the positive gesture of 'reaching out', but only in death. Serrano's comment is undermined by the reality that Serrano knew nothing about the life of the deceased. However, if we accept that the corpse is an object, one can take away that Serrano wanted to represent

⁶³³ Serrano, speaking about this piece, explained: 'I like him reaching out in death because maybe he couldn't do it when he was alive.' This suggests that the connection Serrano sees is only within the subject, there is no reference to the viewer. Hobbs, 42. See also: Piotrowski.

the notion that in death, gestures are possible that might otherwise be unavailable in life. The allegorical gesture of reaching out does not have an impact on the deceased, he is beyond help, but the impact it has on the viewer exists through the intervention of the photographer.⁶³⁴ The riot of colour bearing down on the viewer, enhanced by the contrast of light and shadow, and the interlocking panes of glass in *Knifed to Death I* and *II* encourage a reading of the entire *Morgue* series as an interlocking window to be viewed from a distance in order to consider the whole.⁶³⁵

When on display in a gallery *The Morgue* presents all the images as equals in creating the whole. While forensic teams preference certain images based on evidence, resulting in a hierarchy, the stained glass window is a more coherent metaphore because each pane of glass is equally important in building the whole. There is no hierarchy among Serrano's photographs of the dead, and while each image is beautiful and intriguing, they function as a whole. Critical response to *The Morgue* similarly picks out a few images as examples, but references the series as a whole. For example, in catalogues Ferguson focuses on the titles throughout *The Morgue*, Hobbs discusses the relation of the series to political strife and Fitzpatrick examines identity throughout the series. Steiner focuses on the overall sensation (a mix of distress and attraction), using specific examples to point to abstraction in the overall representation of the dead. As I do, Steiner examines the tension between beauty and horror within the series through specific examples, but the strongest approach to analysing *The Morgue* is as a unified series. Using the mataphore of a stained glass window encourages one not only to step back and examine the series as a whole, but to also consider the interconnectivity of the pieces. I have already noted one aspect of interconnectivity: the presence of multiple examples of the same cause of death help to equalise the representations of the dead. However, another commonality among the dead is the careful depiction of each in rich colours, with chiaroscuro-like lighting, which enhance the majesty of the already monumental corpse fragments. The artistry with which Serrano depicts these corpses becomes more significant when considering the series as a whole. No matter what the critical reception, *The Morgue* is recognized for the beauty and the careful formal presentation of the dead.

Making the comparison between *The Morgue* and an interconnected stained

⁶³⁴ Blume, p.42.

⁶³⁵ For more on viewing forensic images as a whole, see, among others: Douglas Ubelaker and Henry Scammell, *Bones: A Forensic Detective's Casebook* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992); William S Smock, "Forensic Photography," in *Handbook of Medical Photography*, ed. by Lawrence Stack and others (Philadelphia: Hanley & Belfus Inc., 2001), pp. 397–408; Sam J Sansone, *Modern Photography for Police and Firemen* (Cincinnati, OH: W.H. Anderson Co., 1971).

glass window also brings to mind the alchemical process behind stained glass. The act of melting wood and ash to create crystalline glass is a form of purification, at least in an optical sense. This has a spiritual connection of the transformation of ash to spirit that occurs in the body after death. Metals are melted into the glass to create rich colours, but keep the translucence of the glass in a process that, on a certain level, purifies through uniformity. The process of transformation that takes dark earthly matter (such as ash and metal) to the translucent purity of illuminated glass resonates in *The Morgue*. Serrano similarly purifies (the deceased) through a transformative process (photography). Critic Olivia Rubio in the catalogue for *El Dedo en la Llaga* that Serrano is able ‘turn his subjects into archetypes’.⁶³⁶ This archetype is derived from the primal archetype of Jung: Serrano uses symbols and compositions that have a widely understood meaning as a way to subvert and reconfigure the notion of that archetype.⁶³⁷ Serrano uses archetypal poses in *The Morgue* to conceive of the corpse as a new type; stripped from its archetypal meaning and re-presented as corpse-object. In *The Morgue* series, we see Serrano using and reworking the archetypal image of the dead. In photographs like *Infectious Pneumonia* or *Jane Doe (Killed by Police)* the corpse is shown from the neck up in profile. The image of a corpse on its back, displayed in profile is so ingrained in imagery of the deceased that it can safely be categorised as an archetype. In addition to tombstones, effigies of the deceased are lain out as though asleep, presenting a profile to visitors and passers by, this tradition held true for centuries across royal, the upper classes and is used in church effigies of saints.⁶³⁸ In painting, corpses were often painted in profile: both the corpse representing death in *The Judd Marriage* (1506) and the body of Ophelia in John Everett Millais’ *Ophelia* (1851) are shown in profile a tradition held in a myriad of paintings in between. The same tradition is visible in the bodily arrangement of the deceased in Victorian post-mortem portraiture. By enlarge, the deceased were arranged laying on their back in profile or facing the camera directly.⁶³⁹ Working inside this framework, Serrano is able to alienate the viewer from the corpse, without completely removing the photographer

⁶³⁶ Rubio, p. 180.

⁶³⁷ The primary definition of an archetype is ‘The original pattern or model from which copies are made; a prototype’ but its secondary definition acknowledges the archetype as a standard or ideal. In the case of Serrano it suits this definition because it does not fall in line with Jung’s instance on a collective unconscious, but rather references a long respected and repeated history of presenting the dead lying down in profile. While an argument may be made that this relates to a collective unconscious, it is not necessary here. ‘Archetype, n.’, *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. [Accessed 12 March 2014].

⁶³⁸ Tomb effigies and sculpture have evolved over time, but a representation of the deceased in repose is common from the middle ages, though appeared earlier: Erwin Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture: Its Changing Aspects from Ancient Egypt to Bernini* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1964); Suzanne G. Lindsay, *Funerary Arts and Tomb Cult: Living with the Dead in France, 1750-1870* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).

⁶³⁹ There are images of the deceased seated upright but this was a more difficult practical issue as the corpse may need support to maintain that position. As such, these images were less common than the corpse in repose.

from the photograph. The viewer is still able to recognise the archetypal pose and even some religious references, though the viewer is also made aware of their experience being mediated by the photographer.

The archetypal poses and strong lighting have a purifying effect that is also beautifying. Arenas described her response to first seeing *The Morgue*, insisting that despite her ‘initial terror and revulsion’ she found that ‘surprisingly, at some point in this process, without ever losing their tight grip on us, these images begin to turn into beautiful pictures.’⁶⁴⁰ In truth, the beauty has always been there, in the formal elements of the work, but the shock of the subject matter, as Steiner and Bal argue, means that the viewer must take time to examine the photograph before their beauty emerges.⁶⁴¹ These beautifications, and the contrast between titles and formal elements of the photograph, are an example of the artistic purifying the abject. I previously addressed abjection in relation to Goldin, noting the parallels between photography and embalming. *Cookie in Her Casket* is saved from the abjection of decay by the camera, which then perpetuates an image of the beautified corpse. In Serrano’s work, the viewer is confronted with that which is hidden from the image of Cookie: the decomposing body.

The Morgue images bombard the viewer with those realities that are the destruction of life, and the materiality of death, the very things that Kristeva associated with the abject:

A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not signify death. In the presence of signified death – a flat encephalograph, for instance – I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death.⁶⁴²

Here, Kristeva draws the line between the ‘signified death’ and the knowable, tangible reality of death, where the latter is abject because it forces one to acknowledge their own death; not merely the inevitability of death, but its *evidence*. And yet, while the photographs in *The Morgue* may be shocking or unsettling in that they confront us with the materiality of death, they present the body in a context that, for Kristeva, purifies the abject, through the religious and the artistic.⁶⁴³ Kristeva believed the structured practices of religion ‘purified’ and ‘repressed’ the abject, avoiding a direct

⁶⁴⁰ Arenas, p. 123.

⁶⁴¹ See: Steiner, p.16; Bal, p. 185.

⁶⁴² Kristeva, p. 3.

