

Composing Dwarfism: Reframing Short Stature in Contemporary Photography
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Abstract: This paper will explore the work of two contemporary dwarf photographers, Ricardo Gil and Laura Swanson, who use different conceptual and technical methods to re-frame the figure of the dwarf subject. The dwarf has often been a marginalized subject in the history of photography, so I am interested in exploring how the strategies that Gil and Swanson employ might resist reductive meanings, and offer alternative readings to the dwarf beyond the oppositional gaze. The articulation of these methods will be prefaced by a focused discussion of dwarf depictions in the history of photography based on the intentions of the photographer, so that the work of several photographers might be powerfully juxtaposed with the radical counter-strategies that Gil and Swanson utilize.

Key Words: art history, Ricardo Gil, Laura Swanson

Introduction

This paper will explore the work of two contemporary dwarf photographers, Ricardo Gil and Laura Swanson, who use different conceptual and technical methods to re-frame the composition of the dwarf subject. The dwarf has often been a marginalized subject in the history of photography, labeled as deviant, pathological, freak and “other,” so I am interested in exploring how the strategies that Gil and Swanson employ might resist reductive meanings and offer alternative readings to the dwarf beyond the oppositional gaze. The concept of the oppositional gaze, first put forward by critical race theorist and activist bell hooks, is where the traditionally passive marginalized subject, who is objectified under a white, male gaze will instead return that gaze to claim agency (1992). The articulation of these methods will be prefaced by a focused discussion of dwarf depictions in the history of photography based on the intentions of the photographer, so that the work of several photographers might be powerfully juxtaposed with the radical counter-strategies that Gil and Swanson utilize.

In their strategies of re-directing the gaze of the viewer, privileging the dwarf subject and more generally re-framing depictions of the short-statured embodiment, I suggest that these artists significantly depart from the stigmatized status surrounding the dwarf’s representations in the work of non-dwarf photographers, such as Diane Arbus, Arthur Fellig (Weegee), Mary Ellen Mark and Bruce Davidson. This is because the viewer is made more aware of the psychology of the dwarf, as a means to encourage the viewer’s compassionate involvement, as opposed to attracting a historically prevalent, morbid and reductive curiosity. Art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau says that this is an important duality in the ethics and politics of photographic criticism, in which an insider position might convey a more personal involvement in the “truth” of the subject matter, as opposed to an outsider perspective that might convey a detached observation of a mere object and spectacle (Solomon-Godeau, 2004). Troublesome photographer/subject relationships have often left behind traces of controversy around power, control, and moral and ethical responsibility, leading to stigmatization of the subject at hand.

This paper will therefore use Solomon-Godeau's duality theory as a jumping-off point, to consider the following critical questions: Can we trace a distinctive, more complex disability politics in photographs at the hands of disabled, or in this case, dwarf photographers, where a new discourse around intersectional identity and complex embodiment can be found? How do these photographs move beyond one-dimensional readings of portrayals of disability, to add more representational layers to disabled corporeality? What are the implications of photographers who do not identify as disabled, but claim to offer more sensitive readings of disabled groups as an alternative to the freak or outsider constructs, and those photographers who do identify and are empowered by the technology that is firmly in their grasp?

The power and agency held by Gil and Swanson may foster different perceptions of dwarfism that have received scant attention in art history and criticism. These readings may shed light on, in Solomon-Godeau's words, the "inside" of the dwarf (Solomon-Godeau, 2004). The viewer may come to know the dwarfs differently through their revealing acts, which cannot otherwise be understood from a non-dwarf photographer's perspective. Most importantly, we learn to see the dwarfs from both behind and in front of the camera, with full knowledge that they are the ones in control of both sides of its lens. However, determining what is reductive or non-reductive in relation to the representation of the dwarf in contemporary photography has many more shades of grey than meets the eye.

The Ambiguities of Dwarfism in Historical Photography

In this section, I will focus on two strategies that reveal how the dwarf has been depicted in the history of photography. I argue that these strategies exploit the mainstream desire to look at the dwarf's unusual anatomy, despite any well-meaning intentions of the photographer. These reductive and oft-implemented strategies offer the dwarf as either featured in the nude, or as a circus performer.

