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What Good Is Anthropology? Celebrating 50 Years of *American Ethnologist*

The smugness of privilege

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Abstract

This essay answers the question What good is anthropology? via a discussion of Susan Sontag's review of photographer Diane Arbus's 1972 retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. Sontag asserts that Arbus, in depicting people whom Sontag smugly regards as "ugly," is necessarily exploiting them. I perceive an exact comparison between Arbus's photographs and anthropology as an epistemological project and a representational practice. Like Arbus's photographs, anthropology is good for subverting the privileged protocol articulated by critics like Sontag, who are prepared to contemplate "ugly" people, vastly different from themselves, but only through an optic of pity or of vicarious indignation at the supposedly unrelentingly grim conditions under which such people are imagined to live their lives.

KEYWORDS
Arbus, ethics, photography, privilege, representation, Sontag, ugliness

> I work from awkwardness. By that I mean I don't like to arrange things. If I stand in front of something, instead of arranging it, I arrange myself.
>
> Diane Arbus (1972, p. 12)

> If I were just curious, it would be very hard to say to someone, "I want to come to your house and have you talk to me and tell me the story of your life." I mean people are going to say, "You're crazy."
>
> Diane Arbus (1972, p. 1)

In 1973, cultural critic Susan Sontag published an essay titled "Freak Show," on photographer Diane Arbus. The essay, a review of the Museum of Modern Art's 1972 retrospective exhibition of Arbus's work, is a no-holds-barred, scalding indictment.[1] Sontag (1977a, p. 32) lambastes Arbus for portraying "assorted monsters and borderline cases—most of them ugly; wearing grotesque or unflattering clothing; in dismal or barren surroundings." In splenetic, aggressive prose, Sontag asserts that Arbus's photographs convey an "anti-humanist message" (p. 32), by which she means that the photographs do not promote understanding or empathy. On the contrary, the "pathetic, pitiable, as well as repulsive" (p. 33) people Arbus photographs elicit aversion and dissociation. The work, in Sontag's eyes, "does not arouse any compassionate feelings" (p. 33). Instead, it "reinforces alienation, making one less able to react in real life" (p. 41). By displaying people whom Sontag consistently refers to as "freaks" (the word appears in the title and 19 times throughout the essay in various forms), Arbus's work lacks value: artistically, politically, and ethically.[2] Sontag scorns Arbus as a crass sideshow barker. Arbus is not so much an artist as a crafty exploiter who asks viewers to regard "equivalences between freaks, mad people, suburban couples, and nudists," and despair.[3]

Sontag's sour tract was immediately perceived as a broadside, and it has been labeled "notorious" (Cumming, 2019), "well-educated vitriol" (Hobson, 2022, p. 210), a "diatribe" (Parsons, 2009, p. 296), a "direct assault" (Tóibín, 2017), and "an exercise in aesthetic insensibility" (Schjerdahl, 2005). But it nevertheless remains influential and continues to be discussed as a baseline text in writings about Arbus (e.g., Charrier, 2012; Davies, 2008; Nelson, 2017, p. 124).

I came to this party late and only recently read Sontag's text for the first time, as part of a project on media representations of disability. The essay enraged me so much that, in a melodramatic Alexis Carrington gesture of disdain, I stubbed out an imaginary cigarette on it and pitched it violently across the room.

What particularly appalled me was the celestial entitlement that saturates Sontag's writing, her self-satisfied sense of omniscient privilege. I know that coolly dispensing lofty aperçus was Sontag's trademark style, and I have always found much of her writing mannered and irritating. In this case, though, my irritation turned into revulsion. It stunned me that Sontag's imperious posturing so recklessly short-circuited her self-critical capacity. It clearly thoroughly blocked her appreciation of how, in penning a line like "In photographing dwarfs, you don't get majesty & beauty. You get dwarfs" (Sontag, 1977a, p. 29), she wasn't being clever or arch.

She was being bigoted and tacky.

As someone who has worked with and written books about some of the kinds of people whom Arbus photographed and Sontag found "grotesque" (trans people and people with various disabilities, among others), I can't help but feel interpellated by Sontag's critique, and I read the perspective that Sontag articulates as a broader attack on particular ways of documenting difference that privileged individuals like Sontag regard as "ugly." I am not the first person to mention anthropology in the context of Arbus's photography: Sontag herself does it—dismissively, needless to say.[4]

But rather than just note a passing resemblance or an easy allusion, I see an exact comparison between Arbus's photographs and anthropology as an epistemological project and a representational practice.