⁶⁴³ Kristeva wrote: “The various means of *purifying* the abject – the various catharses – make up the history of religions, and end up with that catharsis par excellence called art, both on the far and near side of religion.” Kristeva, p. 17.

confrontation with it.⁶⁴⁴ This is visible to a degree in *The Morgue*, for example where the abjection of a bloody incision on a corpse is subdued by its reference to the stigmata in *Rat Poison Suicide II* (Figure 27). Serrano's references to religious symbology lace the abject with the religious, repressing abjection thereby accentuating the beauty in the textures and colours of the corpse. Both beauty and religion help to codify and re-categorize the corpse. This experience mirrors Sappol's description of the first response to the early vivid anatomical drawings in Bidloo's *anatomia humani corporis*. Sappol argued 'The overall effect is at the same time ugly and beautiful – Lairese's illustrations [...] are absolute masterpieces of composition and texture – a disturbing nightmare anatomy.'⁶⁴⁵ The anatomical drawings both 'ugly and beautiful' parallels Serrano's work, although, by using photography, *The Morgue* pushes the boundaries of both the confrontation with the cadaver and the beautiful within this kind of depiction. As in anatomical drawing where the texture, shadowing and accuracy of the drawing subdue the abject reality of the body being flayed open and examined, Serrano's photographs use studium –composition, lighting and colour – to mediate the abject reality with the subjectivity of the artist.

The artistic skill and interpretation of the abject body and its organs is a mediating factor, it purifies that which is already abject. This is distinct from science, which Kristeva argued gazes onto the corpse as a non-abject thing.⁶⁴⁶ In the framework of science the corpse is object, rather than abject. The corpse is a thing to be categorised and coded into neat and manageable parts and processes. Essential to Kristeva's description of the abject is a threat to order and identity, but science categorises the corpse and fits it within a scientific, often biological, order and identity. Though Kristeva does not discuss Foucault, we can see the codification of the corpse within Foucault's explanation of clinical looking within *The Birth of the Clinic*. Foucault explained, 'The clinic demands as much of the gaze as natural history [...] to see, to isolate features, to recognize those that are identical and those that are different, to regroup them, to classify them by species or families.'⁶⁴⁷ The doctor created knowledge (by regrouping and classification) solely by seeing; though that act of seeing 'isolates' the patient from the disease, the body from the individual, and certain areas of the body from the body as a whole. Not only is the patient objectified, but they are often not viewed as a unified corpus. This detachment of the subject from their body also applies

⁶⁴⁴ Kristeva, p. 209.

⁶⁴⁵ Sappol, p. 28.

⁶⁴⁶ Kristeva.

⁶⁴⁷ Foucault, pp. 108–109.

to the corpse in an autopsy setting where the doctor is looking through the body for clues as the cause of death or other information, which is available from examination of the body. In this way, the corpse is a source of information and a way to find order. The corpse is also not a threat to identity because in the clinical gaze the identity of the subject and the doctor are irrelevant, only the identity of the systems of the body and the disease or other processes of the body are significant, and they remain intact. In a wider sense, pathology segments the body in order to define and objectify it, making the parts of the body represented in an anatomical text book objects that are not threatening, but identifying.⁶⁴⁸

Kristeva argued that both art and religion purified abjection.⁶⁴⁹ And certainly the chiaroscuro lighting, careful composition and intense colours of *The Morgue* subdue and purify these abject corpses into beautiful photographs. However, the religious is more prominent in my analysis because the repression of the abject in *The Morgue* makes space for the sublime. The religious tone of Serrano's work further enhances the tension between the abject and the sublime. Kristeva noted that 'the abject is edged with the sublime' and in *The Morgue* Serrano reveals how thin the line is between the two.⁶⁵⁰ The iconographic references to Christ and God throughout *The Morgue* establish a correlation between the corporeal and the religious sublime. However, by using the dead body, the series further delves into the sublime in relation to the abject. The images are so closely cropped that the body becomes a monumental subject, enhancing the terror that is a confrontation with death and decay that recalls the Kantian sublime. In Kant, however, there is a separation between the beautiful and the sublime, a line that is blurred in Serrano's work.⁶⁵¹ The formerly abject corpse, now beautiful, is still unsettling in the grandeur of the terrors it reveals to the viewer. Saturated with colour, the smallest wound is made monumental against the intensely detailed encounter with the corpse. For example, the incision on the foot of *Rat Poison Suicide II* takes up just under one quarter of the length of the image at just under 11 inches. The incision in life is a minor wound, but seen at such scale it takes on monumentality and a new tactility:

⁶⁴⁸ As Worden noted: 'By the 1890s, with the influence of the pathology laboratory changing the perception of the patient from an individual to a disease entity, certain conventions were established, which included making the patients anonymous by blacking out their eyes, photographing them naked against plain backgrounds, and eliminating irrelevant parts of the body from the print.' Gretchen Worden, "Introduction," in *Mütter Museum: Historic Medical Photography*, ed. by Laura Lindgren (New York: Blast Books, 2007), pp. 18–24 (p. 1920).

⁶⁴⁹ Kristeva tied the religious and artistic to the sublime, viewing both as edged with the sublime, while tied to purification. Kristeva, p. 17.

⁶⁵⁰ Kristeva, p. 11.

⁶⁵¹ Kristeva, drawing on Kant, does not use beauty to describe the abject, however she does consider the corpse in art to be purified of abjection. Even though this does not imply that beauty is a part of this purification, it does accept the reality of an artwork that is both beautiful and elevates the corpse to the sublime. Taking it a step further, it also allows the possibility of the beauty of an artwork to inform its purification and elevation.

the wound becomes engulfing smear of smooth, shimmering red. This is an encounter that one might not have in the flesh, for the camera picks out the smallest details on the skin, otherwise lost to the human eye. And this encounter, without the revulsion of the smell of decay and the threat of abjection subdued, entices the viewer to touch the surface of the body. Because of the smoothness of the glass, touch would deny the textures visible in the eyes, establishing a surreal encounter with these monumental figures. In making use of the forensic gaze, *The Morgue* also calls upon the historical convergence of the sublime and medical photography. The technology of early medical photography revealed the sublime in the human body. Photomicrography made visible to the naked eye a universe of interactions within the human body. The X-ray in particular made visible the invisible and revealed the sublime landscape within the human body, illuminated and mysterious.⁶⁵² Medical technology demanded a consideration for the sublime within the human, particularly the corporeal, an argument revitalized within *The Morgue*.

Bringing out the sublime in the dead body has a long history with the body of the dead Christ, and in medicine the sublime comes through the categorisation and illumination of the body through relatively recent advancements. However, in relation to abjection, the sublime is not limited to the religious or the medical. In religion and medicine the body is more than just human, but what of Serrano's images? *The Morgue* was first exhibited two decades before Sarah James would argue that, at least within war photography, there was no longer space for the human in the sublime. She argued that photographing people, even corpses, separated the sublime from personal intimacy.⁶⁵³ The truth of this argument is visible in the anonymous monumental corpses in *The Morgue*. However, James insists that the trend of pulling away from the human for the sublime is dangerous because it makes the terror of the sublime inhuman: 'The hidden truth of the sublime is that its archaic threat is posed less by natural phenomena than by other human beings.'⁶⁵⁴ The human threat of the sublime is no more potent than in the universally understood and empathetic fear of death and the threat of dying. In fact, Kristeva argues that the sublime exists at the edges of the abject, and within an encounter with death. Her argument is derived from the work of French philosopher Bataille who similarly believed that a personal confrontation with death gave the

⁶⁵² See Ian Jeffrey, *ReVisions: An Alternative History of Photography* (Bradford: The National Museum of Photography, Film & Television, 1999).

⁶⁵³ Sarah James, 'Making an Ugly World Beautiful? Morality and Aesthetics in the Aftermath', in *Memory of Fire: Images of War and The War of Images*, ed. by Julian Stallabrass (Brighton: Photoworks, 2013), pp. 114–129 (p. 121).

