# Technology and the Portrayal of Death in Photography Over Time: Brady, Weegee, and Warhol

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## ABSTRACT

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**(Under the direction of Dr. Donald Shaw)**

Working within the confines of photography and the technology of the day, three men shared a common theme in their work—the depiction of death. Mathew Brady mounted a comprehensive effort to cover the American Civil War, Arthur Fellig (Weegee) depicted New York City life after dark and Andy Warhol expressed the commonality of death extracted from specific events, but with transcendental qualities. This thesis explores the common links connecting Brady, Weegee and Warhol—technology and the portrayal of death in photography over time.

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction to Photojournalism

The evolution of photojournalism has come full circle. Early photographic images must have seemed magical to the populace, seemingly exact, honest and unerring. Literal snapshots of events embodied a gravity no less powerful than the written word. This would give way, for the most part, to photographic images used as illustrations for the written word. Some major newspapers and periodicals like the *New York Times* and *Life* magazine realized the importance of photojournalism as a storytelling device worthy to stand alone or with captions, others used it as a tool to illustrate and solidify the story that it accompanied. Even today amid difficult economic times for newspapers, photographers are conspicuously absent from small-town newsrooms that provide digital cameras to their reporters as a more efficient means of illustrating their written words. The significance of the previous sentence is the distinction some editors and publishers make, that of photographer and photojournalist. One is primarily for illustrative purposes, the other is charged with assignments similar to traditional journalists.

To fully understand the significance of Mathew Brady, Arthur Fellig (Weegee) and Andy Warhol as photographers, journalists and artists, it is important to establish the role of photography as it relates to these three exemplars throughout history. Photojournalism has evolved from its earliest incarnation with Brady to the present, where I posit it now is, having

experienced times of lesser appreciation, achieving even greater significance and respectability.

Brady, self-employed as he was, set his own mission to cover the Civil War. His images, and those of his assistants, were taken not only to chronicle and document the war but also to inform the citizenry of what was and what had occurred.

Similarly, Weegee was not tethered to particular assignments and therefore had no gatekeepers. He was free to roam the city and listen to his police scanner. His freedom allowed him to witness people and events and to photograph them as a means of preserving a story.

Warhol, working until his untimely death in 1987, was a magazine publisher, journalist and photographer, among many other things. His works discussed in this thesis, however, are separate and distinct from those more traditional pursuits. He never ceased to report and inform and critique on his surroundings, settling on his *Death and Disaster* series, perhaps, as his magnum opus. As with Brady and Weegee, Warhol's images were thought-provoking, sometimes shocking and always saturated with meaning and social criticism.

Individual forebears of photography and journalism who sought to raise the bar on their art, craft and profession exemplified the true significance and impact visual media could offer. Today online news media influence editors and how they think about visual representations of the news. Web-based news relies heavily on images, video and audio and thus requires a new commitment to photojournalists and journalists with evolving titles like "media content providers" or "web-video journalist."[1] The new direction appears to empower photojournalists to capture the news with their lenses once again rather than simply

[1] Loup Langton, *Photojournalism and Today's News: Creating Visual Reality*, (Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 221.

produce an image to illustrate the written word. This evolution resurrects the power of the photographic image of decades past and merges it with the ethics and considerations of traditional journalism while simultaneously allowing for video and room for multiple photographs where space was once too limited for their publication.

The word "photojournalism" was popularized in the 1940s by professor Cliff Edom at the University of Missouri. Prior to this, terms like "news photographer," "press photographer," and "magazine photographer" were used.[2] To use the new terminology, Mathew Brady was, arguably, the first photojournalist innovating and pushing the bounds of photography from portraiture and landscapes into the realm of journalism and storytelling through the capture and recording of events. As a new medium, photography had already gained popularity with portrait galleries where people could sit for their own portrait or, in the case of Brady and P. T. Barnum, among others, see images of prominent and important people. Up until this point, however, the medium was considered more as a means of literal reproduction than as a thought-provoking one.

The three subjects of this thesis were visual anthropologists as expressed by Julianne Newton in her book *The Burden of Visual Truth: The Role of Journalism in Mediating Reality*.[3]

> Photojournalism is visual anthropology. Photojournalist study humankind through their reportage; they are professional observers. Anthropologist may bristle at this assertion, arguing that journalists are not social scientist. But the best journalists are indeed social scientists. They observe, they participate and observe, they record, they analyze, they immerse themselves in the culture of the observed, they report what they find, they reflect on the

[2] Frank P. Hoy, *Photojournalism: The Visual Approach*, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993), 5.

[3] Julianne H. Newton, *The Burden of Visual Truth: The Role of Visual Journalism in Mediating Reality*, (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001), 54.

> meaning of what they have seen. They have mass audiences and many more opportunities to influence how members of those audiences see and remember than most anthropologists.

Without enumerating the criteria as they apply to Brady, Weegee and Warhol, one can recognize the significance of their work. Perhaps it was their autonomy that allowed them the freedom to pursue the stories they did. Perhaps it was a drive and ambition to communicate stories and events to others. The connective thread among these men is that they stepped outside the norms of their day to bring events and issues to the eyes of the public. Their prescience foretold a rebirth, a reemergence of recounting and conveying stories to media consumers today. Media presence on the worldwide web demands visual impact and that impact is achieved via photographic images and video.

The 21st century now embraces the photojournalist, visual journalist, media content provider and web-video journalist as a group, a profession where once a few individuals awed people with groundbreaking coverage and interpretation.

## CHAPTER 2

## Background

In February 2002, the Tate Modern museum in London hosted the "Andy Warhol Retrospective." Of the 160 paintings and more than 80 drawings (conspicuously absent were photographs and film) exhibited, the emphasis of the show, according to one critic, was on the legendary pop artist's 1960s 'Disaster' series.[4] That critic said, "Warhol suddenly became an objective chronicler of America in a time of social and political change, knowingly drawing his viewers in through his direct, unflinching portrayals of death."[5] During Warhol's career, he displayed a fear and concern for death that manifested itself in his work. As early as 1962, Warhol produced works of death and disaster. Beginning with *Optical Car Crash, 129 Die (Plane Crash),* and *Suicide*, he continued into the decade with *Bellevue I,* 1963*; 5 Deaths,* 1963*; White Burning Car III,* 1963*; Ambulance Disaster,* 1963*; Saturday Disaster*, 1964*; Sixteen Jackies,* 1964; and *Atomic Bomb*, 1965 among others. [6] Warhol painted these from photographic images.

Warhol was not the first person or to use his art to comment on everyday death in America, nor was he the first to brand his images to make them unmistakably his. Arthur Fellig, also known as Weegee, was a photographer whose specialty was capturing modern

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[4] Marcel Krenz, "Art in Times of Disaster," *Art* 53, (February 2002), *Review* 26.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Andy Warhol and Menil Collection, *Andy Warhol: Death and Disasters*, (Houston: Menil Collection, 1988).

violence in America on film.[7] Indeed, as Kristen Hope Bigelow suggests, "Weegee's major importance may reside in his influence on Pop Art purveyor Andy Warhol. As voyeurs psychologically inhabiting the margins of society, both Weegee and Warhol paradoxically worked and lived at the cultural center of the social orders and practices they seemed to objectively observe." Weegee's 1945 book, *Naked City*, secured his place in history as a great photographic chronicler of death and disaster for his time, just as Warhol's *Death and Disaster* series did for him. According to Bigelow, "Weegee's representations of the unselfconscious and guiltless spectator highlighted the public's growing desensitization to tragedy as a consequence of constant exposure to mediated images of disaster."[8]

Some people have a natural voyeuristic craving for news coverage of shocking, sometimes horrific events. No matter how bad the occurrence, the tendency is to seek a true account of what happened. Often times, seeing is believing. To that end, the three subjects of this thesis played a part in satisfying that urge within us and indeed, within themselves. They did this in such a distinctive way as to create a signature style in their medium and in the case of Warhol, a new genre. They each exhibited an adept sense of branding as well, a term that was not in their lexicon.

An underlying theme that connects Andy Warhol, Weegee and Mathew Brady is one of extremes. They juxtapose high art with low art, the rich and the poor, the good and the bad. All three men seem to have understood that both points of view were necessary to empower their work for maximum impact. Brady was first known for society portraiture but turned his attention to the Civil War and became the primary person responsible for its coverage. Weegee was the quintessential New York City photographer, covering crime, fires

[7] Kristen Hope Bigelow, "Warhol's Weegee," *The New Art Examiner* (October 1994), 23.

[8] Ibid.

and the homeless. He also covered New York high society. He tried, later in his career, to transition from photojournalism to art photography by manipulating celebrity portraits, but they never achieved much notoriety. While Warhol was a successful painter, he was also a photographer and filmmaker, as well as a writer, publisher, television host, model, spokesperson, and astute investor. This thesis will focus on his paintings, though it must be understood that many of Warhol's paintings originated as photographs. He, too, understood the value of extremes. Warhol had the uncanny ability to elevate low art to high and not simply juxtapose the two. Examples were his *Mickey Mouse* and *Campbell's Soup* paintings and *Brillo* sculptures.

All three men were society portraitists, recognizing and profiting from their stature as artists and chroniclers of their time. From the standpoint of a societal commentator, Warhol's *Death and Disaster* series represents part of the bad or unfortunate in society. This series contains paintings of automobile accidents, fires, contaminated cans of tuna fish, suicides, and race riots. He brought life and death, success and failure, to the fore. In these instances, Warhol is not telling us what to think, rather, what to think about.

In Alan Trachtenberg's book, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans*, he argues that to read photographs properly, one must read them "not as pictures alone or as documents but as cultural texts."[9] The value of photographs as history, he says, "lies not just in what they show or how they look but in how they construct their meanings."[10] Trachtenberg explains that "the history they show is inseparable

[9] Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans,* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), xvi.

[10] Ibid.

from the history they enact."[11] The point is that the photographer is inseparable from the photographs he produces. This duality exemplifies the melding of the photographer's history with the subjects and thus, the final result—the photographs.

Bigelow bolsters Trachtenberg's concept: "Each also chose to view their respective surroundings through a parallel consciousness, a created persona that represented that which was depicted in both of their works: fame, fortune, and what Weegee called 'the disorder of the modern city in all its violence and passion.'"[12] To the question "why look?" John Taylor discusses how "fear and disgust are responses to images of horrifying events that arise before thought and understanding. Both repugnance and nausea are linked with depictions of pain, decay and death. They imply the possibility of being absorbed and fascinated as well as repelled by pictures of cruelty and savagery."[13] Taylor continues, "The various responses to representations of death include squeamish or fastidious behavior, respect, fear, glee or, even a more intense thrill. Within the varying limits on representing death, people peep, peer or stare unashamedly, out of normal curiosity about mortality."[14] These artists use this as a tool to deliver their message, their commentary.

Brady, Weegee, and Warhol satisfied this natural urge found in consumers of news and art. They did it by injecting themselves, their history, and the cultural norms of their day into their art, and they rendered photo-documentation of events with resonance. Trachtenberg's point is well-taken with the artists concerned in this thesis. The examples

[11] Ibid.

[12] Bigelow, "Warhol's Weegee," 21.

[13] John Taylor, *Body Horror: Photojournalism, Catastrophe and War (The Critical Image),* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 29.