For that reason, I would like to take Sontag's disparagement of Arbus as the springboard for my answer to the question What good is anthropology? My answer will be that anthropology offers a bracing riposte to the smugness of privilege that animates the discourse of people like Sontag, a discourse that is uninterested in or squeamish about difference, and that condemns and belittles people, like Arbus or anthropologists, who approach difference with curiosity, professionalism, and zest.

THE UGLY PROBLEM

Arbus had already established a reputation as a magazine photographer in New York, when, in 1967, 32 of her photographs were displayed in an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art that showcased her work and that of two other photographers (Lee Frielander and Gary Winograd). As a review in *Arts Magazine* reported,

> Most of the photographs in this extraordinary show are of human oddity in one form or another: oddities of birth (twins, triplets, midgets); psychological oddities (homosexuals, transvestites); or those great American ritual oddities that so fascinated Nathaniel West (beauty contests, dance marathons, movie premiers). (Magrid, 1967)

Reviews like this established Arbus's enduring reputation as a portrayer of "freaks." Arbus (1972, p. 3) acknowledged her fascination with differently bodied people, remarking admiringly that "most people go through life dreading they'll have a traumatic experience. Freaks were born with their trauma. They've already passed their test in life. They're aristocrats." According to one of her biographers, though, "she resented the label [as 'the photographer of freaks'] because she felt that, at their best, her portraits suggested the secret experiences that are within all of us" (Bosworth, 1984, p. 311). Others have noted how Arbus's portraits "leveled all her subjects, regardless of who they were. … The term 'freak' or 'normal' in her context became meaningless. Because Diane made no distinctions—no concessions either" (Bosworth, 1984, p. 199). Feminist pioneer Ti-Grace Atkinson remembered how Arbus talked about the people she photographed at Vineland, an institution for people with intellectual disabilities: "She said she was drawn to them because there was a special beauty there, and she wanted to capture that" (Lubow, 2016, p. 487).

Susan Sontag perceived no beauty in Arbus's work; in fact, her excoriation of Arbus's photographs rests precisely on their supposed utter absence of beauty. Sontag declares that the people Arbus depicts are ugly—apparently incontrovertibly and objectively ugly, in Sontag's view. She summarizes "the Arbus show," as I noted above, as "lin[ing] up assorted monsters and borderline cases—most of them ugly; wearing grotesque or unflattering clothing; in dismal or barren surroundings" (Sontag, 1977a, p. 32). Later in the essay, she observes dryly that "most characters in Arbus's Grand Guignol [that is, her show featuring horrible spectacles] appear not to know that they are ugly. Arbus photographs people in various degrees of unconscious or unaware relation to their pain, their ugliness" (p. 36). At another point, she asks, "Do they see themselves, the viewer wonders, like *that*? Do they know how grotesque they are? It seems as if they don't" (p. 36; italics in original).

The seeming ingenuousness of the people in the photographs as regards their own repulsiveness means that Arbus, by representing them, can only be exploiting them. Sontag writes that Arbus concentrates on "victims, on the unfortunate—but without the compassionate purpose that such a project is expected to serve. Her work shows people who are pathetic, pitiable, as well as repulsive, but it does not arouse any compassionate feelings" (p. 33). Sontag never defines exactly what she means by "compassionate feelings" and "the compassionate purpose that such a project is expected to serve." But it seems clear that "compassion" is Sontag's euphemism for "pity," or "outrage." She seems to think that portrayals of ugly people are justifiable only to the extent that they invoke pity in the viewer, or indignation on their behalf. Her argument returns repeatedly to her dismay that Arbus's portraits resist this. They "don't allow the viewer to be distant from the subject," she complains (pp. 33–34).

Importantly, Sontag locates this dynamic of not encouraging pity in Arbus's method. Arbus decisively rejected the approach of Walker Evans, Robert Frank, and Weegee—photographers she admired, but who famously took pictures of people without their knowledge or consent.