⁶⁵⁴ James, p. 125.

spectator a glimpse beyond the limits of human life.⁶⁵⁵ In Serrano's images of the corpse we have the monumental, the terrible and the truly threatening in a confrontation with the abject corpse where the abject is subdued through art (*studium*) and religion, making visible the space of the sublime in material reality of death. They are terribly beautiful, and through the terror there is the sublime.⁶⁵⁶ Arenas' response is an exemplar of that experience. She kept looking back, through the 'terror' and the 'revulsion' to the point of beauty. It was not that the terror subsided. Revealed within the terror of the material reality of death is the sublime of the human. It is not the direct confrontation with the abject Kristeva wrote about – Serrano mediates the abject with *studium* (art) and religious symbology – but it is more direct than the Judeo-Christian structure surrounding the law of the father that she critiqued in *Powers of Horror*. If, as Kristeva insisted 'The corpse, seen without God and outside of science is the utmost of abjection', then one could argue that Serrano's *The Morgue* allows that within the structures of God and science the corpse can be sublime.⁶⁵⁷

6.2 Creating Dignity through Distance: In Response to the Medical Death

Beautifying these corpses, and elevating them from the abject to the sublime is a way of lavishing care onto the corpse that is otherwise locked away in the clinical environment of a morgue. Like Goldin's work, Serrano's notion of care derives from the attempt 'to take thought for' or to 'trouble oneself' over the deceased.⁶⁵⁸ This deviates from Goldin's notion of care which relates directly to the origins of care as lamentation, where the deceased are grieved as individuals focusing on the life that has passed and the loss that is felt by those who remain.⁶⁵⁹ Instead, Serrano's form of care monumentalises the deceased drawing out the aesthetics of the corpse and elevating the sectioned body to the iconic and even the sublime. This form of care does not take into account the life of the individual representing the deceased, but offers something more than clues leading to an objective, knowable truth. The key to this elevation can be found in the connection between Serrano and Baroque masters.

When describing the effects of Baroque sensibility in Serrano's *The Morgue*, Bal commented:

⁶⁵⁵ Kristeva specifically considers the abject in relation to Bataille. See: Kristeva, p. 13; Georges Bataille, *The Tears of Eros* (City Lights Books, 1989).

⁶⁵⁶ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*.

⁶⁵⁷ Kristeva, p. 4.

⁶⁵⁸ 'Care', Def. 3, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2013. 17 May 2013. It's first use as a phrase recorded in the OED was c. 1230 "He wile carien for hire" referring to the husband providing for and protecting his wife.

⁶⁵⁹ Goldin's form of care relies on intimacy that is implied in the first use of care between a husband and wife. Serrano's form of care is arguably more evident because he takes trouble over the deceased who have no personal connection to him.

The abject dead body becomes a powerful monument, brought to life by the “maternal love” of the camera that dignifies it – the slowed-down gaze that skims over the object, caresses it and surrounds it with care.⁶⁶⁰

Bal places the camera as the source of ‘maternal love’ emphasising the camera’s role in transforming an abject corpse in the morgue into the sublime, beautiful and monumental corpse in the photograph. The act of photographing, and the resulting image, purifies and elevates. In this way one can understand the ‘love’ of the camera on the corpse to relate to the effect of photographing the corpse – the angle, lighting, composition and other intentions of the photographer to create something through the act of photographing. These elements, the studium, result in a form of care, not through the act of photographing, but later, in the response to the studium, by the viewer’s gaze. The gaze, as Bal describes it is slowed and ‘caresses’ the formerly abject body as it moves along the corpse, soaking in the colours, forms, and textures in that moment of visual contact. This is a different caress from the caress by Goldin – which is the caress of a photographer and relies on the personal relationship between photographer and subject – but both caresses occur through the camera, and imagine the camera as a mechanism of care and a conduit for contact. Serrano takes a care for the deceased through the act of photographing them, bringing out the sublime in the corpse.

In the catalogue for the *Body and Soul* exhibition, Arenas noted of the *Nomads* series ‘the strong light and deep shadows that bite into richly textured figures [...] would have made Caravaggio envy what Serrano’s spotlights and Cibachrome film can make of *chiaroscuro*.’⁶⁶¹ The description of photographic chiaroscuro is present in *The Morgue* as well, bringing a sense of majesty and drama to these corpses.⁶⁶² They are not merely bodies in a New York morgue, but stylistically alongside Caravaggio’s beheaded Holofernes, crucified Saint Peter, and the holiest of corpses, Christ. These iconic corpses of history and religion painted by masters are alluded to in Serrano’s style, which places all corpses on the same plane of aesthetic drama and baroque colours.⁶⁶³ Rather than indexical single deaths recorded in a forensic gaze, the photographs become allegories and icons. The effect is surprisingly normalising, normalising of the causes of death, but also of dying. The disease and cause of death need not limit the dead, who are equal in dying, no matter if they die of AIDS,

⁶⁶⁰ Bal, p. 192.

⁶⁶¹ Arenas, p. 122.

⁶⁶² See: Bal.

⁶⁶³ Serrano’s work was specifically compared to Mantagne’s *Lamentation of the Dead Christ* in Andrea D Fitzpatrick, ‘Reconsidering the Dead in Andres Serrano’s *The Morgue*: Identity, Agency, Subjectivity’, *RACR*, 32, 28–42 (p. 35); Heartney, “Andres Serrano”, p.132.

pneumonia, or crucifixion. The care and veneration of the dead in *The Morgue* as Baroque painting treated other iconic deaths came at a time when dying was stigmatic or invisible.⁶⁶⁴ Serrano's images use the gaze that was the cause of such stigma, the forensic and medical gaze, and radicalised it to present the possibility of identifying disease without belittling or diminishing the subject. While Serrano is specifically not interested in the identity or living history of the corpse, he demonstrates that in photographing the corpse, even in a forensic setting, the corpse can be sublime in its own right. This is a product of the photographic caress, whereby Serrano has presented these dead as careful textural spaces to slow the gaze of the viewer, and further elevated them using Baroque stylistic techniques.

In elevating the corpse, Serrano demonstrates that he caresses the dead through a photographing transformation. To understand the photograph as a kind of transformation it is helpful to compare the images of *The Morgue* to another photographic work, *The Glassman* (Figure 28) by Serrano's contemporary, Joel-Peter Witkin who photographs bodies found in the Mexican morgue.⁶⁶⁵ While born in New York City, Witkin left for New Mexico to develop his photographic work. Witkin is known for his choice in non-traditional subjects, including corpse fragments and corpses from the morgues of Mexico. Because his practice is partly based in Mexico, his work relates to questions of ethics, the drug cartels and boarder towns of Mexico and calls on the humour in death and mix of life and death recognised in Mexican heritage, and expressed in events such as *Dia del Muerte*.⁶⁶⁶ The additional concerns of practicing in Mexico, however, do not impact the comparison I wish to make between Serrano's *Jane Doe* and Witkin's *The Glassman*. I focus briefly on this comparison as a demonstration of different kinds of transformation, which will serve to highlight the relationship between beauty and transformation in Serrano's photographs.

The Glassman is Witkin's only image, thus far, of a fully intact adult corpse. In

⁶⁶⁴ Serrano's work has been compared to Baroque painting in, among others: Arenas; Mary O'Neill, 'Images of the Dead: Ethics and Contemporary Art Practice', *Inter-Disciplinary.Net* <<http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/neillpaper.pdf>> [accessed 25 May 2013]; Bal.

⁶⁶⁵ Witkin was raised in New York, and one might think that he is part of the same dialogue as Serrano and Goldin, but Witkin moved from New York to New Mexico to do his masters in Photography. The move changed the trajectory of his career and his work. His use of the morgues in Mexico also bring up issues of ethics, the drug war and the struggles of the boarder towns of Mexico. That is too large a scope to consider in this essay, but for more, see: Peter Schwenger, 'Corpsing the Image', *Critical Inquiry*, 26 (2000), 395–413; Townsend, "Damaged Bodies"; Joel-Peter Witkin, 'Danse Macabre: Witkin on His Photographs about Death', *Aperture*, 149 (1997), 36–9.