[14] Ibid.

discussed herein are cultural texts because, as Trachtenberg has said of photographs, "the history they show is inseparable from the history they enact."[15]

To borrow a chapter title from Karen Halttunen's book *Murder Most Fowl: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination*[16], this thesis looks at "The Pornography of Violence" tangentially and the influence that technology had, as seen in the works of Mathew Brady, Weegee and Andy Warhol, all three pioneers of photojournalism. Halttunen's title refers to the pleasure one gets from reading accounts of brutal murders, while this thesis looks at a similar pleasure one gets from the visual accounts and universality of death and disasters, and what underlying intentions might be suggested by the photojournalist or artist.

The most obvious similarity among these three men is that they produced graphic images of death to convey a message. The more significant similarity is their use of images as news stories, commentaries, and documentaries. Brady, and often associates of his, most notably Alexander Gardner and Timothy O'Sullivan, documented the American Civil War with pictures of fallen soldiers, and (arguably)[17] arranged the bodies for maximum impact on the viewer. Weegee gained notoriety for his stark, honest photographic accounts of New York City life, which included photographs of automobile accidents, murders and fires. Andy Warhol, who appropriated press and stock photographs of automobile accidents and suicides, turned them into paintings to make statements about consumer affluence and the reality of death.

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[15] Trachtenberg, xvi.

[16] Karen Halttunen, *Murder Most Fowl: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 60.

[17] Ibid., 83.

These three men sought to tell a truth, a compelling story, with their images, and they used the technology of their day to do so. Brady and Warhol tried to tell, perhaps, a more universal truth through the manipulation of images, either before the shutter was released or after, while Weegee used the bright direct photographic flash to wash out and illuminate the faces of his subjects, showing in stark contrast the difference between his subjects and the people who would view and read about them the next morning. Through the graphic use of a corpse (or falling suicide victim), Warhol told a universal truth in keeping the anonymity of the victims. The names were unnecessary, for these were events that happened every day. He wrote lines of prose that began with the click of a shutter and whose message was edited and refined in the darkroom and studio.

The manipulation of the photographic image to transcend any one particular event brings art and journalism together and can make for powerful statements. These three men provided continuity from the mid-1800s to 1987, the year Warhol died. Aptly put by Marcel Krenz, "Warhol suddenly became an objective chronicler of America in a time of social and political change, knowingly drawing his viewers in through his direct, unflinching portrayals of death."[18]

During Warhol's career, he displayed a fear and concern for death that manifested itself in his work. While recovering from gunshot wounds inflicted by Valerie Solanis, Warhol said that the next time he had to go to a hospital he wouldn't come out alive. This statement proved to be prophetic. Warhol died in February 1987 from an apparent heart attack while recovering from gallbladder surgery. He was in the hospital for a second time. It was the last time.

[18] Marcel Krenz, "Art In Times Of Disaster," *Art Review*, vol. LIII (February 2002): 26.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the effect technology had on Mathew Brady, Weegee, and Andy Warhol, and the journalistic significance of their depictions of death to sate the voyeuristic appetites of media and art consumers. To accomplish this, I will use primarily Warhol's *Death and Disaster* series, Weegee's *Naked City* and the published Civil War photographs from Brady's studio (see Sources Consulted). I will also provide a brief history of photography to contextualize the three subjects contained herein while focusing more specifically on the technology available to each of them. These works will be used to demonstrate the common threads that link the three artists.

This thesis is organized into an introduction and five chapters. The introduction contextualizes photojournalism, Chapter 1 serves as the introduction for the thesis as a whole, Chapter 2 is the literature review, Chapter 3 answers the first research question, Chapter 4 answers the second research question, Chapter 5 is the conclusion, and Appendix A contains the images referenced in this thesis.

## CHAPTER 3

## Literature Review and Research Questions

If one is to understand the three artists referenced in this thesis and the significance of their achievements with the technology of the time, one must understand a few basics of photographic history. According to Helmut Gernsheim, "Knowledge of the optical principle of the camera obscura images can be traced back to Aristotle; its use as an aid in drawing, to Giovanni Battista della Porta."[19] The projection of images has been around for hundreds of years, but it was not until 1826 that the first photograph was taken by Nicéphore Niépce on a pewter plate.[20] According to Gernsheim, Nicépce signed a partnership with Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre in December 1829.[21] Daguerre was able to acquire the patronage of Deputy François Arago, who became instrumental in helping the French Government acquire the invention in 1839, "in order to give it free to the world."[22]

The first successful daguerreotype taken in America was by D. W. Seager on September 16, 1839.[23] The daguerreotype was used by Mathew Brady and his associates in the 1840s, and from there he progressed to "ambrotypes and wet plate negatives printed on

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[19] Helmut Gernsheim, *A Concise History of Photography*, 3d ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1986), 3.

[20] Ibid., 8.

[21] Ibid., 10.

[22] Ibid., 11.

[23] Ibid., 31.

salted paper in the 1850s, to shiny albumen prints in the 1860s."[24] Panzer explains, "Brady's career was distinguished by an ability to exploit new technology to reach the largest possible audience."[25] This attribute applies equally to all three subjects of this paper.

By the time Brady set out to cover the American Civil War, the albumen print was his method of choice. This process required carrying heavy glass plates, paper, and chemicals in a wagon to the site where the images would be printed. Due to the great expanse of the war and the cumbersome nature of early photography, it was quite a logistical undertaking requiring a team of men rather than only Brady himself. This brief sketch of the history of photography is not to explain the processes by which the earliest photographs were made but to demonstrate just how young the art and craft of photography was when Brady set out for the war. Details of the technology employed by these three men will be provided as needed in the following sections.

**MATHEW BRADY (1823-1896)**

Mathew Brady's career as a photographer spanned from the 1840s until his death in 1896. He achieved acclaim for his societal and political portraits, (e.g. see Image 1 of a self-portrait and Image 2 of Abraham Lincoln in Appendix A), but he was also renowned for coverage of the Civil War. Though he did not always release the shutter himself, he took credit for the photographs that were taken under his direction. This allowed for greater coverage than what one man could accomplish with one camera and proved to be a precursor to the concept of "branding." This would later be employed by Andy Warhol, as well.

[24] Ibid., 4.

[25] Ibid., 4.

Brady was arguably the most important photographer of the 19th century. He achieved acclaim as a portrait photographer in the 1840s and 1850s before moving into the realm of war photojournalism in 1861 and the Civil War. According to Mary Panzer, "Mathew Brady discovered how to use a camera to tell true lies,"[26] just as Tom Wolfe and Hunter S. Thompson did with "New" and "Gonzo" journalism. The significance here is that Brady and Warhol pioneered this idea first, photographically and artistically.

Brady did not take all of the photographs that are attributed to him but rather he directed them as a movie director or play director would. His coverage of the American Civil War required many men and Brady's management. One must understand that in the early days of photography, a photographer had to do more than simply release the shutter on the camera. While one person could conceivably complete the process from beginning to end, it was common for photographers to have apprentices and helpers. According to Mary Panzer, many daguerreotypists worked alone. She mentioned "mid-century accounts," that

> …describe large studios that employed many specialized workers, including young boys who polished and prepared the plates; a camera operator who made the exposure; technicians who manipulated chemicals and mercury fumes to develop the image; colourists (sic) (often trained artists) who added touches of pink to cheeks and gilding to jewelry and watch chains; and the finishers who covered the fragile portraits with glass and sealed them in a leather case. The proprietor ran the business, greeted his customers and directed the making of the portrait.[27]

With this understanding, one can see how involved the process of producing someone's portrait was in the mid 19th century.

Panzer contends Brady's "discoveries led to the invention of modern celebrity as well as to the dramatic story-telling pictures that we know today as photojournalism."[28] Until

[26] Mary Panzer, *Mathew Brady*, no. 55 (New York: Phaidon Press Inc., 2001), 4.

[27] Ibid., 7.

Brady began making celebrity portraits, people were famous by word of mouth, but they were not instantly recognizable because of the lack of visual documentation. Brady made portraits of important people in the United States, which he sold and displayed in his galleries. This led to a greater visibility for those who sat for his camera.

As a society portraitist, Brady's intent must have been to make his clients look their best. He was one of the first photographers to enhance his photographs to better suit the sitters. It must also be noted that Brady thought of himself as an artist. Indeed, this is an instance where the work of Brady meets that of Warhol. Brady and his assistants enhanced the photograph or daguerreotype itself while Warhol turned photographic images into silk-screens, transferred the image to canvas, and then added enhancements and embellishments to portray the subject as he so desired—often to generate repeat business. According to Panzer,

> Brady himself employed painters, who added 'enhancements' to his photographs in ink, watercolour (sic) and oil paint. By applying ink, artists could make unruly hair smoother, help jackets lose their wrinkles, make large feet smaller and wide waistlines grow slim.[29]

Sometimes portraits were enhanced with oil paint to produce a realistic oil painting. Photographers and artists alike discovered the endless possibilities with photography. Objects could even be added to the backgrounds.

There is debate over whether Brady arranged or posed bodies for some of his Civil War photographs. It is important to understand that photojournalism was a new field and ethics were being formed anew. Also, given the nature and constraints of the camera and other necessary equipment, photographers were not afforded the access to dangerous

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[28] Ibid., 15.

[29] Ibid., 10.

battlefield action one might expect today. Brady and his men used cameras that were large and heavy, requiring them to stand while taking a picture, which would not have been a good practice on a live battlefield. Nonetheless, Brady chronicled the Civil War to the best ability of the day.

It is understood that Brady employed others to take most of the Civil War photographs attributed to him, but it is also understood that Brady was the impetus behind the documentation and therefore, he was given credit for them. Seven examples are shown in the appendix: five credited to Brady, one to Alexander Gardner and one to Timothy O'Sullivan, both of whom were Brady's employees at the time.

**ARTHUR FELLIG (1899-1968)**

Arthur Fellig, known primarily and herein as Weegee, once said, "To me a photograph is a page from life, and that being the case, it must be real."[30] Weegee was born Arthur Fellig (see Image 8 in Appendix for self-portrait), but keen on self-promotion, he stamped the back of his photographs with "Credit Photo by Weegee the Famous" and thus, Arthur Fellig became known by his new moniker. He was an Austrian immigrant who worked and achieved fame as a freelance photographer in New York City in the 1930s and 1940s.[31] Prior to his work as a freelance photographer, Fellig worked as a darkroom technician at Acme Newspictures (later known as United Press International Photos).[32] It was there that he was exposed to thousands of "newsworthy" images.

[30] Weegee, *Naked City*, (New York: Da Capo, 1985), 12.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Miles Orvell, "Weegee's Voyeurism and the Master of Urban Disorder," *American Art 6*, no. 1 (1992), 22.