First, I will examine the work of non-dwarf photographer George Dureau. In an interview, dwarf photographer Ricardo Gil said that he believed Dureau wanted to take photographs of dwarfs because he admired their unusual proportions (Gil, 2013). Psychologist Betty Adelson supports Gil's position, because she says that Dureau was interested in demonstrating his appreciation of the male body and made a conscious effort to "dislodge stereotypical, negative assumptions about the bodies of individuals with physical deformities" (Adelson, 2005, 177). Dureau took many photos of dwarfs in the nude, or some posed with minor embellishments or props like a hat. For example, in *Short Sonny* (ca. 1970, fig. 1), a black man with the most common type of dwarfism, achondroplasia, poses in this black and white photograph, wearing a decorative turban that is suggestive of Oriental tropes. The African- or Middle-Eastern-inspired head-dress was meant to evoke romantic imagery, which recalls a genre of Orientalist photography which allowed, as art historian Linda Nochlin says in the context of Orientalist painting, "the (male) viewer...[to] sexually identify with, yet morally distance himself from, his Oriental counterparts depicted within the objectively inviting yet racially distancing space of the painting." (Nochlin, 1989, 45). I argue that Dureau is calling on these tropes to reactivate strategies to similar those of such Orientalist photographers, where the burden of both Oriental and dwarf representation is combined to retain the captivation of the mainstream gaze to its most extreme point.¹

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE.

The man in Dureau's photo stands off to the side, his back and buttocks facing towards the viewer, his hands placed on his hips. He is by a window with light pouring in, and he looks out of the corner of his eye back at us, almost as if he is trying to catch the viewer in the act of gazing upon his nude form. It is hard to determine if his gestures are meant to demonstrate pride in his nude body's appearance, or indignant protest. Is he questioning why he must be looked at in this way? Doesn't the nudity amplify our interest in the dwarf's unusual form even more? Again, it is as if Dureau's admiration and curiosity were moved to the point of shedding layers of clothing in order to take full advantage of the delight a viewer would have in gazing upon the dwarf's atypical corporeality. Further, despite the fact that this dwarf looks back at us looking at him, how much empowerment is Dureau giving his subject here?

Dureau's imagery is complicated by the fact that Dureau had a so-called insider status, according to Gil, who posed for Dureau many times, both in the nude and with various articles of clothing, and claims that Dureau is a friend to this day (fig. 2, fig. 3). The earnestness expressed by Gil regarding Dureau's authentic intentions cannot necessarily be transferred to the surface of Dureau's portraits of dwarfs. How is it possible to determine Dureau's insider status from simply looking at an image? Rather, I would argue that it is all too easy to categorize and label such work as part of a historical trajectory of images of dwarfs who are partially or fully stripped of their clothing in order to titillate the voyeuristic gaze.

INSERT FIGURES 2 & 3 HERE.

For example, the infamous *Mexican Dwarf (a.k.a Cha Cha) in His Hotel Room*, (1970) by Diane Arbus, and *Drinking In Style*, (1943, fig. 4) by Arthur Fellig (Weegee), amongst others, posit the dwarf in various forms of undress.² Several scholars, such as David Hevey, suggest there may have been an erotic or sexual relationship between the dwarf and Arbus that can be construed from looking at *Mexican Dwarf (a.k.a Cha Cha) in His Hotel Room*; however, I argue that this doesn't necessarily nullify the sensationalistic and voyeuristic opportunity the image now provides for an audience that continues to associate the dwarf within very particular, narrow stereotypes (Hevey, 2010). While on the one hand Ann Millett-Gallant says that the dwarf is an empowered sexual being in the Arbus photo, given the way he also meets the viewer's gaze flirtatiously, accompanied by a somewhat smarmy smile, his overt sexuality might also be interpreted as indigestible, dirty and even sleazy (Millett-Gallant, 2010). In Fellig's image, the dwarf stands at a bar dressed in a diaper, while holding a beer and donning a 1943 party hat. Betty Adelson says that he is "clearly intended to be an amusing emblem of ushering in the New Year," much like the still commonly-practiced ritual of inviting dwarfs to events and/or parties in Hollywood in order to amuse guests (Adelson, 2005, 167).

INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE.

It is also hard to imagine that an elevated status of the nude dwarf might be on par with the revered status of a classical Greek nude statue, whose corpus was meant to espouse the utmost qualities of perfection, proportion and beauty, given what we know about the history of

the dwarf consigned to the status of a freak. In other words, while the nude figure of so-called perfection was to be admired, the nude figure of imperfection was historically meant to be gawked at. So while the intentions of Dureau and Arbus may have been earnest, do these images of the nude dwarf evoke such intentions, or do they continue to problematize dwarf as “other”?

To further drive home these points, I would now like to consider photographs that depict the dwarf as a circus performer. Adelson says that a “remarkable number of photographs have been of clowns, reinforcing the image of dwarfs as clowns in the minds of the public” (Adelson, 2005, 167). The two images that Adelson examines include Mary Ellen Mark’s photograph, *Twin Brothers Tulsi and Basant (Great Famous Circus, Calcutta, India)*, (1989, fig. 5) and Bruce Davidson’s *The Dwarf* (1958, fig. 6) that depicts the Jimmy the Clown. In both of these photographs, the dwarf appears on the circus grounds, in what look like grim conditions. Both photos are taken from the perspective of average-height photographers, as we are looking down on these forlorn creatures. Mark’s photo shows twin dwarfs dressed in gorilla costumes, a device used by the circus to emphasize the dwarfs’ animal-like status in the community, to accentuate their historically-subservient role as entertainers and laughing stock. One twin has taken the head-piece off, and stares back at the viewer with a dejected expression, while his brother stands off to his side in full garb. This photo looks as if it is taken from an angle, as if to emphasize the quirkiness of Mark’s subject matter. Adelson goes on to describe Mark’s experiences capturing images of the twin brothers and their circus colleagues. Mark also talks of the beauty and ugliness to be found in the circus, and that she wanted to demonstrate to viewers that these circus characters are victims by portraying them in a sympathetic, caring light (Adelson, 2005, 168-169). While the effect of the oppositional gaze that one of the brothers brandishes is important to Mark’s strategy, (we detect the oppositional gaze by the way he confronts the viewer directly and by his assertive body language and facial expression), does this offset the context in which the image is shown, i.e. that of the circus? While the viewer may sympathize with the angry dwarf in the circus, the viewer may also understand that the dwarf is perpetually confined to the circus, distinguishing pathology from normalcy, and keeping the freak at a distinct distance from the so-called average subject.

A remarkable similarity in composition may be detected in Bruce Davidson’s image of Jimmy the Clown, who inhales from a cigarette with one hand, while gripping a bunch of wilting roses in the other. Jimmy does not look back at the viewer in protest regarding his glum circumstances, as demonstrated in Mark’s photo, yet he does gaze off into the distance, his facial expression bearing antithetical traces of any stereotypical qualities attributed to the merry compartment of a clown. Whilst the sad clown is also a prevalent trope, Jimmy’s penetrating gaze thwarts the made-up expression of the falsely-sad clown stereotype. Jimmy is alone, and his exaggerated clown make-up only serves to accentuate his true sadness, marking a too-easy transition of his character portrayal into his real-life role as a servant to mockery and jest.

INSERT FIGURES 5 & 6 HERE.

Again, Adelson comments on the fact that Davidson had personal relationships with his dwarf subjects, particularly with Jimmy, who became his friend, therefore also confirming Davidson’s role as privileged insider, alongside Goldin, Dureau and Mark (2005, 168-169).

As a counter-strategy to the problematic frameworks of dwarf as nude or dwarf as circus performer, I turn to Gil and Swanson who are dwarf photographers concerned with rupturing the mainstream voyeuristic gaze that wants to reduce their dwarf bodies to the level of “other” or freak. By engaging in radical performative acts before the camera, the dwarf photographers “perform disidentifications,” a term coined by the late José Esteban Muñoz, as a means to provide a strategy of resistance or survival for minority subjects, while also acknowledging its limitations (Esteban Muñoz, 1999, 5). I argue that in performing disidentifications, the photographer with agency must now do something more than simply have his or her subjects stare back at the viewer, so that the photographers activate their work differently from that of so-called “insider” photographers like Dureau, Mark, Davidson and even Arbus. In this way, their photographs will register as transformational in how people might perceive the dwarf. Further, Dureau, Mark and Arbus place the dwarf in contexts that the mainstream public is all too familiar with; they are comfortable with the trope of dwarf as nude or dwarf as clown, and so the insider-positions of Dureau, Mark and Davidson become meaningless given that we can only judge an image by its cover.