⁶⁶⁶ Van Deren Coke, *Joel-Peter Witkin: Forty Photographs* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1985), p. 36; Heartney, *Postmodern Heretics: The Catholic Imagination in Contemporary Art*, p. 132. These additional concerns are not relevant to this discussion of Serrano's *The Morgue*, but they help to explain why I have focused on artists within New York. The few other artists photographing the dead did so on an international level, which brings into focus other political concerns. New York, on the otherhand, was a site of social upheaval and particularly heated response to the AIDS epidemic, with concerns that focused intently on the social space of the corpse.

this black and white image, the corpse is strapped to a chair with an open metal backing by a single strap across the torso. The hands are arranged on his bare lap, with palms up and fingers slightly intertwined. The corpse's head leans to one side and eyes are partially opened. There is an odd mix of attention and lack of care to the image. The artist has taken the time to prop the body up in the chair, strap it in, and arrange the hands. However, the body slumps diagonally on the chair, with the head lulling making the arrangement seem hap-hazard. The body itself has not been washed, there are drips of blood and stained hand marks on the body, possibly from surgery or the artist. The body is dirty and the stitching of the autopsy scar is coarse and uneven. The surface of the photograph has been carefully scratched and tarnished, mimicking the scars on the body in an painstaking act by the artist that makes the image look deteriorated and handled poorly, even though it took time and attention.⁶⁶⁷

Discussing the image in an interview with Michael Sand, Witkin explains that he initially had difficulty engaging with his corpse subject, which he chose from among other, more damaged, corpses in the back of a Mexico City morgue truck.⁶⁶⁸ He took a few pictures with various props before handing it over to morgue technicians, but was unsatisfied with the images. However, when witnessing the autopsy, Witkin claims that he saw the corpse undergo a transformation: 'I realized during the autopsy that this man was being judged. I saw his fingers hardening. I saw his face changing. I witnessed his passage.'⁶⁶⁹ This moment – where Witkin outlines that he believes he saw the deceased experience mortal (Christian) judgement, and gain entry into either heaven or hell – inspired Witkin to photograph the body anew. From early on in his life Witkin became engrossed in that moment where the body moves from life to death, and having, he believes, witnessed this moment, the subject became intriguing and valuable to him again.⁶⁷⁰ This transition is not a beautiful moment, and autopsy struggles to be appealing, but it is at this moment that Witkin moved from ambivalence to interest. Witkin relayed to Sand that after more than an hour of photographing, the corpse 'looked like Saint Sebastian. He looked like a person who had grace. His fingers, I swear to God, had grown 50 percent.'⁶⁷¹ These transformations – one at the moment of being judged in the autopsy room, and the other during the photography session – does

⁶⁶⁷ Schwenger, p. 407.

⁶⁶⁸ Michael Sand, 'Interview with Joel-Peter Witkin' *World Art 1*, (1996) <<http://zonezero.com/exposiciones/fotografos/witkin/jpwdefault.html>> [accessed 13 May 2012].

⁶⁶⁹ Witkin, 'Danse Macabre: Witkin on His Photographs about Death', p. 36.

⁶⁷⁰ Witkin's fascination with the transition from life to death, he attributes to an incident in his childhood where he witnessed a decapitation. This is discussed in, among others: Townsend, 'Damaged Bodies', p. 46; Eugena Perry, *Joel-Peter Witkin: The Bone House* (New York: Twin Palms Publishers, 1998), p. 15; Joel-Peter Witkin, 'Revolt Against the Mystical' (University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, 1967).

⁶⁷¹ Sand.

not happen within the frame of the camera, but has already happened in front of Witkin, who subsequently captured this transformation with the camera.

Townsend's discussion of *The Glassman* immediately grasps onto the formal similarities between the image and the depiction of Christ as a man of sorrows.⁶⁷² Like my argument with Serrano's *The Morgue*, Townsend associates this elevation of the corpse to a religious icon as a way to infuse dignity into the subject.⁶⁷³ The elevation of the subject is thus related to the man being re-presented in art, something we see in Serrano as well, and mentioned in relation to the display of *Cookie in Her Casket*. Townsend's interpretation explains that the act of photographing and recalling previous artworks with the composition also has a transformative affect in Witkin's work, but this is tied into Witkin's story of the transformation of the corpse to a likeness of Saint Sebastian.⁶⁷⁴

The transformation of the bodies in an unnamed morgue, however occur for Serrano through the process of becoming image. The lighting, colours, the process of Cibachrome and the sealing of the image to plexiglass transform the corpse from an abject object to a purified sublime art object, as I have argued. Beauty is one of the tools Serrano uses to facilitate this transformation. Rather than the starkness of an 'ugly' corpse these are aligned with the traditional beauty of Baroque master painting. By adding traditional, painterly elements of beauty Serrano uses the photograph to transform the corpse. Witkin's beauty, as Townsend notes, 'is of a different order, and it stands outside the worldly success that the body beautiful so convincingly represents' a beauty that Witkin presents through the subject.⁶⁷⁵ In contrast, Serrano brings to the corpse traditional, historical beauty of the Baroque. It is that uncertain line between being made beautiful and having one's beauty brought out, and Serrano, I argue, actively makes the corpses beautiful.

By using beauty as a tool in his works, Serrano makes beauty a form of care, rather than an affect of caring. In 'The Beautiful and the Sublime', Danto expressed that beauty is a choice by the artist, and I have argued that Serrano is an artist who has used beauty as a tool in concordance with the sublime.⁶⁷⁶ Danto related the sublime to the work of abstract-expressionists who polarized the sublime and the beautiful, but given that he acknowledged both the sublime and beautiful as options within art, one might

⁶⁷² Townsend, 'Damaged Bodies', p. 52.

⁶⁷³ Townsend does not distinguish here between the living and dead subjects of Witkin, which Townsend argues Witkin presents as saints in contemporary society. Townsend, 'Damaged Bodies', p. 48.

⁶⁷⁴ Townsend relays the same story. Townsend, 'Damaged Bodies', p. 52.

⁶⁷⁵ Townsend notes that Witkin sees beauty in the suffering of his living subjects, as an example of untraditional beauty. Townsend, 'Damaged Bodies', p. 47.

⁶⁷⁶ Danto, pp. 160.

assume he would agree they could be used in conjunction with each other.⁶⁷⁷ In fact, bringing together the beautiful and the sublime in photography raises the question of whether painting polarized the beautiful and the sublime out of necessity. After all, Danto argued that the burden of representation hinders the sublime, and this ties into the representation of beauty.⁶⁷⁸ That is an entirely unrelated argument, but Serrano's use of beauty fits within Danto's argument, which followed from Hickey, that beauty can be used as a tool. In the case of Serrano, beauty was a way to relay the sublime in the abject. The correlation between beauty and the sublime might have been foreseen in Hickey or Danto, but unique to my argument is that Serrano's use of beauty is a form of care, where beauty is used to alleviate abjection and connect these unidentified, socially ostracized corpse with history and with the sublime.

When first exhibited in New York in 1993, *The Morgue* was part of a larger cultural concern for dignity in death. The 1980s and 1990s brought to a head the way in which AIDS and cancer defined their patients. As mentioned previously, in *Illness as Metaphor* and later *AIDS and its Metaphors* Sontag highlighted the alienating and debilitating effects of being labelled with cancer and AIDS in the 1980s. She noted that illness defined the patient: because of the discourse and anxiety that surrounded fatal diseases, the patient might feel socially isolated, if not alienated by their own family.⁶⁷⁹ In taking on specific causes of death with a variety of images, Serrano emphasises the ambiguity of disease. The causes of death are not revelatory; in some cases they offer explanation – the mottled purple skin is a side-effect of drowning – but they do not define or limit the photograph as they might limit the corpse in life, both by the forensic gaze which sees only what it 'needs' for answers and by wider society which defined the person by their disease.⁶⁸⁰ Ironically, we can see an example of this in Nan Goldin's *Cookie in Her Casket* and the broader remembrance of Cookie Mueller. Despite Mueller's chronicled role as a writer, a hippie, a drug dealer, a mother and art critic, she is commemorated primarily as an AIDS icon.⁶⁸¹ Because of the conflict surrounding

⁶⁷⁷ Danto, pp. 143–160.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁹ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), p. 6.

⁶⁸⁰ While there is a desire to believe in the colloquial saying that death equalizes, works like that of Fitzpatrick reveal the associations that come with certain ways of dying. While Fitzpatrick considered the criminal context of death, a disease like AIDS in the 1990s, as previously discussed, could be stigmatizing. See, among others: Fitzpatrick, "Reconsidering the Dead in Andres Serrano's *The Morgue: Identity, Agency, Subjectivity*"; Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*; McGovern; David Armstrong, "Silence and Truth in Death and Dying," *Social Science and Medicine*, 24 (1987), 651–657.