Weegee lived across the street from police headquarters and kept a police frequency radio by his bed. Known for arriving at the scene of crimes in time to chronicle them with his photographs, he seemed to have psychic powers. Such powers became the impetus for his new name, "Weegee," and his spelling, after the Quija board. Weegee had showman and self-promotion qualities similar to P. T. Barnum. According to Miles Orvell, Weegee's personal appearance was a persona that evolved and was then perpetuated by the photographer himself. "We often see the same persona—two days' beard, a constant cigar, blunt features, a warm, at times leering expression, and clothes that look slept in."[33] Weegee even went so far as to have his tailor-made suits from London (once he was successful) made two sizes too big "to achieve the same look but at a higher level."[34]

After lecturing at the Museum of Modern Art in 1944, Weegee published *Naked City*, a compilation of his years of New York photography. The publication of this book finally brought Weegee the fame he deserved, and, according to Miles Orvell, "Weegee was, it seemed, an Artist."[35] The follow-up to *Naked City* was *Weegee's People* (1946). This book, however, was not accorded the same acclaim as the first because it lacked the same edge. Orvell describes it as "a collection of portraits that was published close on the heels of *Naked City*, …is an innocuous and largely humorous collection of urban types, from the perfectly normal to the strangely bizarre. Each portrait exhibits some emotion, but there is a certain blandness to the collection as a whole."[36]

[33] Ibid., 21.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.,19.

[36] Ibid., 39-40.

Weegee's final publication was *Naked Hollywood* (1953). In what Orvell called an attempt to "reach beyond his original strength, lured in part by the notion that something 'higher' was required of him,"[37] he tried to satirize the people of Hollywood with trick photographs. His attempt was not successful. Weegee was an acclaimed photographer for his work covering the city he knew and loved. When he received recognition for what he knew best, he tried, unsuccessfully, to give more.

Weegee's preferred camera was a 4x5 Speed Graphic.[38] According to www.graflex.org, the Speed Graphic "was the dominant portable professional camera from the 1930's through the end of the 1950's."[39] The fast shutter speeds allowed photographers to take candid photographs without being encumbered by a tripod. The bulb flash allowed photographs at night and filled in features of subjects in daylight. The relatively large 4x5 inch negative produced with a Speed Graphic camera rendered sharp photographs when reproduced for newspapers and magazines. Those attributes made this camera popular among professionals and allowed Weegee to introduce his style of photography to New York and to the world.

**ANDY WARHOL (1928-1987)**

Warhol's career took him in many directions. Image 13 is an example of one of many self-portraits taken by the artist. Primarily he is known as an artist, yet many are not aware of the different directions his creativity led him. In 1949 he began his career as a

[37] Ibid., 40.

[38] Weegee. *Weegee's People*. (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1946), Introduction.

[39] The Graflex Speed Graphic FAQ, (accessed 19 July 2009); available from http://www.graflex.org/speed-graphic/; Internet.

commercial artist in New York City.[40] "By 1957," according to Sophie Howarth, "Warhol had become New York's best known and highest paid fashion illustrator, described by one magazine as the 'Leonardo da Vinci of Madison Avenue.'[41] It was also the year he established Andy Warhol Enterprises Inc.[42] After achieving success as a commercial artist, known for his shoe drawings for I. Miller & Sons Shoes advertising campaign, he made the difficult transition from commercial art to fine art. In 1961, Warhol met and talked with Muriel Latow, a small gallery owner. She asked what he liked most—to which he replied "money." With this response, Latow suggested he paint "something that everybody sees every day, that everybody recognizes…like a can of soup."[43] He painted the can of soup and portraits of Marilyn Monroe, and more. Having just begun his pop art career in 1961, Warhol decided to retire from this genre in the mid-1960s and take up filmmaking. Warhol would later resume his painting and drawing, but this brief overview of his career helps to contextualize his work.

Warhol had an immense desire to record the times in which he lived. This desire manifested itself with his tape recorder (often referred to as his wife), his cameras, both still and movie, his books, and *Interview* magazine[44]. He also kept time capsules, which consisted of banker's boxes into which he would drop his daily junk-mail, correspondence, photographs, audiotapes, and other materials. Aside from being a social chronicler of his

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[40] De Salvo, Donna M., *Success is a Job In New York: The Early Art and Business of Andy Warhol*, The Grey Art Gallery & Study Center and the Carnegie Museum of Art. 1989: pg. 84.

[41] Howarth, Sophie, *Andy Warhol*, Tate, Spring 2002, pg.24.

[42] Ibid.

[43] De Salvo, *Success is a Job in New York*, 84.

[44] *Interview* magazine was founded as an instrument to review movies, music, and parties. What made this publication unique was its concept of celebrity interviews conducted primarily by other celebrities. Warhol would often conduct the main interview in a question and answer format.

time, Warhol was a businessman as well as an artist, able to create a viable media empire to bring his observations to the world.

To understand the importance of Warhol, one must first know the pieces of his empire. He began his career as a commercial artist in New York City in 1949. He soon became so successful that he was employing his friends and his mother as assistants to enable him to produce more work. Soon, he would desire the recognition that befalls a fine artist. In 1952, Warhol had his first show. From his success as an artist, he was able to start making movies and writing books. Eventually, he would found *Interview* Magazine, the *Velvet Underground*, and television programs. *Interview* magazine was created, according to Warhol, so he could get free tickets to movies and concerts. He was known to attend several parties a night, keeping his name and persona in the spotlight. Warhol is remembered by most people as the pop artist who painted the Campbell's soup cans. In reality, he was a media mogul.

While an accomplished photographer himself, Warhol used press and stock photographs in his *Death and Disaster* series. By the early 1960s, photography had advanced beyond Weegee's Speed Graphic. Cameras, lenses, and film were faster than ever. This naturally made the mechanical aspect of photography easier but allowed for even more creativity on the artistic side. That did not stop Warhol from wanting more. The very nature of artists is to take what is accepted within a particular medium and press forward and break new ground; this led to the mechanization of his art with the use of silk-screens. A simplistic description of this process begins with a photograph of which a silk-screen is made. The silk-screen is then placed on top of a canvas and paint is poured over the screen. A squeegee is then pulled across the screen thus pushing paint onto the canvas, registering an image

beneath. The artist controls the paint, e.g. color, amount, placement, and has complete freedom to continue with the screening or to remove the screen and paint directly on the canvas. Warhol used this method to great effect and thus added an extra layer between a particular event and a transcendental one.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper answers the following questions:

1. What role did technology play in the works of the respective artists?

2. What was significant about their depictions of death in regards to photojournalism?

To answer the research questions I will use the published images of Brady, Weegee and Warhol, as contained in the following books, and many other sources:

Garrison, Webb B. *Brady's Civil War,* (New York: Lyons Press, 2000).

Horan, James David. *Mathew Brady, Historian With a Camera,* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1955).

Menil Collection. Andy Warhol: *Death and Disaster,* (Houston: Fine Art Press, 1988).

Meredith, Roy. *The World of Mathew Brady: Portraits of the Civil War Period,* (Los Angeles: Brooke House Publishers, 1976).

Panzer, Mary. *Mathew Brady, no. 5,* (New York: Phaidon Press Inc., 2001).

Weegee. *Naked City,* (New York: Da Capo, 1985).

Weegee. *Weegee's People,* (New York: Da Capo, 1946).

## LIMITATIONS

I have limited my study to the published works because they contain the images presented to the public. As such, they are relevant to this thesis.

## CHAPTER 4

## Technology and the Art and Craft of Photography

This chapter addresses the first research question: What role did technology play in the works of the respective artists? I chose this question because I wanted to explore the difficulties and hindrances each artist confronted in the capture and presentation of his respective work. I was not satisfied with the singular importance of the individual artists, justified though it may be. To truly understand the importance of these three men, they must be contextualized. In answering this question it is my intention to explore the technological progression that linked them and in so doing, show how each man took what was available to push forward. Part of their greatness was their unwillingness to accept current technology for what it was. All three were innovators.

### MATHEW BRADY

Though limited in nature, cameras in the 1860s did allow war coverage. Slow shutter speeds meant photographers could take pictures only of stationary objects, scenes or occurrences. Brady was not the first war photographer. That title most likely belongs to Roger Fenton, who photographed the Crimean War in 1855. Fenton knew the burden of photography in the field as his accounts portrayed neither battle nor its aftermath.

Brady, however, did try to show war's devastation as graphically as the contemporary technology allowed. The bulk and weight of the equipment meant coverage of a battle or

scene after the fact. The Brady images contained in the Appendix show the carnage and the toll the war had on both sides. Image 3, *Confederate dead on Matthews Hill after the first Bull Run*, 1861, depicts a fallen Confederate soldier and Image 6 a row of Confederate dead by a fence. Images 4 and 7, *Dead Confederate soldiers near Chevaux-de-frise, Virginia*, 1865 and *A Harvest of Death*, July 1863, respectively, also offer examples of how death was dealt with photographically during the war. These four photographs exemplify the type of photography that was possible in Brady's time, as no action images could be captured. The best one could hope for was to try to capture the nature and feel of what transpired on that battlefield. This is why most of Brady's Civil War images are of men either before a battle or after. Image 5, *Union soldier after release from Andersonville*, 1865, captures the horrific treatment of an union soldier prisoner near death from apparent starvation.

A war photographer had to carry a heavy camera, silver plates, chemicals and other provisions. According to Panzer, "The cumbersome wet-plate process was too slow to record action," though "portable wagons made it possible to record battlefields after the fighting had ceased."[45] Cameras allowed for war coverage in limited though profound ways. Most photographs were taken after the fighting and showed the death and disaster left in its wake. While this new technology, photography, allowed the documentation of war, it also, in its deficiencies, allowed Brady to manipulate scenes on the battlefield to show what might have, could have, or probably happened. The end result was war carnage not seen before by non-participants.

Photography was used as a tool to recreate battle scenes. Looking back, one sees the limitations of early photographic means while at the same time one can appreciate the ability of men like Brady and his associates to use this new tool as building blocks to reconstruct

[45] Mary Panzer, *Mathew Brady*, no. 55 (New York: Phaidon Press Inc., 2001), 13.

war scenes for non-participants and historians. An example of another medium used to record events is that of a court sketch artist. Court sketch artists are present during a trial but are unable to capture a particular scene as literally as they could with a modern camera. Instead, they try to record a particular scene as they remember it. The end result is as accurate as the artist's memory and technical skill, and it is subject to interpretation.

If we look at Image 3, *Confederate dead on Matthews Hill after the first Bull Run,* 1861, there is a body in the foreground and no movement. No sense of action, just a sense of static isolation. At least two more bodies seem to be visible in the background. Image 4, *Dead Confederate soldiers near Chevaux-de-frise, Virginia,* 1865, captures one dead soldier in a trench. This image is framed in part by the fortifications designed to stop or slow enemy incursions into the trenches. Both images have a still, quiet quality to them. The photographer used framing, context and body position to record the impact of battle.

Brady and his associates were trying to capture scenes as well. Faced with technical constraints, their objective was to portray what took place on the battlefield, using the tools at hand making the best of their situation. One looks back and sees this technology as a burden or hindrance, but for Brady it was most likely viewed as a breakthrough. This medium was new and thus, modern ideals of ethics did not apply. Rather than seen as artistic license, scene manipulation was used as an attempt to reflect broader truths.

**WEEGEE**

Of the utmost importance for Weegee was his Speed Graphic camera equipped with a bulb flash such as Image 8. Not only could this camera be wielded sans tripod, but the flash also allowed for night photography, which was Weegee's forte.