Everyone seems agreed that Arbus was conscientious about establishing rapport with the people she photographed. This

rapport ranged from conversations in which she explained to the people she wanted to photograph that she found them "terrific," to being the result of decades-long relationships. She began photographing Lauro Morales, the "Mexican dwarf," in 1957, and she took her famous photo of him in his hotel room 13 years later, in 1970, for example. She met Eddie Carmel in 1960 and photographed him for years before she snapped "A Jewish giant at home with his parents in the Bronx," also in 1970 (Lubow, 2016, pp. 517–23). She was also eager to do short bouts of participant observation. She made repeated visits to Sunshine Park, the nudist camp in New Jersey she immortalized, and stayed for weeks at a time, and she visited institutions that housed people with intellectual impairments many times during 1969–71 (Gross, 2012, p. 134; Lubow, 2016, p. 482).

Sontag (1977a, p. 35) acknowledges that Arbus was concerned to connect with the people she photographed: "Far from spying on freaks and pariahs, catching them unawares, the photographer has gotten to know them, reassured them—so that they posed for her." But that seemingly innocuous em-dash between "reassured them" and "so" concisely conveys Sontag's punch line, which is to denigrate the reassurance Arbus offered and frame it as bogus.

Rather than view Arbus's attempts to establish relationships with the people she photographed as constructive or ethically affirmative, Sontag interprets the rapport Arbus sought as a sinister means of manipulation. She notes that in most of Arbus's photos, the subject looks straight into the camera. And she observes that

> what makes Arbus's use of the frontal pose so arresting is that her subjects are often people one would not expect to surrender themselves so amiably and ingenuously to the camera. Thus, in Arbus's photographs, frontality also implies in the most vivid way the subject's cooperation. To get these people to pose, the photographer has had to gain their confidence, has had to become "friends" with them. (Sontag, 1977a, p. 38)

What Sontag calls "the subject's cooperation" here is plainly intended to mean "the subject's exploitation." This is one of the many places in her essay where it is evident that Sontag seems genuinely unable to entertain the notion that anyone of her own class (to which Arbus, who grew up on Park Avenue in New York in an upper-middle class family, indisputably belonged) might honestly want to approach the kinds of people Arbus photographed out of interest and curiosity. The scare quotes around the word "friend" in the quote above connote dishonesty and deception. And Sontag's assumption that the people whom Arbus "befriended" are "people one would not expect to surrender themselves so amiably and ingenuously to the camera" hinges on her view that such people should reasonably want to shy away from exposure because they ought to realize that they are ugly. Sontag (1977a, p. 36) seems perplexed, and even angry, that "though most viewers are ready to imagine that these people, the citizens of the sexual underworld as well as genetic freaks, are unhappy, few of the pictures actually show emotional distress."

Befriending individuals that people who share Sontag's sensibility regard as ugly; hanging out with people who wear "grotesque or unflattering clothing; in dismal or barren surroundings"; being careful to not invoke pity; and soliciting people's cooperation rather than spying on them—these qualities sound an awful lot to me like a felicitous description of a great deal of anthropology. In this light, it makes perfect sense that Arbus herself once said that in her profession as photographer, she practiced "a sort of contemporary anthropology" (Coleman, 1971; see also Lubow, 2016, p. 250).

ANTHROPOLOGY AND ARBUS

Almost every word of the edited transcript that introduces Arbus's (1972) posthumously published *Aperture* collection of photographs could be uttered by many anthropologists. Her remarks that I quote in the epigraph to this article—about how she "works from awkwardness" and, instead of arranging things, arranges herself—strike me as an exceptionally pithy précis of how anthropologists do fieldwork.

That text begins, aptly, with this: "My favorite thing is to go where I've never been." Then it continues,

> If I were just curious, it would be very hard to say to someone, "I want to come to your house and have you talk to me and tell me the story of your life." I mean people are going to say, "You're crazy." Plus they're going to keep mighty guarded. But the camera is a kind of license. A lot of people, they want to be paid that much attention. … Actually, they tend to like me. I'm extremely likeable with them. I think I'm kind of two-faced. I'm very ingratiating. It really kind of annoys me. I'm just sort of too nice. Everything is Oooo. I hear myself saying, "How terrific," and there's this woman making a face. I really *mean* it's terrific. I don't mean I wish I looked like that. I don't mean I wish my children looked like that. I don't mean in my private life I want to kiss you. But I mean that's amazingly, undeniably something. (Arbus, 1972, p. 1)

Like Arbus's camera, anthropology provides its practitioners with a license. I still remember the burst of epiphany I experienced when I understood, about halfway through the first undergraduate anthropology class I ever took, that (a) anthropology is an actually existing profession (before then, I had vaguely assumed that it was about historical societies, like archaeology, and had expired with Margaret Mead in the late 1970s, by which time I supposed that all the exotic places anthropologists went to and wrote about had been exhausted), *and* that (b) anthropologists actually get paid to travel to places they otherwise might never have visited and hang out with people they might otherwise never have had a reason to speak to.