⁶⁸¹ See: Nan Goldin, "Nan Goldin on Cookie Mueller," *Digital Journalist*, 2001 <http://digitaljournalist.org/issue0106/voices_goldin.htm> [accessed 10 June 2013]; Mallory Curley, *A Cookie Mueller Encyclopaedia* (New York: Randy Press, 2010); 'Icon of the Week: Cookie Mueller' *A Brie Grows in Brooklyn* <<http://abriegrowsinbrooklyn.com/post/3203134693/icon-of-the-week-cookie-mueller>> [accessed 10 June 2013]; 'Cookie Mueller Dead; Actress and Writer, 40' *New York Times* (15 November 1989).

governmental response to AIDS and HIV, those who died were easily made martyrs or villains, defined by their illness in life and death. With *The Morgue*, Serrano uses the narrow and segmenting forensic gaze to reveal the impotence of such tunnel vision, insisting on the body being more than just a sign for the cause of death.⁶⁸² There is more to see than the cause of death, as there is more to see than the disease in the patient, the marks on a body. More interestingly, Serrano does not suggest that we look at the former identity of the body either. The corpse itself, separated from individual identity, is celebrated in *The Morgue* as a corpse. Yes, the body can offer physical referents to the cause of death, or to hints as to its gender and race, but it can also be acknowledged and valued simply as corpse-object for its aesthetic potential.

Opening up the corpse to be defined as more than just the cause of death is particularly poignant in a time when the reality of death was what Tercier dubbed a ‘hi-tech death’. Tercier described the reality of dying in the past half-century as medical and exhausting.⁶⁸³ The mechanical devices that mediated dying enhances the sense of a patient objectified and helpless before the cold, impersonal gaze and practice of the doctor, which was criticised from the late-sixties through the 1990s.⁶⁸⁴ While dying still occurs predominantly in hospitals today, the intense objectification and clinical detachment of the process has since been combatted.⁶⁸⁵ In the 1990s, however, these changes were just taking shape as the reality of AIDS and HIV patients photographed in their hospital beds became front page news, the hospice movement gained momentum in contrast to hospital care, and death took hold in the art scene. Serrano’s work, as I have argued, reinvigorated the connection between death and the sublime and challenged the relationship between the abject and the beautiful. The effect was one that recalled the nineteenth century the wonder of photography and its ability to inspire the sublime in medical imaging such as the x-ray.

What Serrano did differently, and perhaps why his exhibition received strong initial criticism, was to photograph without the narrative of the deceased. Even an exhibition from the same time period of crime scene photographs by newsmedia photographer Weegee, the information from the news story accompanied the photographs, allowing the viewers to hold on to the human narrative in death.⁶⁸⁶ The

⁶⁸² This is part of the disjuncture between title and image discussed in, among others: Ferguson; Heartney, “Andres Serrano.”

⁶⁸³ Tercier, 10.

⁶⁸⁴ Tercier particularly highlighted the violence of some medical techniques, such as CPR. Tercier, 165.

⁶⁸⁵ This is actually a source of some contention, but improvements have been made. For more on the medical side of changing relations with the patient, see: Atul Gawande, “Final Cut: Medical Arrogance and the Decline of the Autopsy,” *The New Yorker*, 2001, 2–9; Arushi Sinha, “An Overview of Telemedicine: The Virtual Gaze of Health Care in the Next Century,” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 14 (2000), 291–309.

⁶⁸⁶ Weegee exhibition was reviewed by Cookie Mueller. Mueller, *Ask Dr. Mueller: The Writings of Cookie Mueller*.

dominant response to the invisible and medical death at the time was to counter it with human reality. AIDS was one of the central concerns of the time, with artists and activists alike demanding respect for those dying or having contracted HIV. *The Morgue* makes no such demands, instead working within the forensic gaze and the system of detachment to allow for a different kind of caring. The images in *The Morgue* are detached from a living history, but they still evidence care. Serrano's careful cropping, strong lighting and deep colours elevate the corpse to monuments or allegories; an action which Bal described as 'the "maternal love" of the camera that dignifies [the corpse]'.⁶⁸⁷ It is, as Bal described, a way to 'caress' the corpse, but not in the way that Goldin caresses her subjects. Serrano does not reach out with his camera, instead composing the image so that the eyes of the viewer caress the corpse. The tactility and materiality of the photograph encourage viewers to take care in looking, while the composition and dramatic colours and lighting of the photograph evidence care for, in 'taking a thought for', the corpse carving it into history and revealing the sublime in the material reality of death.⁶⁸⁸ Working within the tension of abjection, beauty and the sublime, Serrano shows care for these corpses by asking every viewer to think on them longer, to consider them as beautiful, sublime, and valuable as corpses. This is crucial because Serrano never turns to the living identity of the corpse to care for them, but allows these bodies, to exist and be appreciated *as corpses*.⁶⁸⁹ This not only supports the sublime within the human, but also the sublime of death. *The Morgue* challenged the existing belief in the invisible death by showing what is lost when it is hidden away: the sublime within death. The appreciation for the sublime, the terror and the awe of death is presented through an encounter with its materiality. Of course this would have been a shocking encounter at the time, but one that directly countered the prevailing belief in an invisible death while showing care for the deceased. *The Morgue* asks the viewer to consider the importance of caring for the dead and the failings of the medical invisible death, but does so in the context of forensic looking. This suggests that it there is nothing inherently wrong with the medical or criminological way of looking at the dead – in fact it reminds one that the medical once revealed the sublime – and that in fact we can still have a medicalised response to death without losing the power of its reality.

Section Conclusion

⁶⁸⁷ Bal, p. 192.

⁶⁸⁸ 'Care', Def. 3, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2013. 17 May 2013.

⁶⁸⁹ This runs counter to Goldin's familial approach which engages with the dead as people with a history.

In this section I argued that Serrano's work is primarily received in respect to his controversy with the NEA, which politicizes his work, but risks overlooking his engagement with beauty. Those who have highlighted beauty within Serrano's work do not engage with the historical context of the work, instead reflecting internally on the relationship between art and the subject. I clarify that my own analysis, while working from the same principle as Danto and Hickey that beauty is a tool used by the artist, takes into account the relationship between Serrano's work and the forensic gaze, and considers the wider historical context of *The Morgue*. Focusing on *The Morgue*, I argue that Serrano engages with the notion of forensic looking, which I outline in relation to the objectivity of the camera and drawing on Foucault's conception of a clinical gaze and clinical looking. I then demonstrate that Serrano uses the expectations of forensic looking to present the corpse as a thing, independent from a living history.

While objectifying and dissecting the body with the camera, I argue that Serrano's work is not strictly forensic, because the hand of the photographer is clearly visible in the studium of the photograph – its composition, lighting and colours – and in the use of beauty within in the image. I then consider the effect this has on the indexical nature of the photograph, revealing that *The Morgue* pulls away from the photograph as an index, focusing on the formal and aesthetic qualities of the image. Serrano presents these images within the tension between the abject, the beautiful and the sublime, subduing and purifying the abject to extend care to the dead, even from a position outside of the familial. I further explored how beauty and iconography were wielded by the artists to demonstrate care for the deceased within the photograph. The relationship between beauty and care is an on-going theme for my analysis of Goldin and Serrano, where Serrano has made a clear artistic choice to make his corpses beautiful, removing them from the abject, but not to connect the corpse with its living counterpart nor with a personal history or relationship.

Serrano's photographs, like Goldin's *Cookie in Her Casket*, mediate the abjection of the corpse and elevate the dead showing them care and putting them in the realm of icons. The issues of beauty, truth, and the abject meet in the space of the photograph, with the photographer controlling the relationship between all three. The mediation of abject corpse with beauty is not inherent to photography, and their choices to reflect care and to present a beautiful corpse reflect a wider concern for death and dying in 1990s New York City. While the differences between Serrano and Goldin's approaches to photographing the corpse make them suitable case studies, their similarities indicate real changes that are occurring within the art world and wider New

York society.