Weegee's photography of note took place in the darkened streets of New York City, where he captured occurrences that typical residents would only experience through the morning newspaper.[46] The powerful flash of Weegee's Speed Graphic camera allowed him to push back the curtain of night and capture people on film with a stark washed-out look to their faces—as if caught in the act, literally. The end result was a photograph that revealed the underside of city life as respectable people were not used to seeing. Not only did his camera have faster shutter speeds, which made candid photographs possible, but it also equipped him with the means of stopping a subject's actions or expression with a second's notice, thus revealing more than might have been feasible with slower cameras of the past. If Weegee was on the scene, his camera was preset and ready at a moment's notice. Often, subjects had no time to hide or alter their behavior before being captured for the next morning's newspaper.

Weegee also used radios and scanners to gain knowledge of accidents, crimes, and movements of the police. This technology, along with his portable darkroom (see Image 9), helped Weegee to arrive at scenes before the authorities sometimes. It also helped that he lived across the street from a police station.

As modes of transportation improved, so did camera technology. The world got faster, and so did the means to stop it photographically. With Weegee we see a progression. With the advent of the Speed Graphic, Weegee was able to photograph in a literal sense that was unavailable to Brady. Though Weegee was not above manipulating a scene, he was able to show in the stark contrast of night what life and death was like in New York City.

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[46] According to Richard Meyer in the book he coauthored with Anthony W. Lee, *Weegee and Naked City*, Weegee photographs were frequently published by the *Post*, the *Daily News*, the *Mirror*, the *Journal American* and the *World Telegraph*—typically, no credit was given. Anthony W. Lee and Richard Meyer, *Weegee and Naked City*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 25.

Image 10, *Murder in Hell's Kitchen*, 1940, is a typical Weegee picture. His Speed Graphic not only allows him to get close to the ground but also allows for a vertical frame thus adding depth. This angle not only captures the gun but also directs the flash towards the body, illuminating the dead man's bloody face.

The portable nature and wide-angle lens of Weegee's camera enables him to frame and tailor his pictures to the action he was capturing. Image 11, *Firefighters,* 1940, demonstrates his adeptness at not only capturing action, but containing it. The burning building frames the right side, the firefighters frame the left, and the fast shutter speed stops the torrents of water directed towards the building.

While Brady might have felt stifled in his ability to cover the war due to technical limitations, Weegee took the new advances of his day and continued to push forward. Because Weegee was not hindered by technology, he was able to offer a more literal view of death for two obvious reasons: technology and not being a potential target himself as war photojournalists can be. This allowed him to photograph scenes accurately, though it is believed that he sometimes altered the scene for vividness.

**WARHOL**

Warhol had an abundance of technology at his disposal. The cameras of the day made anything possible, or seemed so. Not content with the status quo, Warhol pushed for more. To Brady and Weegee, their subjects were significant as the focus of each print. With Warhol, however, the individual identity was not the focus or intent. His goal was to remove identity and to create something more important, something with more resonance, something transcendental.

This diagram explains in part, his choice of silk-screening as a tool allowing him further remove from the event.

**Event→Photograph→Warhol Silk-Screen→Warhol Painting**

The process began long before Warhol was involved. Something terrible happened—the event. That event was captured on film by a photojournalist and either published or sold to a stock photo agency. Warhol searched for the type of image he had in mind, something graphic and impactful. In his *Death and Disaster* series, these pictures were usually found as unpublished stock photos. Once the image had been secured, he had a photo-silkscreen made from the image. From this point, Warhol and his assistants transferred the silk-screen image onto the canvas. Warhol then painted over the image and completed the work.

It is significant that the victim's identities are never disclosed save for the tuna poison victims. If one is telling a truth larger than one that relates to a particular case, then there is no need to use the names of victims. The artists' intentions are not related to protecting the victims or being uncaring but are to show that the names are not important. What is important is the recognition that these accidents occur every day, and as a society we must accept the risks with the rewards.

Warhol showed in his work how success could bring tragedy, how possessions could become the possessor. If one looks at images 16, 17 or 18, one grasps the significance intended by the artist. Owning an automobile is a mark of success. Yet those fortunate enough to own one accept the risk of automobile accidents.

The purpose here is not to debate Warhol's choice of events or subject matter necessarily, but rather to explain the role technology played in the creation or production of his *Death and Disaster* series. Technology not only allowed Warhol access to photographs

like the suicide pictures, (e.g. Image 20, *Suicide*, 1962), (Not only could faster shutter speeds freeze moving objects but telephoto lenses could enlarge them.) but it also allowed him to take art to a different level by combining photography with silk-screening, painting, and the conceptual eye of the artist. For some, the mechanization of art might seem less than genuine, as if cheating. One can conclude, however, that the use of multiple images, duplicates, background color and or painting on top of another silk-screen are tools in the artist's arsenal—tools like pens and ink, pastels, oils, brushes and palette knives.

Warhol first would have selected the stock or news photographs he intended to use for a particular painting. The prevailing technology of the day played a role in the images he had at his disposal. Warhol used the process of silk-screening in this series and in much of his work. This decision in itself is important because he not only mechanized his work but he also set up layers of remove from the subject. He did not take the pictures. He did not paint representations of the images, but rather he silk-screened them onto canvas for further manipulation. The names of the victims were not used save for the two women in the tuna poison works. Considering this, one gravitates to the story behind the images and the completed pieces.

Suddenly one realizes that Warhol is elevating his commentary above a technical representation of an event and is transcending a single event. These powerful images force the viewer to think on a much larger scale. Death is a part of life. The use of image repetition is like the frames of a movie reel. It imparts a living quality to the work and allows the viewer to imagine the scenes changing slightly, but new victims are, nevertheless, produced in perpetuity.

There is a connection between the multiple images on canvas and his films *Sleep* and *Empire* (see Image 21 of the Empire State Building taken from the film). To watch either of these films at first seems futile. One is watching a man sleep, and there is hardly any movement. The other is a film of the Empire State building, and there is no movement at all. The genius is in the representation. Though both the sleeper and the building appear to be completely still, time is advancing. Not only is the sleeper living, but each second of the movie is a representation of a life being lived. As for the building, lights are on and occupants presumably are inside. The building may not be moving, yet it is alive within.

Both media as used by Warhol have a living quality. Repetition is like a heartbeat, it breathes life into each image. Image 19, *Marilyn Monroe,* 1962, who's subject committed suicide and Image 22, *16 Jackies,* 1964, depicts Jacquelyn Kennedy happy and also when in mourning. Obviously, these images are not of death but touch on the subject tangentially. The repetition demonstrates a new occurrence of each accident. He allowed for the silk screening process to be flawed or imperfect so that each panel is the same and different.

The multiple images are like individual film images or cartoon cells without motion. The motion lies in the knowledge that death is happening every minute, every second. It is a living concept just as watching a person sleep without moving. One may notice subtle movement in that particular film and may perceive a subtle movement in the paintings due to the nuances in each image and Warhol's coloration.

One might watch *Empire* (Image 21) in which the Empire State building is the subject. The camera is stationary and obviously so is the building. In a literal sense, nothing happens in the eight hours of footage. Upon deeper reflection, however, one realizes just how much is happening beneath the surface or behind the walls. Life exists inside and around the

building, life goes on and that includes death; both are quite natural. *Empire* was filmed in 1964, while Warhol continued to grapple with death as a subject. *Empire* is significant in understanding his frame of mind during this time period.

As significant as the photographic technology was for Brady and his associates, it still confined their coverage of the war to images captured after battle or camp scenes. In Brady's work one appreciates his adeptness at framing. He had the ability to deliver forceful impact in pictures while facing more constraints than Weegee and Warhol. Weegee had the technology and used it. His images may have been a literal depiction of an event, but the true significance lies in his canon and in his added commentary that connects his various images. Warhol used photojournalism, the mechanized silk-screen process, and his abilities as a classically trained artist to transcend what others had done. He took technology, used it, reinvented it, and created a new edgy genre.

# CHAPTER 5

## Pictures of Death

This chapter addresses research question number two: What was significant about their depictions of death in regards to photojournalism? The answer to this question is a culmination of what was significant for each man and what was significant about their body of work in this regard. Whether it be the heroic task of documenting the Civil War, exposing the underside of New York City, or pursuing the inevitability and universality of death; these men were media pioneers. The culmination of each career raised questions and provided answers to how and why the portrayal of death is important.

### MATHEW BRADY

Brady's initial fame was as a celebrity portraitist in New York. He was not alone, as this was seen as a new and lucrative business, taking pictures of famous men and women, displaying them in lavish galleries and charging admission. The emergence of the portrait gallery soon provided many people with the first glimpses of what public figures really looked like. Prior to that, drawings, paintings, and live appearances were the only means for ordinary people to conjure images when certain names were mentioned aloud or in print. With newspapers and television today, we take for granted that we know what our politicians look like, so one can imagine how fascinating portrait galleries must have been.

Mathew Brady represents a breakthrough in photojournalism in terms of war coverage. While the Crimean War (1853–56) was covered by Roger Fenton and others, Brady was the first man to undertake a comprehensive approach to war coverage. According to Lewinski, "The American Civil War was the first war to receive full photographic coverage, due by and large to the efforts of one man – Mathew B. Brady."[47]

In an interview with Alfred Townsend in 1891, Brady explained his motive for leaving his lucrative portrait studio in the hands of his associates:

> My wife and my most conservative friends had looked unfavorably upon this departure from commercial business to pictorial war correspondence, and I can only describe the destiny that overruled me by saying that, like Euphorios, I felt I had to go. A spirit in my feet said, 'Go' and I went.[48]

Brady certainly enjoyed his success as a portraitist and gallery owner, but he was not adept at business, as evinced by his eventual bankruptcy. Panzer described Brady as "a man of artistic aspirations who looks upon the mechanical features of his art as subsidiary to higher aims."[49] As his studio was known to be first-rate, so too were his efforts on the battlefields.

Enlisting the help of noted photographers Alexander Gardner and Timothy O'Sullivan, Brady set about to bring images of the American Civil War into the homes of civilians. Indeed, most of the graphic photographs were taken by Gardner.[50] An example of

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[47] Jorge Lewinski, *The Camera at War: A History of War Photography From 1848 to the Present Day* (London: W. H. Allen & Co. Ltd., 1978), 37.

[48] Mathew Brady, interview by Geo. Alfred Townsend, *The New York World* (New York, NY, 1891), Vickie Goldberg, *Photography in Print: Writings From 1816 to the Present*, (New Mexico: UNM Press, 1988), 205.

[49] Mary Panzer and Jeana Kae Foley, *Mathew Brady and the Image of History* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press for the National Portrait Gallery, 1997),1.

[50] Ibid.,1.

his style can be viewed in Image 6, *Confederate dead by a fence on the Hagerstown Road, MD, September 1862*. Timothy O'Sullivan took perhaps one of the most famous images though: *A Harvest of Death,* 1863 (Image 7). This complemented some of the majestic camp portraits by Brady. Constrained by the processes and equipment of the day, action pictures were not possible, and battlescapes, group pictures of soldiers, corpses, and scenes of destruction were the norm as seen in Image 3, *Confederate dead on Matthews Hill after the first Bull Run,* 1861.