That epiphany, as all genuine epiphanies do, changed my life, and in the mid-1980s, as a doctoral student in anthropology, I arrived unannounced in a small village in Papua New Guinea

and essentially said to the people there, "I want to come to your house and have you talk to me and tell me the story of your life." They may well have thought I was crazy, but they let me stay—for 15 months. I have been going back ever since, uttering unnumbered "Oooo"s and the local ingratiating versions of "How terrific" at everything villagers tell me.

Ten years later, I did the same with a group of trans sex workers on the streets of Salvador, Brazil, who compelled me because I saw a group of them standing on a street corner laughing scabrously. I have worked with women who run fatporn websites, and I have done fieldwork in group homes for adults with intellectual and physical disabilities. I have interviewed people who communicate telepathically with deceased gerbils and etiolating coral reefs. I am currently preparing a research project about migrant laborers who work in pig abattoirs.

I can do everything I have done and have gotten to know everyone I have worked with because I am an anthropologist who has been privileged enough to pursue my curiosity about people who are different from me and to do it as a job, just as Arbus was able to approach people who interested her and establish rapport with them because she was a photographer.

It goes without saying that interest and curiosity like Arbus's or mine (or, my argument is: the interest and curiosity that constitute the core of anthropology as a profession) are not necessarily completely disinterested and innocent. In an insightful article that seems surprisingly little known in anthropology, philosopher Iris Marion Young (1997, p. 357) discusses inquisitiveness about others in relation to cultural theorist Luce Irigaray's notion of "wonder," by which Irigaray means "an openness to the newness and mystery of the other person."

Young (1997, p. 357) agrees that wonder is an affirmative modality of engagement, but she cautions that

> this concept of wonder is dangerous. It would not be difficult to use it to imagine the other person as exotic. One can interpret wonder as a kind of distant awe before the Other that turns their transcendence into an inhuman inscrutability. Or wonder can become a kind of prurient curiosity. I can recognize my ignorance about the other person's experience and perspective, and adopt a probing, investigative mode toward her. Both stances convert the openness of wonder into a dominative desire to know and master the other person.

Recognizing these dangers (which, of course, are similar to the ones literary critic Edward Said [1978] famously drew attention to in *Orientalism*) prompts Young to propose a modality of engagement that she labels "asymmetrical reciprocity." This is a stance centered on awareness that we can never fully understand another person and that we need to be wary of constructing a common ground that allows us to imagine reversibility ("I know *exactly* how you feel!"; Arbus [1972, p. 2] expressed it like this: "Somebody else's tragedy is not the same as your own").

Asymmetrical reciprocity involves reflexivity, in the sense of "being able to see one's own position, assumptions, perspective as strange, because it has been put in relation to others" (Young, 1997, p. 358). It also involves perceiving other people's responses not so much as exchanges but as *gifts*, to which the ethically proper reaction is not a return ("If you give me a gift, and I give you back the same gift, you are affronted. If I give you the same kind of thing that you have given me, this is uncreative; it does not take our relation further. If you treat your gift to me as the repayment of a debt owed, then this too is ungenerous, and endangers our bond"; Young, 1997, pp. 355–56) but, rather, an acceptance.

Arguments like these are not straightforward. What exactly might it mean to treat other people's responses as gifts, for example? But however one might choose to ponder something like that, the point is that considering such a question is familiar terrain to anthropologists—not necessarily because we've read philosophical meditations like Young's but because we have engaged in ethnographic fieldwork. Anthropology is founded on "being able to see one's own position, assumptions, perspective as strange, because it has been put in relation to others," and the relationships we form with the people we engage with and write about unavoidably entail a complex variety of extended obligations and dependencies.

They also entail a particular way of seeing, and of representing that seeing. In an essay on Arbus's *Untitled* series, which consists of images of people with intellectual disabilities, literature scholar Deborah Nelson (2017, pp. 141–42; emphasis in original) observes that

> Arbus took these photos in the early 1970s before activism on behalf of the mentally and physically disabled had produced a new fund of images. I do not believe (nor do I think that Arbus believed) that the subjects of her photographs were in pain or that they lacked self-consciousness. In fact, many of them in this series look remarkably happy, even joyful. But the photos have been *received* as painful images and images of pain. This is due to the discomfort in the viewer who has no protocol to view them. Arbus puts us in an interesting position here with regard to "paying attention," which is complicated by the taboo against "staring" at the mentally retarded, or, indeed, anyone with a manifest disability. This taboo against staring … is equally a withdrawal of attention.