CONCLUSION

Dignity and Care in Post-mortem Representation

CHAPTER 7

The Narrative of Care

Within my examination of Nan Goldin's *Cookie in Her Casket* and Andres Serrano's *The Morgue*, I have argued that both artists demonstrate care for the dead and represent the dead with dignity through the creation and display of their photographs. However, while they address common themes, Goldin and Serrano's series reflect two distinct forms of care. Goldin's expression of care in *Cookie in Her Casket* relates to the narrative of her personal relationship. The image and its display are a way of caring in a memorial sense, tied to the notion of 'taking a care for' the dead.⁶⁹⁰ Goldin's care relies on creating a familial gaze, and compelling the viewers to take a care for Cookie. In contrast, Serrano expresses care through artistic choices which elevate the corpse; a care that exists outside personal knowledge of the deceased. Through lighting and composition, Serrano 'take[s] a thought for' the deceased, and encourages the viewers to similarly reconceptualise the corpse.⁶⁹¹ As Bal noted, the monumental photographs result in a slowed caressing gaze by the viewers, and I have argued that the size and detail of the images renders visible minutiae otherwise invisible to the naked eye.⁶⁹² While Serrano's form of care encourages the viewers to see the dead in a new light, Goldin calls on a tradition of familial mourning and empathy.

In focusing on Goldin as a case study, the role of the narrative and the familial gaze in representing care visually becomes clear. Her style of snapshot photography broke from the tradition of outsider photographers photographing disconnected subjects, and instead photographed from within, which created a sense of the familial. Goldin's friends, fellow photographers such as David Armstrong, Peter Hujar and David Wojnarowicz, practised this new style of documentary. Because of her relationship to other photographers in the 'Boston School' she is an ideal study for this kind of personal documentary, which found itself tracking the death and loss of friends with AIDS. However, focusing on Goldin also cuts out those artists who documented themselves. While I briefly addressed the work of Mike Morrisroe in relation to the medical framework of AIDS death, Goldin's work sets up a system of caring in a social

⁶⁹⁰ See: "Care 2b", *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), March 2014. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/27902?p=emailA6EziYbSxNH0s&d=27902> [accessed 3 March 2014]. This form was used as early as 1230.

⁶⁹¹ See: "Care 3", *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), March 2014. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/27902?p=emailA6EziYbSxNH0s&d=27902> [accessed 3 March 2014].

⁶⁹² Bal, 60.

space. The individual response to death, and the personal awareness of one's own death, cannot be addressed by examining Goldin's work.

In the introduction, I referenced Airès and Tercier, who focused on the lacking *social* space of death. By examining Goldin I have been unable to assess the role of personal narrative of death and its impact on the visual representation of the dead. However, this has allowed me to focus on the social space of death – that is, how the living respond to the dead – and this analysis was not limited to the social aspect of mourning, for Serrano's work opens up my work to the visual representation of the anonymous, impersonal corpse. The relationship between the corpse and the living is the point of particular concern for Tercier, who built on the work of Kübler-Ross in noting that death had moved to the domain of medical specialists who used a cold and detached gaze to evaluate, not engage with, the dead and dying. While the work of Goldin (and others photographing their dead friends and family) rejects the sterility of the medical sequestering of death, Serrano's work delves into that world to reconfigure it.

I have argued that Serrano visually represents care for the deceased in the *studium* of his photographs, meaning those elements that visibly demonstrate the hand of the artist. Serrano's attention to beauty and reference to artistic techniques from Baroque masters demonstrates care in the creation of each image. Presenting the dead within a series enhance the grandeur of the religious iconography and the monumentality of the series. Serrano moves the corpses from the abject to the sublime, drawing attention to that thin line while suggesting the sublime within the corpse even without a personal history. The suggestion is that visual care need not rely on the familial way of looking. Serrano's work demonstrates on how the artistic and religious purify – and further, elevate – these abject corpses. In comparing his work to that of Goldin, beauty emerges as an underpinning to the visual demonstration of care. At the core of both, beauty helped to elevate and to reflect the care of the artist. That is not to insist on an inherent connection between beauty and care, but to demonstrate that the use of beauty was a conscious choice in the artists' demonstration of care.

In both cases, narrative frames the relationship between beauty and care. For Goldin, the familial narrative reflects back into the life of Cookie to express a personal narrative of loss and mourning. The personal narrative begins by presenting *The Cookie Portfolio* as a memorial work commemorating a beloved friend, beginning with the handwritten eulogy. Goldin's style also enforces the notion of a family album, encouraging a familial approach to looking at the photographs. The series then follows a

chronological narrative of the women's friendship and Cookie's decline in health and ultimate death, ending with the emptiness that was left behind for Goldin to endure. In Serrano's work, the personal narrative is removed and replaced with the narrative of the photographic act. Within the narrative of photographing, Serrano has established several smaller narratives including the narrative of his work's relationship to Baroque masters, the narrative of 'the morgue' which ties the disparate bodies together, and the narrative of the series which suggests a way to look at the photographs together as an entity, rather than individually. Goldin has also used the narrative of the series, but for Serrano the series enhances the religious tones of the work, and points to their intense beauty. Within the narrative of photographing, beauty is a choice made by Serrano that mediates the viewer's interaction with the corpse, essentially reframing the abjection of the dead body and opening it, in combination with religious narratives, to the sublime.

Serrano and Goldin's narrative of care fits within a complex web of social and political issues within New York and a wider shift in how America has chosen to relate to the dead. However, we can get some sense of the effect of their work from its reception at the time. For example, Goldin's *Cookie in Her Casket* had a more positive reception than Serrano's *The Morgue*. In an interview with Townsend, Serrano explained that *The Morgue* was slow to encourage sales, and remains unpopular as a series.⁶⁹³ I have already noted that several critics found *The Morgue* to be too detached, and therefore superficial in its representation of the dead.⁶⁹⁴ While Serrano demonstrated care in his work, and crucially did so without having a personal relationship with the subject, it was seemingly more popular to have a personal history behind the message of care. This can be assumed because of the much more positive reaction to *Cookie in Her Casket* which was considered moving and remains a very valuable work.⁶⁹⁵ The poignancy of this, more personal, approach can also be seen in the popularity of the *Witness: Against Our Vanishing* exhibition, which caused an uproar with regard to NEA funding because of Wojnarowicz's essay but which was described as a very necessary way to express aggravation by the *New York Times*. In fact, the review concluded:

In mounting the show, Artists Space has remained true to its original ambition, which was to give artists a chance to show work that, as yet, no one had been willing to take on. And if, in

⁶⁹³ James Kent, "Vile Bodies: The Dead", (London: Channel 4, 1998).

⁶⁹⁴ Michael Kimmelman, "Serrano Focuses On Death", *The New York Times*, 2012 <<http://www.nytimes.com/1993/02/05/arts/review-art-serrano-focuses-on-death.html>> [accessed 22 November 2012]; Peter Schjeldahl, "Art After Death", *The Village Voice*, 1993, 91.

⁶⁹⁵ For pricing see: "Cookie Mueller 1949–1989", *Christies.com*, 1999; On the poignancy of the work see: Toby Litt, "All the World's a Stage", *Modern Painters*, 15 (2002), 32–35.

the matter of AIDS, there are barriers between 'us' and 'them,' it is for us to break them down, not to build them higher.⁶⁹⁶

The review suggests not only that the show was profound, but that it also had a strong social dimension and effect. The use of personal narrative throughout the exhibition and the sense of personal history to the exhibition – artists who either produced work about themselves or their friends – was a large part of its impact and reception. The differing responses to Serrano and Goldin's approach to care within the photographic representation of the corpse suggests that, while there was a clear desire for a narrative of care, New York was primarily interested in the personal side of that narrative. There are many other factors that could have such an effect; for example, Serrano's work was more pointedly religious than Goldin's, but the reviews indicate that the difference in reception was related to the desire for death to connect to life. Serrano's work might be considered more radical because it engaged with care in the face of the impersonal realities of death. That radicalism was a likely contributor to the fact that Serrano's care for the dead has been overlooked.