The significance of Brady and his men can easily stand on its own for the very monumental nature of their coverage. Proper credit must be given to his photographers when attribution is known, but it should not be forgotten what a tremendous undertaking he embarked upon in his coverage of the American Civil War. Brady saw no problem with his art being a collaborative effort within his studio or on the battlefield.[51] In most instances, according to Panzer, "Brady is not an operator himself, a failing eyesight precluding the possibility of his using the camera with any certainty, but he is an excellent artist nevertheless—understands his business so perfectly, and gathers around him the first talent to be found."[52] Panzer continues, and this is applicable to his work on the battlefields: "In fact, Brady's frailty may have worked to his advantage, removing him from all technical work to concentrate on the artistic side of his trade—the winning of clients, the poses, the lighting, the composition, and the training of new professionals."[53] The commitment of time, labor, and ultimately, his financial solvency were a tremendous price to pay—far greater than the appreciation he received at the end of the war. Not knowingly, but nevertheless, he

[51] Ibid,1.

[52] Ibid., 43.

[53] Ibid., 43.

sacrificed financial success and died impoverished. Yet, in doing just that, he laid the foundation for war coverage and provided us with new questions — questions of what one is looking at and how to digest the images, what they mean, and what their significance is in a relatively new medium.

Due to the long exposure times, heavy equipment, and fragility of the plates and chemicals, bodies were known to be repositioned and framed for maximum impact. While scene manipulation was necessitated by technical hindrances, one should not rush to judge Brady negatively as one might a contemporary photojournalist. If one is charged with the task of capturing battles on paper for those not fighting on the field, then an ambitious man must reconcile the science and technology of the day with that of the prevailing artistic and journalistic standards. This, quite naturally, does not preclude one from pressing forward as indeed the very notion of covering battle photographically was for Brady.

Still in their infancy, war photography and certainly photojournalism, it was not yet considered unethical to stage a scene before taking the picture—indeed it was practically necessary. In actuality, it allowed Brady to crystallize the horror of the battlefield for those who had never been on one. Even with this manipulation, the resulting photographs, staged and non-staged, were tame, no doubt, as to what could have been captured through the camera lens of today. Beginning with Brady, we begin to see the significance of photography as a tool and as an art for journalism.

According to Panzer, Brady "left almost no papers, letters, records, or artifacts behind."[54] And as Drew Gilpin Faust wrote in her book *This Republic of Suffering*, "Even as we acknowledge the impact of Civil War photography, it is important to recognize how few Americans would actually have seen Brady's or other photographs of the dead." Faust

[54] Ibid., 3.

continues, "Newspapers and periodicals could not yet reproduce photographs but could publish only engravings derived from them.…"[55]

Brady wanted, nevertheless, to show what devastation war could bring to civilized people, and to that end he must have known that scenes of death, while disturbing to look at, were an important means of presenting the true cost of the Civil War. Graphic in nature, the pictures held more than shock value for the viewer; they exemplified visually what traditional journalists could not. *The New York Times* wrote, "Mr. Brady has done something to bring home to us the terrible reality and earnestness of war. If he has not brought bodies and laid them in our dooryards and along the streets, he has done something very nearly like it."[56]

While views of his work might not have been great in number, there are some prominent accounts of reactions to them. *The New York Times* wrote on Brady's "The Dead of Antietam" exhibit in his Broadway establishment:

> The living that throng Broadway care little perhaps for the Dead at Antietam, but we fancy they would jostle less carelessly down the great thoroughfare, saunter less at their ease, were a few dripping bodies, fresh from the field, laid along the pavement.
>
> …there is a terrible fascination about it that draws one near these pictures, and makes him loth (sic) to leave them. You will see hushed, reverend groups standing around these weird copies of carnage, bending down to look in the pale faces of the dead.
>
> It seems somewhat singular that the same sun that looked down on the faces of the slain blistering them, blotting out from the bodies all semblance to humanity, and hastening corruption should have thus caught their features upon canvas', and given them perpetuity for ever (sic).[57]

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[55] Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, (New York: Knopf, 2008), 275.

[56] "Pictures of the Dead at Antietam," *The New York Times*, 20 Oct. 1862, p.5.

[57] Ibid.,5.

Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote in *The Atlantic Monthly*, "The honest sunshine is Nature's sternest painter, yet the best." Providing "…some conception of what a repulsive, brutal sickening, hideous thing it is, this dashing together of two frantic mobs to which we give the name armies."[58]

Some images deserve closer inspection. Image 7, *A Harvest of Death, July 1863*, is all about death. It is a landscape of endless, chaotic death. In the background, one can vaguely make out two living silhouettes while the dead are painfully obvious in the foreground. Image 6 is also chaotic but includes an orderly fence practically aligning the bodies—symbolic in the death and defeat of these Confederate soldiers. Lastly, Image 5, *Union soldier after release from Andersonville*, 1865, captures a Union soldier after release from Andersonville. In a sense this image is more horrifying than a body on the battlefield. This man is alive and yet seemingly dead.

If presented with the adage "pictures don't lie," one must concede that often times they do. Brady's coverage of the Civil War did tell lies, literally, but in context might have told a greater truth by using the tools available to his men at that time. Grappling with such a momentous task, if not a calling, he sought to inform and document for history.

His significance in this paper is as a pioneer, a chronicler of war, and a pillar of comparison for the two other subjects: Weegee and Andy Warhol. This benchmark enables one to connect and contextualize the two latter with the former.

[58] Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Doings of the Sunbeam, *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 12, Issue 69, July 1863.

**WEEGEE**

When Mary Margaret McBride asked Weegee in a radio conversation how he felt when he photographed a man who had been hit by a car, he said: "It was a very sad thing, I mean, sometimes…I cry, I mean, but I can't help it. I figure it's my job to record these things."[59]

As Mathew Brady was the first to bring war coverage to the public eye, Weegee was similarly known for doing the same with images of unfortunate accidents and of the darker side of city life. It is easy to hypothesize that law-abiding citizens of New York City during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s would have known and read about crimes occurring in their city but were probably not witnesses to them and indeed, probably not aware of the gruesomeness of mob hits as evidenced in Image 10, *Murder in Hell's Kitchen*, 1940. I chose this image for several reasons. Obviously it depicts a murder scene, but its significance is much deeper in terms of what newspaper readers would learn, see and fear in their city. It is one thing to read about such murders but quite another to witness it in the morning newspaper. The same can be pondered for automobile accidents. Lastly, in regard to Image 10, one must notice not only the graphic nature of this image but the contrast brought by the harsh flash that Weegee employed so brilliantly. Not only does this image bring the worst of the city, visually, into the homes of its inhabitants, but the tonal quality of light in the foreground and darkness in the distance also presents it as an unveiling.

Another Weegee image, *Auto Accident*, 1940, (not included in the appendix), is of a man's shoe under a car tire.[60] This was a precursor to Warhol's *Death and Disaster* series.

[59] Mary Margaret McBride, Radio Interview, (1945), quoted by Michael Hargraves in *Weegee: In Focus*, (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2005), 120.

Indeed, one of Warhol's silk screens, *Foot and Tire*, 1963, depicts the sole of a shoe under double tires with the implication being that the leg or foot is also under the tires.[61] The images are quite similar and exemplify the Weegee-Warhol connection. Weegee's version is significant as it tells a story of death or injury without showing a body. Weegee was a master at framing and positioning. In this case it might be supposed that he positioned the shoe himself. That, however, would be conjecture.

Image 11, *Firefighters*, 1940, of a building on fire, is included as an example of many fire photographs taken by Weegee. The framing and point of reference in this image are important. Weegee incorporates the human element by showing the vast number of firemen and their dedication to contain and extinguish the fire. The firemen and potential victims in the building are the story. The building itself is of minor importance. Major fires, like murders, were sure to be profitable for a freelance photographer—provided he got the exclusive. Image 12, *Transvestite Posing in Police Wagon*, 1940, of a transvestite posing in the back of a police wagon was published in *Naked City*. Weegee does not tell us what the charges were, but gives his viewers an alternative view of city activities and entertainment.

Weegee's work had a large viewership in New York, but he often did not receive a credit line under his photographs. This was common practice among newspapers of the day, but one he fought to change. Prior to 1940, Weegee sold his photographs to the wire services, the *Post*, *World Telegraph*, *Mirror*, *Daily News* and many other papers. These newspapers represented standards both high and low, but they insured great coverage for his work. In 1940 Weegee got the credit and respect he had longed for. When he signed on as a

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[60] *Auto Accident*, Getty Images, (accessed 14 May 2009); available from http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/71259071/Premium-Archive; Internet. Permission was not obtained to publish image in this thesis.

[61] Menil Collection. *Andy Warhol: Death and Disaster* (Houston: Fine Art Press, 1988), 76-77.

contributing photojournalist with *PM Daily*. According to Richard Meyer, "*PM* covered national politics and world news far more extensively than the other NY tabloids."[62] Not only did they pay him $75 a week, but they also gave him a credit line, encouraged him to write his own captions and articles, and allowed him to continue his freelance work—in other words they gave him respect.[63]

It seems there is a natural propensity to look at car wrecks, to explore with curiosity as to whether the occupants are alive, injured, or dead. In Weegee's book *Naked City*, he states, "I was on the scene; sometimes drawn there by some power I can't explain, and I caught the New Yorkers with their masks off…not afraid to Laugh, Cry, or make Love. What I felt I photographed, laughing and crying with them."[64] Still in its adolescence, news photography, bolstered with the technology of the time, and with the help of a police scanner, Weegee was able to exert his abilities and talent to bring shock and awe to the masses, or at least to those who read the daily newspapers.

No longer having a technical reason to manipulate a scene before photographing it, Weegee still chose to do so. Why? Perhaps for vividness. One of his more famous images was a shoe under a truck tire. The loss of one's shoes, accidentally or through deprivation, arouses an innate sense of sympathy. Showcased behind a glass wall in the Holocaust museum at Auschwitz are hundreds of shoes taken from those imprisoned, stripping them of their dignity long before they were sent to the gas chambers. For a photojournalist today, Weegee's image would be considered cliché in the least and certainly unethical if the shoe were placed under the tire rather than coming to rest there as a result of the accident.

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[62] Lee and Meyer, *Weegee and Naked City*, 27.

[63] Ibid., 9.

[64] Weegee, *Naked City*, (New York: Da Capo, 1985), 11.

In this sense, manipulation might be seen as the least justifiable, considering it is not necessary to capture the event. It cannot be defended as necessary as with Brady, and because it represents an actual news event with specific victims, unlike with Warhol, artistic license is not a suitable defense. While the defense of scene manipulation may be lacking, Weegee's overall contribution to photojournalism cannot be mistaken. In a way he became the voice for a segment of society often unheard.

Perhaps most significant was Weegee's mission to capture events occurring at night and present them to newspaper readers the next morning. He brought the night into the day with his use of flash photography. This allowed him to bring the secret acts that occurred under the cover of darkness into the light of day for everyone to witness. This can be seen as a continuation and evolution of a photojournalist's duties. It was his propensity to find car wrecks and murders and indeed, those living lives not typically captured on film, that helped propel his fame. Today, most major newspapers avoid graphic depictions of wrecks and focus on broader news and issues. Community newspapers are more apt to publish a picture of an automobile accident but with more discretion and less graphic detail than those of this subject. In modern times, a photo editor might opt not to use such pictures. Weegee provided that option by being the first significant contributor blazing new ground. Innovators leave options as their legacy. They let us know what can be done and what has been done. It is up to others to become the innovators of tomorrow.