Nelson concludes that "the photographs … ask nothing of the viewer except to be seen" (p. 142).

My answer to the question, What good is anthropology?, is just this: we produce accounts of people whom many others "have no protocol" to perceive. Or, if they do have a protocol of perception, it is often the perspective of self-absorbed liberal-minded people like Sontag, who are prepared to contemplate "ugly" people, vastly different from themselves, but only through an optic of pity or of vicarious indignation at the supposedly unrelentingly grim conditions under which such people are imagined to live their lives.

Good anthropology, like Arbus's portraits, is good for subverting that smug, privileged protocol. Good anthropology may dwell on "ugliness," but not to make it palatable or pretty, or necessarily to incite outrage. It simply wants it to be seen. Seen so that it might be noticed, regarded, contemplated, debated, known. Anthropology asks people to "pay attention" to others who share our world but who, without anthropologists documenting their lives, might not ever be considered in discussions about that world.

THE ETHICS OF POSITIONALITY

Now, at this point I imagine that a critic might raise the issue of the ethics of positionality: of who documents, who is documented, why, and for whom. Diane Arbus, it must be said, was not a charitable saint. She took pictures of people who interested her to earn a living, just as all professional anthropologists, to earn a salary, write about people who compel them. Professional photography, like professional anthropology, is not a hobby. They are both, precisely, professions. That inevitably means that the relationship between the photographer/anthropologist and their subject consists of at least three components: the photographer/anthropologist, their subject, and the profession.

Nearly two decades ago, I addressed that tripart relationship in an article titled "Theory in Furs," in which I noted that if one views anthropology in terms of libidinal relationships—of desiring agents—the discipline can be (psycho)analyzed as structured through relations of masochism, in which anthropologists reap professional acclamation and a variety of rewards (academic positions, book contracts, speaking invitations, research grants, prizes, and so on) by in effect substituting themselves for the oppressed people they write about (Kulick, 2006). I do not think that such a substitution is a bad thing; in fact it may be unavoidable. It certainly is ethically more defensible than would be a relation of sadism between anthropologists and their subjects.

I did not know it when I wrote that article, but masochism also figures in some reviews of Arbus's work. Sontag (1977a, p. 43) herself began this vein of commentary by arguing that Arbus's interest in the people she photographed was a symptom of "a desire to violate her own innocence, to undermine her sense of being privileged, to vent her frustration at being safe."

So far, it seems to me, so reasonable (and also so relevant to many anthropologists' reasons for choosing to become anthropologists). But getting carried away by the tow of her own insight, Sontag (1977a, p. 39) couldn't resist plunging on, and she ends up declaring that Arbus's suicide (which occurred in 1971, when Arbus was 48 years old) was "a kind of combat death: having trespassed certain limits, she fell in a psychic ambush, a casualty of her own candor and curiosity"—as though befriending transvestites, dwarfs, and people with intellectual disabilities is an inherently perilous enterprise liable to push any respectable person over the edge. Seemingly encouraged by this kind of irresponsible armchair pop-psychologizing, others went further: Sir Cecil Beaton, a photographer of fashion and British high society, refers to Arbus's subjects as "malformed and lunatic people" and "mentally retarded freaks in paper hats," who all make him "queasy" (*Sunday Times Magazine*, 1974). Like Sontag, he regards an interest in such people as unmistakable evidence of a debilitating pathology. Beaton huffs, "I think she must have been a mess—no wonder she killed herself" (*Sunday Times Magazine*, 1974).

Today, I would modify my account of anthropology to observe that the relationship between anthropologists and their subjects actually consists minimally of four parties, the fourth being the response of people who either identify with the anthropologist's subject or on behalf of that subject, and who these days are quick to express their approval or their outrage via social media channels like Twitter (now X).