By lavishing the dead with care, the artists offer a sense of dignity to the dead, perpetuated by public circulation. They present the dead in a social space as beautiful, cared for, and insist that they are worthy of this public space, and of care. In the case of Cookie, her place in the social sphere as a beloved and missed friend helps to increase her sense of dignity in the face of the social and political shunning of AIDS victims. Dignity in Serrano's work is a result of taking these bodies out from the invisible space of the morgue. Both Goldin and Serrano, in their creation of a work of art, bring the private out into the public sphere. This has the effect of creating dignity, but it also complicates the public-private relationship with death and with these particular dead.

If I had chosen case studies where the artists document their own death, this issue of public and private space and representation would not be a concern. In my case studies someone else – a friend or a stranger – has made public the private reality of the corpse. Goldin further blurs the line between public and private with her personal relationship with the deceased. While the photograph is of a private moment where Goldin saw her dead friend in her coffin, it is at once a public display of her mourning and a public display of a person who did not give permission for her corpse to be on display. The question of profiting from such an image also becomes a concern, and has been in relation to other photographs, as Max sued Goldin over writing and photographs

⁶⁹⁶ John Russell, "Images of Grief and Rage in Exhibition on AIDS", *New York Times* (New York, 16 November 1989).

included in *Ten Years After*.⁶⁹⁷ Serrano's *The Morgue* also elicited concern with respect to Serrano's access to the deceased without permission from their families. Serrano was allowed access to the morgue on the condition that he kept the identity of the deceased and the name of the morgue confidential. Bringing death into the social space in a community where death has become a 'taboo' causes a certain amount of friction. It aggravates the supposition that death should be a private matter, and challenges the usefulness of keeping death private. Goldin brings public mourning out into the open, where Serrano wheels the corpse out of the morgue. Who can say that either one has more right to be private? Or more right to be brought into the social space? For better or for worse, both are more public today, in documentaries, novels, and television, though the space of the representations within a morgue (such as *CSI*) mixes the personal with the distanced forensic framework, to which Serrano has instead brought the religious and sublime.

The dichotomy of these case studies underscores how minimal the difference is between photography of the dead in funeral homes or other memorial settings and that of art photography, as both rely on the idea of caring for the dead through a beautified image of the corpse. Moreover, even Serrano's work drew on the forensic and medical gaze in his work, though breaking from medical and forensic photography through studium. The central difference, as I have demonstrated, between artistic representations of the dead and personal or funerary photography of the dead is the circulation of these images. The wider field of the art market brings up ethical issues surrounding both Serrano and Goldin's work, but also provides social space for the dead wherein they regain dignity.

I began this work with a series of questions surrounding how the dead were photographed. While I have been able to address the relationship between personal and artistic photography of the dead, and demonstrated that the artists present the dead within a framework of care, beauty and dignity, I have not addressed how the artistic interpretation and circulation of such images affects our wider understanding of the material reality of death. The fact of the matter is, these photographs are only ever a mediated view of the corpse, and as such reveal little about the 'reality' of death. Goldin and Serrano challenge the issue of 'truth' with their relationships to wider genres of photography. Goldin, and other artists documenting the death of their loved ones, relate to the issue of 'truth' in documentary photography and Serrano, and those who

⁶⁹⁷ The suit was referenced in Chapter 2. Cookie's executor, Richard Turley, on behalf of Max Mueller, has pursued a suit against Goldin for profiting from Cookie's work and image without compensating Max. See: 'Big Cookie Revival', *New York Post* (November 20, 2008).

photograph from within the morgue engage with the objectivity of forensic photography. Both documentary and forensic photography rely on the notion of producing, or capturing, some ‘truth’ within the photograph.⁶⁹⁸ With forensic photography, this truth uncovers the cause of death or disease within the body. In documentary photography, the ‘truth’ is a constructed ‘reality’ of the peoples photographed, and, as Rosler noted, their supposed struggles.⁶⁹⁹ These photographic traditions are present in both Goldin and Serrano but with different ends. Goldin’s challenge to the falsehood of documentary with the use of the familial gaze attempts to answer Rosler’s paradigm of the photographer as outsider demonstrating power over the photographed and skewing or further engaging the beliefs in their impoverished social state.⁷⁰⁰ By being one of the group she photographs, Goldin creates the illusion of a familial gaze, which is why so few critics question the sale of her art work in favour of the championing of her self-reflection. Serrano, on the other hand, uses the tropes of forensic photography to create distance, but ultimately his work shatters the preconceptions and expectations of forensic photography with beauty, religious iconography, and allusion to the sublime.

The Morgue intentionally undermines the ‘truth’ associated with forensic photography. By ‘truth’ I mean the supposition in forensic photography that the photograph is objective.⁷⁰¹ While there are elements of forensic distance in the fragmentation and labelling of each corpse, the beauty and the studium of the photograph shatter the distance with subjectivity. In forensic and medical images taken in a morgue, there is a conscious effort to suppress the subjectivity of the photographer. As previously mentioned, In the introduction to *Looking at Death*, Norfleet described police and medical photographers as ‘mute witnesses’ lacking subjectivity in their pursuit of ‘truth’.⁷⁰² By denying this subjectivity, making visible his own hand as an artist, Serrano uses beauty to undermine the associations between medical/criminal

⁶⁹⁸ For more on both genres and their relationship to objectivity, see: Steve Edwards, *Martha Rosler: The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (London: Afterall, 2012); Ubelaker and Scammell; Peter Hutchings, “Modern Forensics: Photography and Other Suspects”, *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature*, 9 (1997), 229–243; Liz Wells, *The Photography Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003); Weiss; James E Girard, *Criminalistics: Forensic Science and Crime* (Sudbury: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 2008); Fox and Lawrence; Kemp; Keller; Ruddy; Allan Sekula, “Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (notes on the Politics of Representation)”, *The Massachusetts Review* 19.4 (1978) p. 859-883.

⁶⁹⁹ Rosler argued that the photographers victimized their subjects and exploited their struggles in order to reinforce the power dynamic of their supposed ‘reality’ of poverty/disenfranchisement. Rosler, p. 307-308.

⁷⁰⁰ Rosler’s solution was to photograph the Bowery absent of people, avoiding the power dynamic of photographer over subject. See: Rosler; Edwards.

⁷⁰¹ On the objectivity of the forensic photograph, see: Hutchings; Weiss; Charles Calvin Scott, “Photography in Criminal Investigation”, *American Journal of Political Science*, 29 (1938), 383–419; Eastman Kodak Company, *Photography in Law Enforcement* (Rochester, NY: Eastman Kodak Company, 1939); Larry Miller, *Police Photography*, Fourth (Cincinnati, OH: Anderson Publishing Co., 1998); Barbara Norfleet, *Looking at Death* (Boston, MA: David R. Godine, 1993).

⁷⁰² Norfleet, p. 30.

photography and the ‘mute witness’ photographer. In Goldin, beauty is part of the dialogue of the familial gaze. The beautified corpse is an image of the dead as Goldin wishes to present and remember Cookie, one that ensures Cookie is more generic and thereby in alignment with the wider traditions and expectations of viewing the dead. In Goldin’s work beauty plays into the illusion of truth insofar as the beautification of the deceased corpse supports the view of the familial gaze and the taking on of this gaze by the viewer. It encourages empathy and helps to establish Cookie within a wider tradition of the dead, normalising dying. In neither case does beauty take away from the ‘truth’ of the photograph in that the photograph is the artist’s subjective presentation of the subject. However, in the sense of ‘truth’ associated with documentary and truth associated with forensics, Serrano follows a more expected trajectory of beauty-or-truth within the photograph where Goldin suggests the possibility of beauty-and-truth (or even, poetically, beauty-is-truth).