Weegee was also known for his candid celebrity pictures that provided contrast to his street life and death pictures and eventually became a common comparison in the works of Andy Warhol. The juxtaposition of high and low gives more weight to each component and serves as a reminder of the fragility of each. All three men balanced celebrity and society

portraiture with their more serious social commentary. Weegee's true significance and contribution to journalism was his ability to take pictures that not only alerted viewers to the world around them but also crystallized, as only visual evidence can, the underside of living in New York City at the time. A written piece could not accomplish what a Weegee photograph could.

New Yorkers were allowed to see both the good and the bad of their city. He took on the task of simultaneously comforting and scaring his viewers with the resulting schism the middle class must have felt from the people depicted in black and white images, either by their financial success or by simply not owning a car. (Car ownership and the theme of consumerism are carried forward to Warhol.) In a colloquia published in *Weegee: In Focus*, Cynthia Young said of Weegee, "He is the subject." Bolstered further by Collin Westerbeck, who said Weegee was like the subjects of his photographs: a voyeur, a spectator, someone who was involved.[65]

As with Brady, Weegee felt a calling to take the pictures he took. As evidenced in Image 9, his car trunk was his office. He was prepared to take pictures of life at any time. And, one will notice in Image 10 the gun in the foreground. The gun is as important as the bloody face dramatically washed out by the camera flash. What is perhaps even more important is Weegee's timely presence at the crime scene. His work was his life. As he lived and breathed, he appeared to arrive at newsworthy events as they were unfolding. It was natural to him.

Writing in *Popular Photography* in 1937, Weegee said, "Sure. I'd like to live regular. Go home to a goodlooking wife, a hot dinner, and a husky kid. But I guess I got film in my

[65] The J. Paul Getty Museum, *Weegee: In Focus*, (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2005), 118-119.

blood. I love this racket. It's exciting. It's dangerous. It's funny. It's tough. It's heartbreaking."[66]

**ANDY WARHOL**

Mathew Brady and Weegee serve, in part, to contextualize Warhol's *Death and Disaster* Series. Both Brady and Weegee utilized new technology to capture images that were not possible until their time and to bring newsworthy events to the fore visually. In this, they were groundbreakers. Warhol presents us with something new as well. By his time, there was practically no hindrance, technologically speaking, with regard to photography and with the capture and presentation of newsworthy events. Warhol had no need to manipulate scenes to reconstruct what happened or might have happened, choosing instead to start with a presumably accurate photograph--one taken by someone else. In his appropriation of newspaper and stock photographs, Warhol was reaching for the images with startling impact while placing a barrier between a specific event and what his ultimate statement was intended to be.

Image 16, *White Disaster (Disaster II),* 1963, depicts a car crash in which the driver is thrown from his car and impaled on the spike of a telephone poll. This graphic image would have been appreciated by Weegee, and though Warhol was not the photographer, he immortalized the image in his silk-screen. This image is so horrific it needed capturing on film to be believable.

The final automobile images included in this thesis express the contradiction between ideal and reality. Image 17, *Orange Disaster*, 1963, depicts a car crash in which one person died and two others lived. Image 18, *Saturday Disaster*, 1964, depicts bodies thrown from a

[66] Ibid., 6-8.

wrecked car. An automobile not only serves for transportation but often confers status upon its owner. In reality though, automobiles wreck every day. This further bolsters the notion that the commodity exchange of car ownership is sometimes defective. Symbols of economic status sometimes do not fulfill their intended purpose.

Warhol's *Death and Disaster* series is so graphic, so vivid, that it begs the question: why? He was not shy about his fear or fascination with death. Even beyond this series, he continued with death as a theme. One example is *Skull*, done in 1976, and another is *Guns* from 1982–83 (see Images 14 and 15). Warhol claimed to have died once already. Perhaps this experience is expressed in his works dealing with death. On being shot by Valerie Solanis, he recounts his near-death experience in *POPism The Warhol Sixties*:

> They took me to Columbus Hospital on 19th Street between Second and Third avenues, five or six blocks away. Suddenly there were lots of doctors around me, and I heard things like 'Forget it' and '…no chance…' and then I heard someone saying my name—it was Mario Amaya—telling them that I was famous and that I had money.
>
> I was in surgery for about five hours, with Dr. Giuseppe Rosse and four other great doctors working on me. They brought me back from the dead—literally, because I'm told that at one point I was gone. For days and days afterward, I wasn't sure if I *was* back. I felt dead. I kept thinking, "I'm really dead. This is what it's like to be dead—you think you're alive but you're dead. I just *think* I'm lying here in a hospital."[67]

From that point on, Warhol feared doctors and hospitals. He confided prophetically to Beauregard Houston-Montgomery, "If I go into a hospital again, I won't come out. I won't survive another operation."[68] Warhol died following gallbladder surgery on February 22, 1987.

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[67] Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol Sixties*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 274.

In writing about Warhol's significance to journalism, photojournalism, and the art of photography, one must consider why he chose death as a theme. Clearly, as evidenced in the previous paragraph and excerpts, death was something Warhol had thought a lot about—even experiencing near-death. Warhol explained to Peter Gidal, in his book *Andy Warhol: Films and Paintings*, that:

> My death series was divided into two parts, the first one famous deaths and the second one people nobody ever heard of…It's not that I feel sorry for them, it's just that people go by and it doesn't matter to them that someone unknown was killed… I still care about people but it would be much easier not to care, it's too hard to care.[69]

It is important to note the similarity in Warhol's motivation and that of Brady and Weegee. All three photographers were known to decontextualize their images. The underlying image was real, but its meaning or significance could be altered depending on how it was viewed, where it was placed, or what information (or lack thereof) was contained in the caption. All three men felt compelled to tell a larger story rooted in fact.

Today, Warhol's *Death and Disaster* series is considered to be some of his best work, but initially they were not well received—at least domestically, according to Victor Bockris. His art dealer, Eleanor Ward, refused to show them, which led Warhol to switch to Leo Castelli.[70] Bockris explains, "The paintings were soon to make him famous in Europe, however. In Germany, where pop art was already being collected, his works were admired,

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[68] Jesse Kornbluth, "The World of Warhol," *New York Magazine*, 11 July, 2008.

[69] Peter Gidal, *Andy Warhol: Films and Paintings*, (New York: Dutton Picturebook, 1971), 38.

[70] Victor Bockris, *The Life and Death of Andy Warhol*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 129.

and the art critic Heiner Bastian recalled, 'as the greatest things we had ever seen.'"[71] The French were equally enamored, leading Bockris to say they "greeted the work rapturously."[72]

Each image stands on its own merits, not necessitating Warhol to be the original photographer, as indeed that was not practical. The event is larger than what one man might have captured and is given greater import for the distance between photographer and artist. Warhol creates even greater distance between the initial event and reality with his use of silk-screens to multiply the image on the canvas. Each layer in Warhol's depictions elevates the images and gives them much greater import than they would have enjoyed as simply an image appearing in one newspaper.

Through this method, Warhol managed to tell a larger truth with his work. Perhaps acting as a precursor to Tom Wolfe's New Journalism and Hunter S. Thompson's Gonzo Journalism, Warhol sought to teach and comment on the world around him in a way yet to be done. Warhol did not allow himself to be constrained by the traditional modus operandi of journalism. Foremost, he was an artist (though also a magazine publisher), but he obviously felt a need for his work to be relevant. *The Death and Disaster* series as social commentary incorporates many issues, including consumerism, consumption, success, loss, but with death as a central theme.

Warhol is different than the two other subjects of this paper in that he was not primarily a photographer, though he was quite accomplished as one, he did not take any of the pictures used in his *Death and Disaster* series. He was not primarily a photojournalist or journalist. He did publish three books of his own photography however: *Andy Warhol's exposures, Andy Warhol's party book,* and *America*). He was an artist foremost, though he

[71] Ibid., 129.

[72] Ibid., 129.

did build a media empire nonetheless, and used the sum of his talents to address death. Perhaps this was due to his documented aversion to the topic and fear of death. Regardless, he sought to address the topic on a scale much larger than an individual occurrence. He appropriated pictures from newspapers, turned them into silk-screens with the image multiplied, transferred them to canvases painted with various background colors, and then, sometimes, applied more paint to the canvases to achieve what he desired.

What is significant about Warhol's depiction of death in regards to photojournalism? He approached death and disaster as it had never been approached before. His art started with a news photograph in which a specific death or deaths occurred. This grounded his art in reality. It was not simply art about death. It was art that began with a specific tragedy and was then transformed by genius into a statement that transcended that particular event and became a far-reaching commentary on that event as it is multiplied in every city and every state. It was not a depiction of one specific misfortune but rather the misfortune of society.

Warhol chose to address death in a photojournalistic manner but on a much grander universal scale than would be allowed in traditional journalism. In this sense one can see a progression and eventual acceptance for the journalism of Wolfe and Thompson, who wanted to import more feeling and understanding and perhaps universality of human nature into their work.

To better understand Warhol's mind set while working on his *Death and Disaster* series, one should be familiar with chronology of his work and how some of it coincides. Warhol began silk-screening in 1962 and began the series the same year.[73] On August 5th of the same year, Marilyn Monroe died. Warhol made his first Monroe painting that year,

[73] Menil Collection. *Andy Warhol: Death and Disaster*, 127.

Image 19. The *Marilyn Monroe* painting was not officially part of the *Death* series but serves as a precursor as it touches on death and suicide tangentially; as does *16 Jackies*, made in 1964 (Image 22). In March 1963, two ladies died of poisoned tuna fish. That summer Warhol made his first film *Sleep* and his film *Empire*.[74]

Warhol's use of multiple images, while technical in production, has a much greater significance. In his *Suicide* painting of 1963, one seemingly watches a body fall floor-by-floor though each reproduction is of the same image. The variations in shading and some of the images are off-center, leading one's eyes to start at the top left corner of the work and follow it to the bottom right corner. The effect is like watching the body fall, though one is in fact looking at the same image. In this instance Warhol's use of multiple images is similar to cartoon cells and to a lesser degree, his films *Sleep* and *Empire*. In the later examples, the two objects are filmed though they are basically stationary. One watches a stationary object and is thus prompted to think on a deeper level about the man sleeping and the Empire State Building.

Warhol's 1963 painting *White* consists of a 23-year-old model that jumped 86 floors from the observation deck of the Empire State Building and landed on an automobile.[75] The model is still graceful in death, with her pearls clutched in her gloved right hand. This work connects with *Empire*. The people and the stories behind them make up some of the building blocks that establish the Empire State building as a New York monument. The permanency of iconic structures and New York City itself would later be challenged by the events of September 11, 2001.

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[74] Ibid., 128.

[75] Ibid., 53. Permission was not obtained to publish this image in this thesis.

Ultimately, Warhol's significance to photojournalism was his ability to create time and a total image of an event that not only occurred once but was universal in nature. The *Death and Disaster* paintings achieved their power as reminders of the fragility of life, the status of death in our psyche, while pressing the viewer to confront the issue themselves.

# CHAPTER 6

## Conclusion

In a way, photojournalism has come full circle. Mathew Brady organized a comprehensive effort to cover the American Civil War with the limited capabilities of the equipment and technology of the time. Weegee captured the people, the crimes and accidents of the night in New York City with his Speed Graphic 4x5 camera, with less constraint than Brady experienced and without the necessity of altering scenes. Thus, he was able to offer a more literal account. The circle becomes complete with Andy Warhol, who had the most technical advantages of the three and yet used what was an impediment to Brady's work as a tool to transcend established norms.