If Solomon-Godeau says that this is the quandary of photography, where its ontological status is one limited to exteriority, how can the dwarf photographer ever hope to get beyond appearance and make viewers aware of the dwarf as person, as more than object, if they only have a glossy surface to rely on? Will the burden of their own appearances get in the way of more desirable depictions that are deeper and more complex to shed light on the rich lived realities of the dwarf? Can dwarf photographers eschew deeply-embedded assumptions through the surface of the image? It is at this crucial point that I would like to suggest that the work of Gil and Swanson does much to enact lines of counter or subversive photographic strategies. In their work, it is possible that through the dwarf’s very exteriority, we come to understand the subject’s interiority beyond simply an oppositional gaze. In fact, the oppositional gaze is no longer a cutting-edge methodology to use in thinking about the dwarf’s interiority or exteriority. I will now move into a detailed discussion of their work.

The World Looking Up: The Photographs of Ricardo Gil

In the 1990s, Gil took photographs of his then wife, Meg, and child, Lily, from his perspective, which is a height of 3’9”. He set out to present a portrait of two people that were intimate in his life, in, he says, the most powerful and beautiful way. During an interview with Gil, I asked him about the unique nature of his compositions, where average height people are more or less cut out of the frames, and usually only their legs can be seen, given the remainder of their bodies are not within Gil’s focal radius. He said that average-height people were simply out of the frame - sometimes they were included, and sometimes they weren’t: “I’m sorry, there’s a lot of stuff going on down here, and sometimes average-height people are not privy to it” (Gil, 2013). Gil went on say that some photos are tongue-in-cheek, while others are not. The artist was especially interested in using average-sized people as props, like a column or a prop on a stage. While on the one hand, Gil will say that his viewpoint is not especially unique, given it is just his viewpoint, (and after all, what other viewpoint would he use?), on the other hand, his viewpoint is a big deal because rarely do we come upon his perspective in the annals of art history or even contemporary photographic art practices. The visual stance of the dwarf means that average-height people are reduced to just their legs, given that is what fills most of the dwarf’s sight-line.

In *Walking Man and Mannequins*, by Gil (c. 1996, Fig. 7), a row of average-height mannequin legs wearing various pants and jeans with white socks on their feet are lined along a street pavement in front of a store. Gil snapped the photograph just as a man (also wearing jeans) was quickly walking past. Only the man's walking legs and feet, with black shoes, in motion, and a swinging blurry arm at the side of a torso are visible. The image is a powerful constellation of pairs of legs in Gil's sightline, where both the still and moving forest of body parts work together to exemplify Gil's focal point. Further, the "half" bodies of the mannequins contrast with the walking man's figure, which the viewer might understand as "whole," even if his upper body is cut from the frame. This jumbles up ideas of body sizes and shapes in general, and serves to prompt questions about what is normative or atypical, in parallel with Gil's unusual frame of view as photographer.

INSERT FIGURE 7 HERE.

In the next two photographs (fig. 8 and fig. 9), Gil's ex-wife, Meg, appears engaged in various activities. In the first, *David's Kitchen* (1997), she washes dishes in a kitchen wearing formal clothing and talks to an average-height man. An average-height woman who appears to her right is engaged in putting away the dishes. In the second photo, *Gil, Charles, Eric and Meg* (1999), Meg is laughing and waving as she talks to two average-height men in suits with ties. This looks like a formal event again, as Meg wears another nice dress. Of course, what is distinct about these images is how the focus is on Meg and her perspective. Meg looks up at the men as she talks to them. We see her eyes and/or her head titling up, while the men look down, or we can only imagine them looking down at her. But it is clear that Meg is the main character, and it is her body that we see in full perspective, rather than looking down upon her as other photographers in the past have done. Meg is centralized while the average-height people are, as Gil says, Meg's props to frame her corpus, like Greek or Roman columns.