It is hardly a secret that our discipline is being buffeted by outrage that anthropologists dare to "speak for" others, especially others who are different from them and who do not share the anthropologist's race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, gender, history, age, dis/ability, nationality, and so on. In a way, I think such indignation is a legitimate expression of discomfort at the unselfconsciously self-satisfied, and potentially patronizing, rhetoric employed by many well-meaning anthropologists, that anthropology "gives voice to" people who otherwise are not "heard" (we currently are hearing the same discourse employed in relation to animals and the environment, which is a lot easier to do, since animals and the environment don't have X accounts).

To the extent that anthropologists fashion ourselves as activists or advocates—as I think most if not all anthropologists at least implicitly do—we have to be more self-aware than Arbus, who eschewed taking political stances.

To a much greater extent than she ever was, we also have to be prepared to be confronted by others who also see themselves as advocating on behalf of the people we represent. Such confrontations can be rewarding, or they can be gratuitous (a reviewer on Amazon who identified as a transperson castigated my book on Brazilian trans sex workers because it was about sex workers and not about a topic dearer to that critic's heart). They also not infrequently involve people who seem blithely unaware of their own privilege in relation to the people they claim to be identifying with and advocating for. Fields involving questions of race, trans, and disability seem especially fraught, for reasons that are mysterious to no one.

In the face of such controversies, my own position is that anthropologists should not surrender and should, instead, vigorously insist on continuing to do our job. Yes, we may be privileged in relation to many of the people we write about, and we may earn a living documenting aspects of their lives, but generally speaking, we are not smug, at least not relation to the people we depict. Over the years, I have met and worked with anthropologists who are kind, generous, humble, and delightful; I have also met and worked with anthropologists who are nasty, begrudging, pompous, and insufferable. But even the most disagreeable specimens seem to reserve their toxicity for colleagues and others in the academy. As far as I can tell, in relation to the people they work with in the field and represent, the overwhelming majority of professional anthropologists are concerned, cautious, and genuinely caring. Like Arbus, they

really do think that their interlocutors are "terrific," and they do their best to convey the "special beauty" they perceive in their interlocutors' lives.

Diane Arbus (Arbus, 1972, p. 15) once famously remarked, "I really believe that there are things which nobody would see unless I photographed them." I want to embrace Arbus as an anthropologist *manquée*. And I really believe that there are things which nobody would see unless anthropologists documented them.

Like Arbus's images, good anthropology will—indeed, probably should—generate controversy.[5] And like her photographs, the work we leave behind us will ultimately be history. How history will judge that work is anybody's guess.

But at least there will be something to judge.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The essay, slightly modified and retitled with the statelier "America, Seen through Photographs, Darkly," was republished as a chapter in Sontag's book *On Photography*, and it is that version I refer to throughout this text.

[2] Arbus herself used the word "freaks" to describe some of the people she photographed (for example, "Freaks was a thing I photographed a lot"; Arbus, 1972, p. 3), and many people who comment on Arbus's photographs have seized on that word as a convenient shorthand to summarize the range of subjects she is best known for. According to Neil Selkirk, a photographer who knew Arbus and who, since her death, has been the exclusive printer of her negatives for the Estate of Diane Arbus, Arbus used the word "freaks" in a "highly specific and tightly limited sense." Selkirk says that for Arbus, the word denoted "persons with bizarre physical abnormalities who made a living by means of the commercial exploitation of those abnormalities, namely people who worked in Freak Shows" (Selkirk, 2007; emphasis removed). Whatever the accuracy of that statement may be, it seems evident that Arbus did not use the word to be derogatory or dismissive. Which is clearly precisely how and why Sontag selected and persistently reiterated it.

[3] Elsewhere in *On Photography*, Sontag (1977b, pp. 23–24) declares that "photographic knowledge" (which, one presumes, means "knowledge prompted or invited by viewing a photograph" or "knowledge purported to be conveyed by a photograph") "can, finally, never be ethical or political knowledge." The redundant formulation "finally, never" indicates an authorial insecurity that necessitates rhetorical bolstering, but it also indicates that although she never comes right out and says so, Sontag regards Arbus's photographs as a kind of epitome of what "photographic knowledge" is and can aspire to do.

[4] Sontag (1977a, p. 42) observes, "The photographer is supertourist, an extension of the anthropologist, visiting natives and bringing back news of their exotic doings and strange gear. The photographer is always trying to colonize new experiences or find new ways to look at familiar subjects—to fight against boredom."

[5] Bad anthropology too can and should generate controversy, but since the topic of this essay is "What *good* is anthropology?," my focus here is on anthropology that I perceive as professional, empathetic, eye-opening, and life-affirming.

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