All three men worked in different time dimensions. Brady reinvented the way images of battle could and could not be captured. Out of necessity, he created montages and composites on the field that were then photographed. His images were not taken in real time for reasons explained earlier but were relatively vivid accounts. The action or purported action took place minutes and likely hours before the pictures were taken. His methods, means, and resulting images were dictated by the technology of his time, and his significance lies in the unprecedented undertaking to cover the Civil War and how he dealt with the challenges associated with that.

Weegee moved reality up to the event itself and captured extremely vivid images. Often he arrived at wreck and crime scenes before the authorities, while the bodies were

probably still warm. His work expressed how far photography had progressed and allowed him to act somewhat as the fulcrum in this thesis—representing the basis of reality. As the voice of the unheard, he was an innovator. He not only alerted viewers to the world around them but he also created options for photojournalists of the future. Newspapers today do not habitually publish images as graphic as Weegee's. Perhaps this is because of the ease with which those images can be captured today with digital cameras and cell phones—such coverage is no longer deemed necessary as we are already surrounded by it.

Warhol was not hindered by technology or convention and had the freedom to create time. He reached back in time and propelled into the future, recounting past events while foretelling future ones. In this sense he created images that were relevant then as well as today. They are perhaps timeless. While Warhol's methods raise other questions that are beyond the scope of this paper, he nonetheless transcended what others had done and moved past those notions with an entirely new telling of events and educating of his viewers.

As awesome a reality as it is, we have to die—technology cannot keep us alive forever. Frightened by or addicted to technology, it can ease our way of life and even make transitions in life easier. Nevertheless, these three artists used technology to transform death into something more fantastic—hard reality and soft reality.

Death means something different to each of us and indeed meant different things to Brady, Weegee and Warhol. The challenge for artists is how to present death without scaring us to death. Brady's portrayal was edited but real. Weegee's portrayal was unedited (mostly) or edited for vividness but very real. Warhol recreated death—death as imagination. The two former dealt with what was given, what happed, and sought to capture it as best they could. Warhol, however, sought to take a particular event and transform it into something

more powerful. Through his artful renditions of photographs he left us with images that demand thoughtfulness. They demand that the viewer ponder what death means to them and perhaps to reconcile it in a more personal way. These accidents occur every day. Perhaps he thought by magnifying the inevitability of death, he could harness his own fears. Certainly all three photographers harnessed the technology of cameras and visual arts to tell the story of day-to-day life whether that involved average activities, or grizzly war, or death. Did they reflect life or did they recreate it?

## APPENDIX

**Image 1. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**Self-portrait, 1863, Mathew Brady**

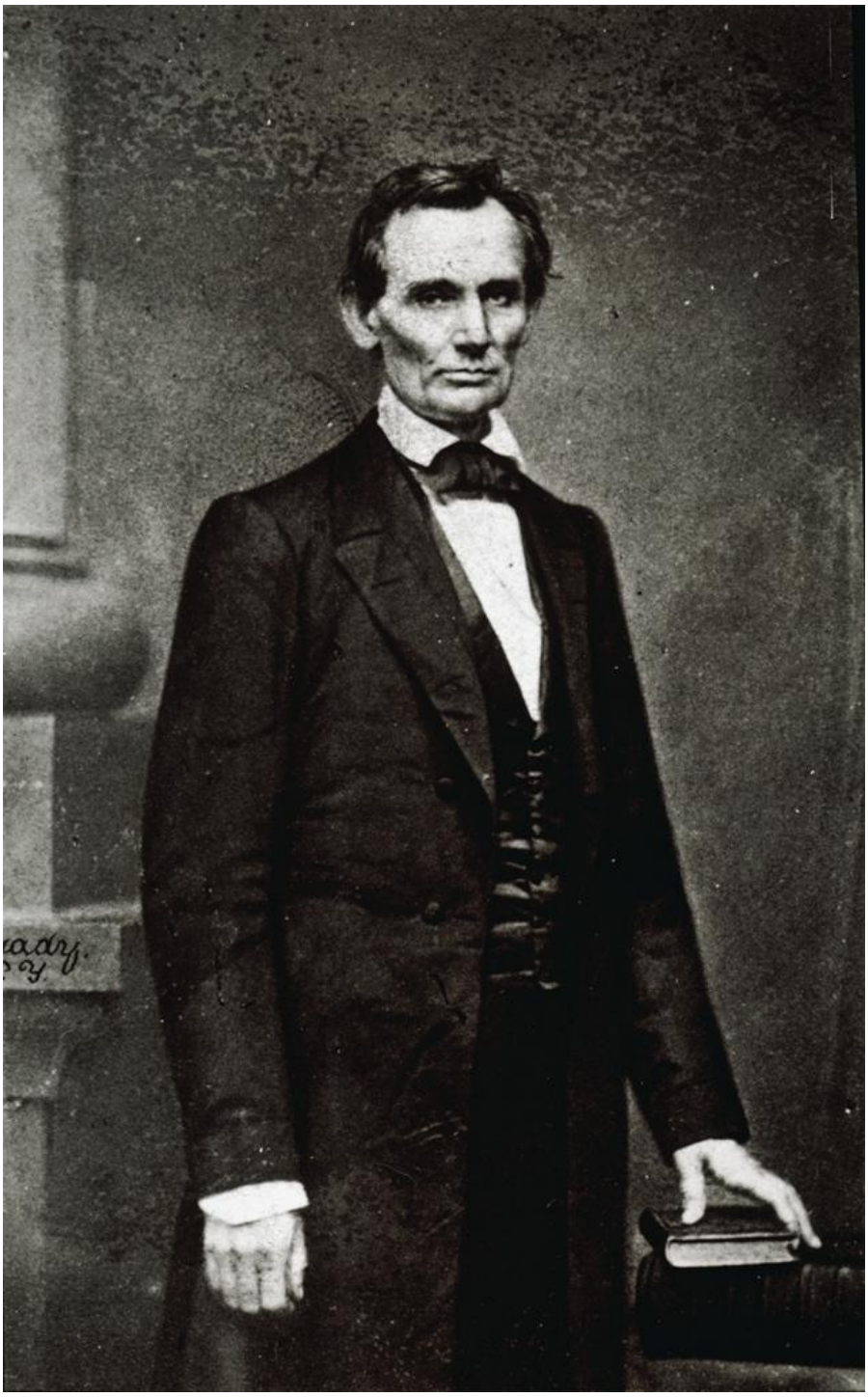

**Image 2. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**Abraham Lincoln (the Cooper Union portrait), 1860, Mathew Brady**

**Image 3. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**Confederate dead on Matthews Hill after the first Bull Run, 1861**
**Mathew Brady**

**Image 4. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**Dead Confederate soldiers near Chevaux-de-frise, Virginia, 1865, Mathew Brady**

**Image 5. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**Union soldier after release from Andersonville, 1865, Mathew Brady**

**Image 6. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**Confederate dead by a fence on the Hagerstown Road, MD, September 1862, Alexander Gardner**