INSERT FIGURES 8 & 9 HERE.

Gil's photos are in stark contrast to several street photos by Garry Winogrand (fig. 10 and fig. 11), where either the dwarf or the amputee homeless man is captured from Winogrand's perspective, which can be estimated between five and a half to six feet tall. In David Hevey's key essay, "The Enfreakment of Photography," the author says that "Winogrand consciously or otherwise included disabled people with the specific intention of enfreaking disability in order to make available to his visual repertoire a key 'destabilizing' factor" (Hevey, 2010, 515). We look down on these unmentionables just as Winogrand did, both literally and metaphorically in a classist, ableist way. Looking down implies distaste, snobbery and judgment, and such a physical gesture places Winogrand's image in the realm of the voyeuristic, regardless of Winogrand's actual intent, or inside/outside relationship with his subjects.

INSERT FIGURES 10 & 11 HERE.

Gil said that initially, when he started playing with his field of view, he did not realize he had something unique to offer in this way. He didn't really know of any other dwarf photographers using this strategy, but he did know of a number of other artists and photographers with disabilities, like Kevin Connolly, who was born without legs and uses a skateboard to move

around. Connolly has taken hundreds of documentary photographs of people staring at him in his journeys throughout the world. Connolly's photos (fig. 12 and fig. 13) show the shocked looks of people across the spectrum in age, race and gender, gazing down at Connolly's unusual embodiment, as he/we look up at them. Both Ann Millett-Gallant and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson focus on the power of the stare or the gaze that Connolly has most effectively captured and inverted through his photographs, while Millett-Gallant also mentions that the "camera's lowered perspective and viewing angle upward reveals Connolly's perspective..." (Garland-Thomson, 2002 and Millett-Gallant, 2008). Like Millett-Gallant, I argue that Gil and Connolly's photographs "exhibit disability as a way of seeing from an embodied, indeed empowered, perspective" given not only the uniqueness of their perspectives, but the fact that we rarely get to *see* photographs from this perspective (Millett-Gallant, 2008).

INSERT FIGURES 12 & 13 HERE.

Ultimately, like Connolly, Gil knew that the power behind his own self-portrait was because it was the man himself composing the images, making a statement about his own community, saying, "this is me, this is us." (Gil, 2013). Gil wants people to metaphorically and even physically "get down on their damn knees to look at the work" (Gil, 2013). And it is down on their knees that an average-height visitor will gain a new perspective on the dwarfed viewpoint, according to Gil.

To Conceal Is to Reveal: The Anti-Self Portraits of Laura Swanson

Laura Swanson is a Korean-American artist whose practice has been influenced heavily by her everyday experiences as a short-statured person. Swanson's photographs question the conventions of looking at bodies that are different in height and size. In *Anti-Self Portraits* (2005-2008), Swanson's attempt to hide her body within different domestic scenes is paradoxically humorous and poignant. By conspicuously denying her identity to the viewer, Swanson's photographs go beyond an examination of representation in portraiture by questioning the desires behind wanting to look at difference. In each image, the artist has obscured or covered her face, drawing attention to the fact that she is withholding something from her viewers. In the four images here, we see a) Swanson standing in a hallway, almost completely covered from head to thigh by a large brown coat attached to a coat hook on a wall (fig. 14), b) a large, red and white checkered bedroom pillow covering Swanson's body as she sits on a bed (fig. 15), c) Swanson's face and upper torso covered by shaving cream as she rests in a bathtub (fig. 16), and d) Swanson's face hidden by an album cover of a 1960s female singer, as she stands in a living room (fig. 17). The difference in this final image is that Swanson doesn't cover her entire body, but just her face – her dwarf body is revealed underneath the album cover. Swanson calls these her "faceless portraits" or "anti-self portraits" where she hides in plain sight.

INSERT FIGURES 14 – 17 HERE.