Norfleet’s aforementioned *Looking and Death* and the publication of Luc Sante’s *Evidence* in 1992 suggest that the 1990s was a time when photographs expected to capture the ‘truth’ of something (in Norfleet’s case medical, documentary and criminal photographs, in Sante’s crime scene photographs). And yet, both Norfleet and Sante argued that these supposedly objective images can be found beautiful, and discussed relative to their aesthetic beauty when seen out of their original context.⁷⁰³ Serrano and Goldin’s work, and that of their contemporaries, employ art alongside expectations from documentary and forensic photography, to challenge the relationship of the two. While Norfleet, Sante, Goldin, Serrano, or any other artist of the era are not ground-breaking in challenging the purity of truth or beauty within a photograph, their concern for truth and beauty with respect to the *dead* demonstrates how the ‘invisible’ relationship with death became a struggle to represent the dead within the dichotomy of truth and beauty. This was a major upheaval for our relationship with death and the corpse, at least in terms of our visual experience of the dead.

⁷⁰³ Norfleet and Sante specifically discuss the aesthetic qualities of these images when taken out of their historical context. Norfleet; Luc Sante, *Evidence* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1992).

Conclusion

The results of the upheaval surrounding death in the 1980s and 1990s are visible today. There are archives of post-mortem portraits, such as the Thanatos archive, that would not have been possible in the 1970s when Airès insisted that America had developed “a certain refusal to accept death, either as a familiar end to which one is resigned, or as a dramatic sign in the Romantic manner.”⁷⁰⁴ The outright *refusal* of death, if we follow Airès’ logic, was the reason it was shunned from society, and why, one could further presume, the visibility of AIDS and cancer caused such upheaval. In contrast to the existing supposition that death remains a ‘taboo’, death and the dead are more visible in our daily lives than Airès would have imagined.⁷⁰⁵ Our areas of entertainment offer representations of death for mass consumption. Over the past ten years, the *New York Times* Best Seller List’s top ten for each year has included at least one book that hinges on death or murder.⁷⁰⁶ Moreover, the physicality of death has been visually re-presented through the news media, and the dead feature in some of the most popular fictional television programmes. Some of the most popular television shows in the US and Great Britain engage with forensics, resulting in the ‘*CSI* effect’ where the jury’s expectations of forensic teams in actual legal cases are shaped by the skewed presentation of forensic science in popular TV shows.⁷⁰⁷ Even the children’s television show *SpongeBob Squarepants* includes an episode where a character, Squidward, is believed to be a ghost of himself, and the titular character attempts to bury his friend.⁷⁰⁸ The *visual* encounter

⁷⁰⁴ Philippe Airès, *Western Attitudes toward DEATH: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. by Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 99.

⁷⁰⁵ A recent survey by the Dying Matters Coalition suggests that death is still rarely discussed in the UK. ‘Death discussions “taboo” for many in the UK, survey finds’, *BBC* <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-27369382>> [accessed 1 June 2014]. The supposed ‘taboo’ of death was also the central thesis of ITV2’s documentary *Billy Connolly’s Big Send Off* (2014).

⁷⁰⁶ In May 2014, *Unlucky 13* a book about a woman’s murder club being stalked by a killer was #1; in 2013, the title belonged to *Gone Girl*, the story of a missing wife where the husband is painted as the murderer. In 2012 the list included *Bringing Up the Bodies* and *The Yellow Birds*; 2011 list included *Dead or Alive*, *Tick Tock* and *Treachery in Death*; in 2010 *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet’s Nest* and *The Postcard Killers*; 2009 *The Associate* and *The Lost Symbol*; 2008 *Change of Heart*; 2007 *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Book of the Dead*; 2006 *The Lay of the Land* and *The Devil in the White City*; 2005 *Saturday*; 2004 *Five People You Will Meet in Heaven*, *Song of Suzannah* and *Angels & Demons*.

⁷⁰⁷ For more on the *CSI* effect see, among others: N.J. Schweitzer and Michael J. Saks, “The *CSI* effect: Popular Fiction about Forensic Science Affects the Public’s Expectations about Real Forensic Science”, *Jurimetrics* (Spring 2007) pp. 357-364; Simon A. Cole and Rachel Dioso-Villa, “Investigating the ‘*CSI* Effect’ Effect: Media and Litigation Crisis in Criminal Law”, *Stanford Law Review* 61.6 (2009) pp.1335-1374; and Andrew Thomas, “The *CSI* Effect: Fact or Fiction”, 115 *The Yale Law Journal Packet Part 70* (2006).

⁷⁰⁸ This does not even begin to address the range of zombie films and cartoons aimed at younger generations, including the PG-13 rated zombie-romance, *Warm Bodies* (2013).

with the corpse has extended to advertising as recently as Marc Jacobs' 2014 ad campaign featuring Miley Cyrus posing next to a model made up as a bloody corpse.⁷⁰⁹

My research has focused on the time period between the climate of 'invisible' death Airès described in 1981 and our contemporary mediated, yet visible, encounters with death. In New York, the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s saw the dead made visible in a series of galleries, with exhibitions centred on artistic post-mortem photographs displayed within blocks of archival post-mortem photography exhibitions. These exhibitions demonstrate, at least in New York City, a renewed interest in the visibility of death. Together the exhibitions were concerned with how the dead were represented visually, why they had previously been photographed and what historic and contemporary photographic re-presentation of the corpse meant for their contemporary society. I have considered Goldin and Serrano's work within the context of this historical shift, and in that examination, I have been able to address those questions and pose new ones.

Through comparing Goldin and Serrano's works, I have highlighted the key components of care and dignity in the artistic representation of the dead. These themes were of wider political and social significance, and the artist's choice to visibly demonstrate care for the corpse in their photographs aligns with the wider outcry for a dignity in death that parted from the invisible and clinical reality of dying in a hospital. I have hinted in my association between historical representations of the dead and Goldin and Serrano's photographs, that their re-presentation of the dead follows an historical tradition of displaying death and the dead in beauty and with care. Goldin's work recalls the enduring tradition of post-mortem portraiture, where Serrano's breaks away from forensic detachment while recalling the beauty of Baroque art that also portrayed death in beautiful and lavish colours.⁷¹⁰ In their historical references, Serrano and Goldin's work demonstrates how the dead were being displayed during this shift, but also that beauty and care were also part of how we *used* to portray death. Their display of dignity in death is not a novel approach, but rather a return to previous social expectations of death and dying.

Given that Goldin and Serrano had such differing approaches to their subject – one personal and the other markedly detached – the importance of care in representing

⁷⁰⁹ This advertisement, and the trend of corpses in advertising, was taken up by *the Guardian* blog. Kira Cochrane, "How female corpses became a fashion trend", *The Guardian*, <<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/womens-blog/2014/jan/09/female-corpses-fashion-trend-marc-jacobs-miley-cyrus>> [accessed 2 July 2014. *America's Next Top Model* photo-session where contestants posed as corpses, and *Vice Magazine's* 2013 spread of female authors posed as though killing themselves.

⁷¹⁰ This correlation was made in Mieke Bal, "Baroque Bodies and the Ethics of Vision", in *Andres Serrano: El dedo en la llaga* (Madrid: La Fábrica, 2006), pp. 185–199.

the dead reflected the desire to reach beyond one's own friends and family. The political debates surrounding euthanasia and abortion, writing on cancer, and AIDS activism were about a wider moral sense of how one deserved to die. These public movements drew on the social collective to encourage a social response to death and a social space for dying. Goldin and Serrano's work similarly relied on the public circulation of their works to create a social space for death, and a space where the dead could be cared for. Their artwork also encouraged social response and engagement with these corpses: Goldin encouraging strangers to take on a familial gaze with respect to her dead friend, and Serrano encouraging a wider acceptance of beauty and the sublime in death. Their work was not only a reflection of the concerns of their time; it was an active engagement with the issue of visualising death, and creating a space for death with dignity.

I put forward, finally, that in the works of artists like Serrano and Goldin we can find the origins of our contemporary relationship with death. Beauty as a mediator of death can be seen in New York City's Morbid Anatomy Museum, which includes a library and museum display of anatomical art as well as art and books on death and society.⁷¹¹ Concerns about the relationship between art, abjection and beauty are ongoing, but the mediation of death through art and aesthetics is part of our everyday encounter with death. Goldin and Serrano, along with the other artists responding to death in the 1980s and 1990s, were part of this shift.

⁷¹¹ The Morbid Anatomy Museum grew out of a library and 'Morbid Anatomy' blog. The non-profit organization houses a library and hosts traveling and permanent exhibitions of items relating to death, beauty and anatomy.

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