Through these acts of concealing, Swanson is actually revealing her vulnerabilities, fears and frustrations over being judged and stared at, simply because of her atypical embodiment. The viewer is thus invited to connect with her in an intimate way, without necessarily having to see her face. Swanson acknowledges that the history of photography is riddled with images of the

“other,” and thus her *Anti-Self Portraits* are “a response to the problematic images that [invite the public] to gawk at otherness – images that continue to stigmatize many groups of people” (Bonner, 2013). According to journalist Kelly Inouye, Swanson is in fact managing to reveal an “inside” unlike most of the photographers that Solomon-Godeau mentions, because Swanson is performatively showing us her innermost feelings and insecurities by hiding and in turn, protesting. Thus, Swanson may desire to hide, shield or protect herself from prying, gazing eyes, yet she actually reveals more about how she feels through her act of concealing, than if she had employed the common trope of the oppositional gaze.

I am particularly interested in Swanson’s equally empowering strategy in using make-shift masks to hide her identity and her facial expression from the viewer. Countless images in photography depict the “other” wearing masks, ranging from the work of Diane Arbus to the contemporary artist Joel-Peter Witkin. Millett-Gallant makes reference to Judith Butler’s theorizing on the use of masks, arguing that “masked subjects invite, block, and mock the viewer’s gaze” (Millett-Gallant, 2010, 37). To put this in context, she discusses Arbus’ photograph entitled *Masked Woman in a Wheelchair* (1970). The mask becomes more than just a costume piece, for it acts as a device for shielding the physiognomic information attached to viewing her face, therefore also deflecting reductive readings of or associations with her countenance as a wheelchair-user. As Millett-Gallant says, “The face is considered the visual marker of who one is, and facial features are common targets of exaggeration and manipulation...” (Millett-Gallant, 2010, 137-138). The mask that this woman wears, in addition to the creative masks wielded by Swanson in her anti-self portraits, symbolize agency for the subject at hand, given they do much to prove that identity is fluid, dynamic and unpredictable, and that we cannot rely on the simple judgment of a facial expression, or even an empowering oppositional gaze. Just as Arbus’ *Masked Woman in a Wheelchair* takes the oppositional gaze one step further by gazing back at the viewer, so too does Swanson’s performative and bodily acts reverse the normal tropes of portraiture.

But the mask can also be wielded by a photographer in yet even more complicated ways. For instance, in *Dwarf from Naples* (2006, fig. 18) by Joel-Peter Witkin, the artist has presented the viewer with a nude portrait of a female dwarf with achondroplasia who wears a white-cloth, cartoon-like elephant mask.

INSERT FIGURE 18 HERE.

She wears long black gloves, holds up a short wand or conductor-style baton, and stands in a studio supported by other props, such as a skull lying on its side and groupings of vegetables suspended from the ceiling. All of these elements, in addition to her posture and her body language, speak to the dwarf’s erotic mastery over her environment and her own atypical corpus, which could be construed as empowering. However, by masking her face with a cartoon-like elephant veil, Witkin is providing the viewer with uncensored viewing pleasure of the dwarf’s nude form, while also mocking her through the derogatory mask. Further, Witkin places the dwarf squarely within the context of historical venues that showcased striptease and burlesque dancers, which is indicated by the style of her clothing, the set and props, and her posture and body language. Showcases like this may not have ordinarily included imperfect dwarf bodies. On the other hand, given the history of the dwarf body on display within the trajectory of freak

shows and similar spectacles in the same time period, this image serves to reinforce and continue this perverse tradition. Thus, the photographer precariously straddles bestowing agency on his subject, and yet consigning her to the same voyeuristic, normative gaze, as many others have done before him.

The examples presented here demonstrate the core issues being grappled with in this essay – what constitutes inside/out, and if the photographer’s intent as “truth” can ultimately be determined by examining the ontological surface of a photograph. In my analyses here, I have aimed to capture the paradox and ambiguities of the inside/outside paradigm, whilst simultaneously avoiding any simplistic positive/negative reading; rather I point to complexities. Given, as art historian John Tagg says, that strategies of representation (and its burdens) have gone largely unchallenged by both mainstream photographers and critics, I hope the work by these dwarf photographers begins to address some of these issues (Tagg, 1993).

Conclusion

Despite the complexities of the positive or negative readings that might be construed in examining the representation of the dwarf in both historical and contemporary forms of photography, or in thinking about the ambiguities in relation to Solomon-Godeau’s inside/outside binary, the fact remains that within this history, rarely do we come upon depictions of dwarfs as interpreted through a dwarf lens. Even less do we come upon focused scholarly attention on work that has been or is being executed by dwarf photographers, so through my study here, I hope to fill in some of these spaces in art history, addressing the unique mode of perceiving dwarfism through the dwarf photographer perspective. Tagg speaks of how critical this determinate space becomes, given it opens up conversations around the nature of power “which [is] brought to bear on practices of representation” (Tagg, 1993, 21). Given that recent photography theory has begun to prize open the legitimacy of the dominant/insubordinate power relations in photographic representations, it is at this juncture that Tagg argues we create this very space for acknowledging that power is no longer uniform, unified, general and only “emanating from one privileged site” (Tagg, 1993, 21). The criticality of this space therefore “exposes a rift...in the general conceptions of representation on which they rest” (Tagg, 1993, 21). It is through the work of the two dwarf photographers here that an awareness of this rift becomes more pronounced than ever before.

Further, we must continue to understand that while the photograph is a mere material item, it exists and is consumed within a wider complex of social relations and ideological constructions which feed into its meaning. By noting the counter strategies that Gil and Swanson propose in their photographic representations of dwarfs, we may also witness their effective “unmasking” of any prescribed “truth” to any ideology that is meant to convey reality. In essence, these photographers confront ostensible “truth” with their own ideologies, which effectively reflect their opposed outlook. Finally, as Solomon-Godeau summarizes, “It may well be that the nature that speaks to our eyes can be plotted neither on the side of inside nor outside, but in some liminal as yet unplotted space between perception and cognition, project and identification” (Solomon-Godeau, 1994, 61). I suggest that beyond the oppositional gaze, the radical counter-strategies and intersectional, compositional devices that Gil and Swanson offer for reframing the dwarf subject might begin to chart some of this liminal, unplotted space that

Solomon-Godeau outlines, thereby finally opening up the possibility for the dwarf to find a new stature in art history and photography.

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Image Credits

Figure 1: George Dureau, *Short Sonny*, ca. 1970, photograph courtesy of Arthur Roger Gallery

Figure 2: George Dureau, *Ricardo Gil*, ca. 1970, photograph courtesy of Arthur Roger Gallery

Figure 3: *Ricardo Gil and George Dureau*, 2012, photograph courtesy of Jason Kruppa

Figure 4: Arthur Fellig (Weegee), *Drinking In Style*, 1943: Shorty, the “Bowery Cherub” celebrates New Year's Eve at Sammy's Bar, in the Bowery district of New York.

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Figure 5: Mary Ellen Mark, *Twin Brothers Tulsi and Basant (Great Famous Circus, Calcutta, India)*, 1989, photograph courtesy of the artist

Figure 6: Bruce Davidson, *The Dwarf*, 1958, photograph courtesy of Magnum Photos, New York

Figure 7: Ricardo Gil, *Walking Man and Mannequins*, c. 1996, photograph courtesy the artist

Figures 8 & 9: *David's Kitchen*, 1997, and Ricardo Gil, *Charles, Eric and Meg*, 1999, photographs courtesy of the artist

Figures 10 & 11: Garry Winogrand, *New York*, ca. 1968 and *American Legion Convention, Dallas, Texas*, 1964

© The Estate of Garry Winogrand, photographs courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco

Figures 12 & 13: Kevin Michael Connolly, *Girl; London, England*, 2007, and *Man; Reykjavik, Iceland*, 2007, photographs courtesy of the artist

Figures 14 – 17: Laura Swanson, *Anti-Self Portraits*, 2005-2008, photographs courtesy the artist

Figure 18: Joel-Peter Witkin, *Dwarf From Naples, Rome*, 2006 © Joel-Peter Witkin / photograph courtesy Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago

Endnotes

¹ For more information on Oriental photography, please refer to Mary Warner Marien's *Photography: A Cultural History*, Second Edition, (London: Lawrence King Publishing, 2006).

² Other photographers who depict nude dwarfs include Joel-Peter Witkin and Vivienne Maricevic.