**Image 7. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**A Harvest of Death, July 1863, Timothy O'Sullivan**

**Image 8. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**Photograph of the Artist, 1942, Weegee**

**Image 9. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**Weegee, 1942, Weegee**

**Image 10. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**Murder in Hell's Kitchen, 1940, Weegee**

**Image 11. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**Firefighters, 1940, Weegee**

**Image 12. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**Transvestite Posing in Police Wagon, 1940, Weegee**

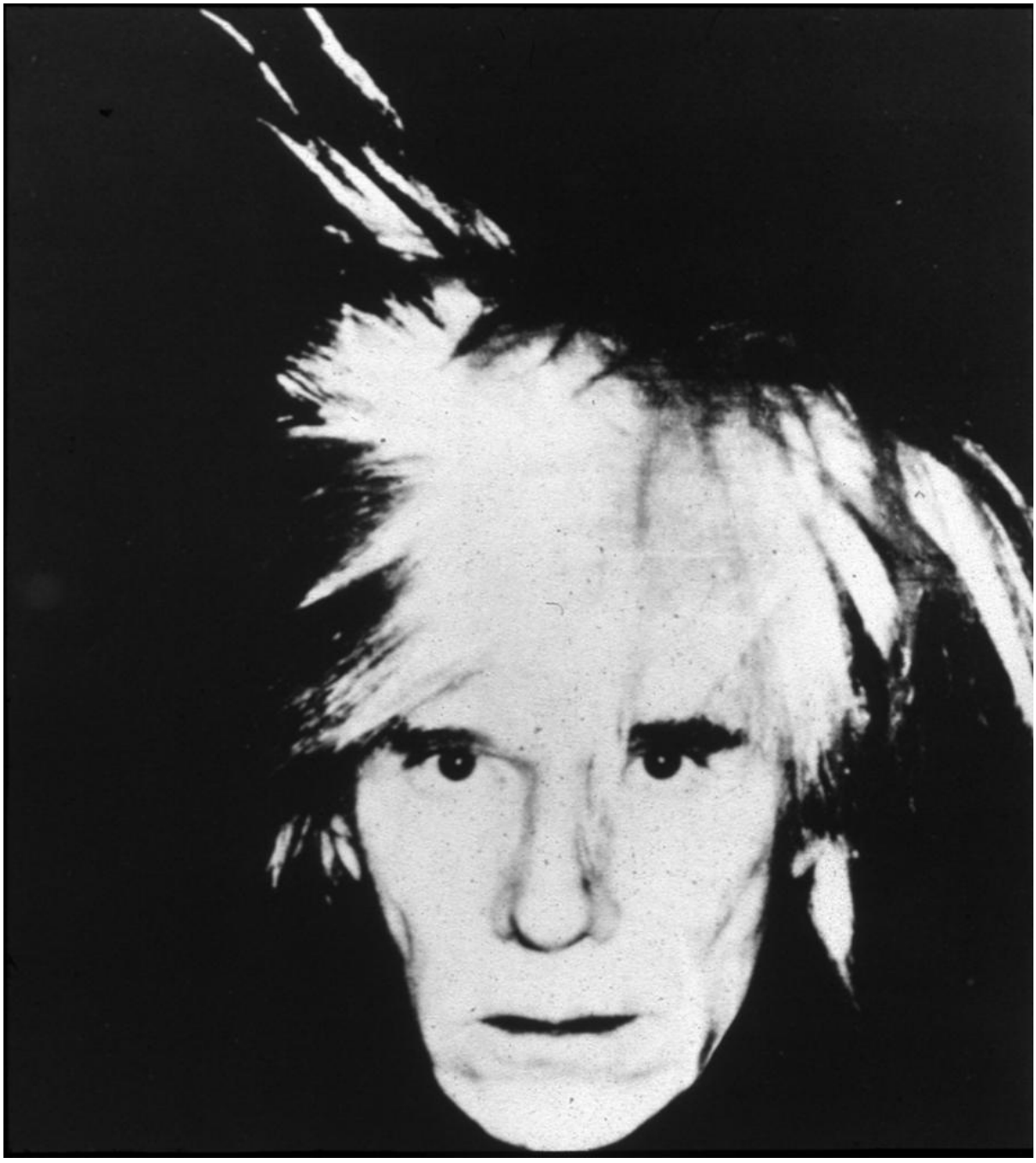

**Image 13. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**Self-Portrait, 1986, Andy Warhol**

**Image 14. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**Skull, 1976, Andy Warhol**

**Image 15. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**Guns, 1982-1983, Andy Warhol**

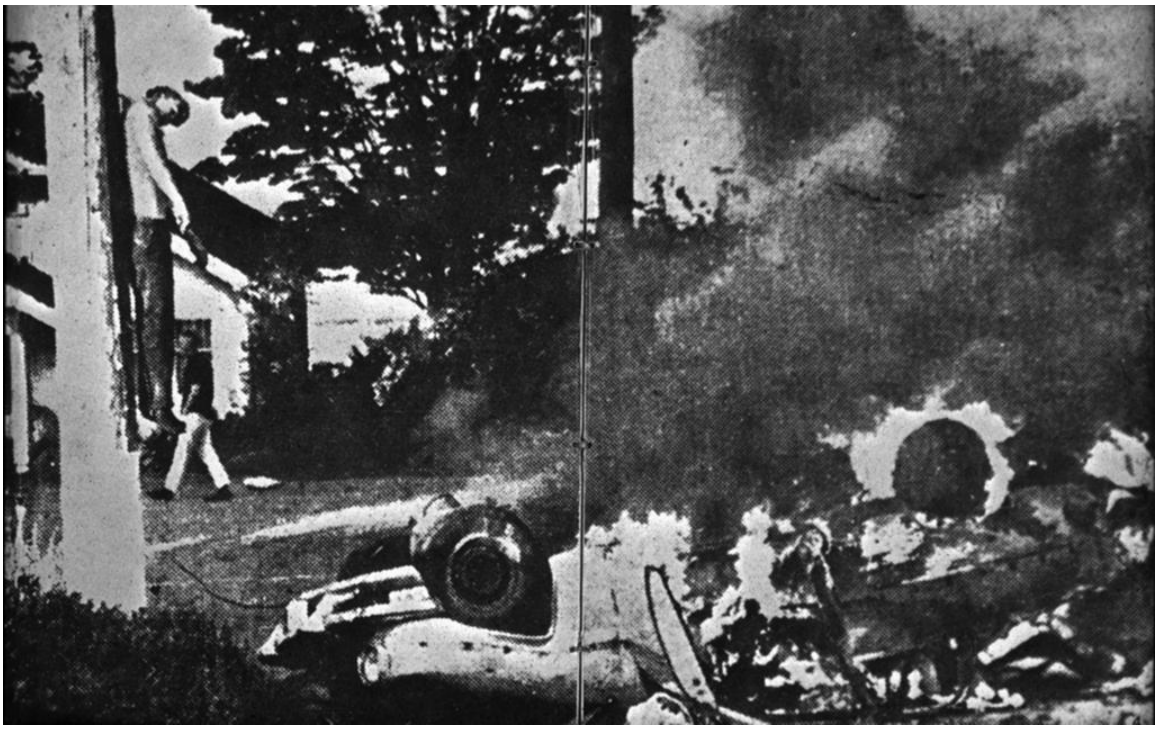

**Image 16. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**White Disaster (Disaster II), 1963, Andy Warhol**

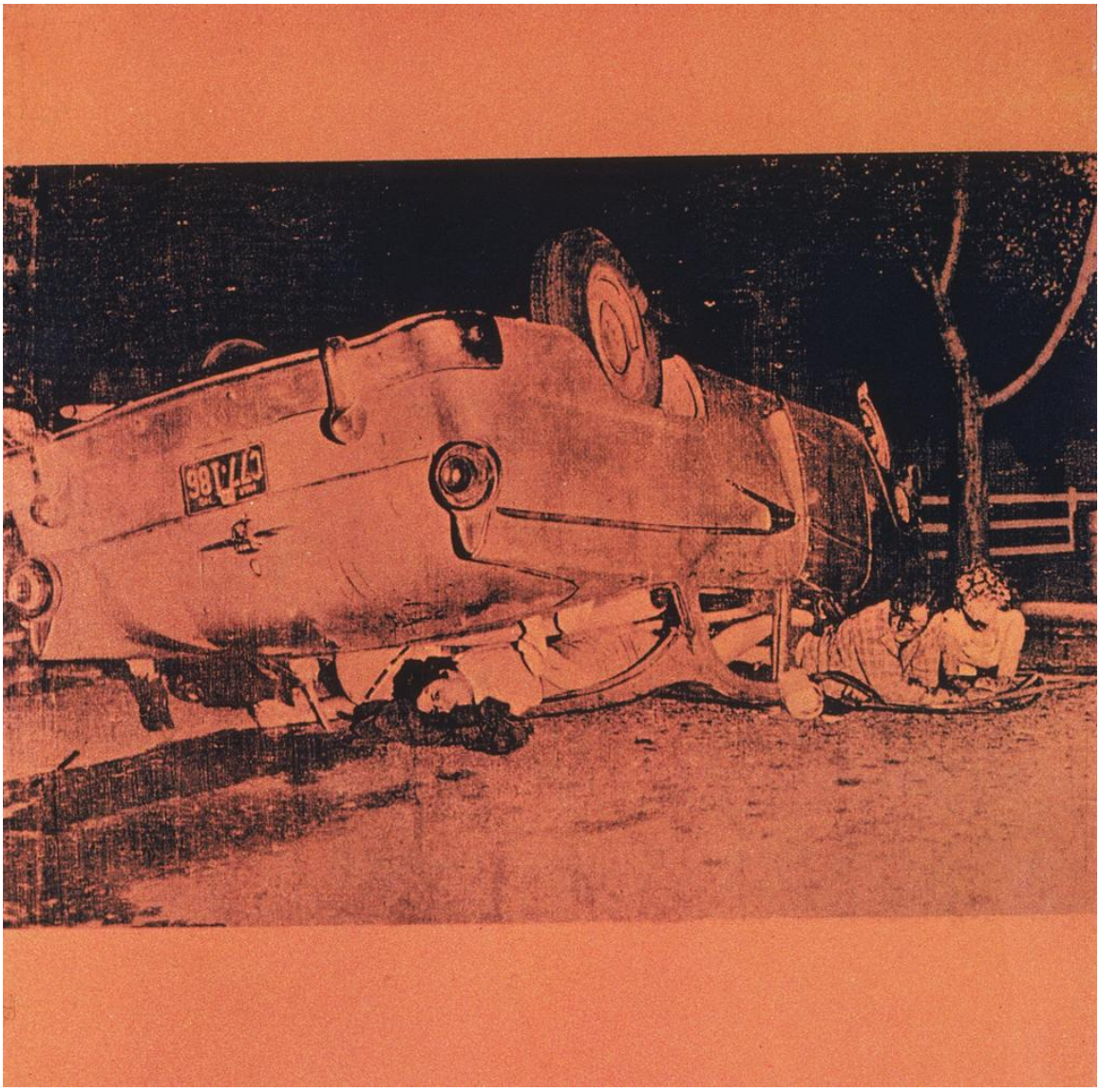

**Image 17. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**Orange Disaster, 1963, Andy Warhol**

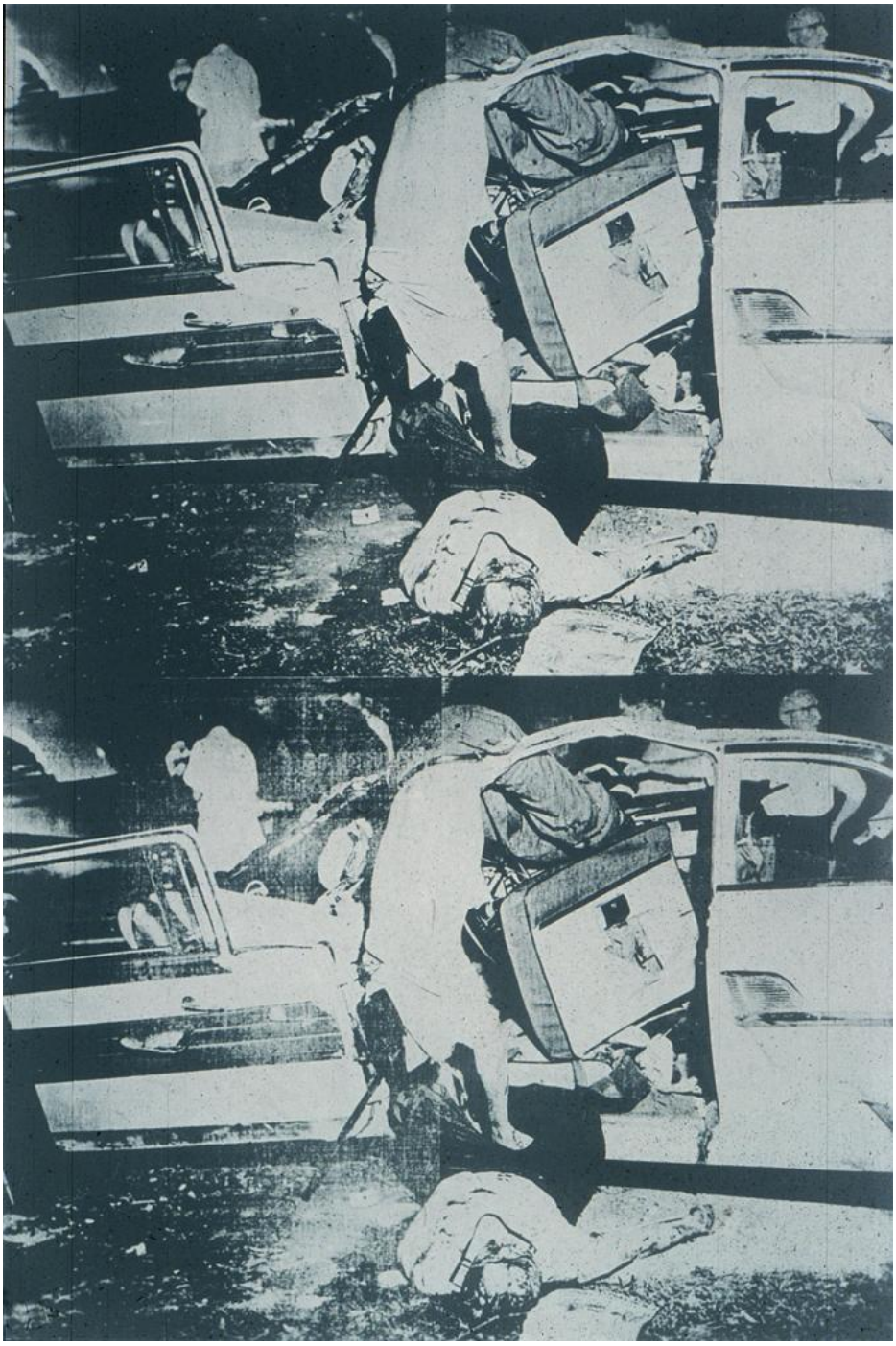

**Image 18. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**Saturday Disaster, 1964, Andy Warhol**

**Image 19. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**Marilyn Monroe, 1962, Andy Warhol**

**Image 20. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**Suicide, 1962, Andy Warhol**

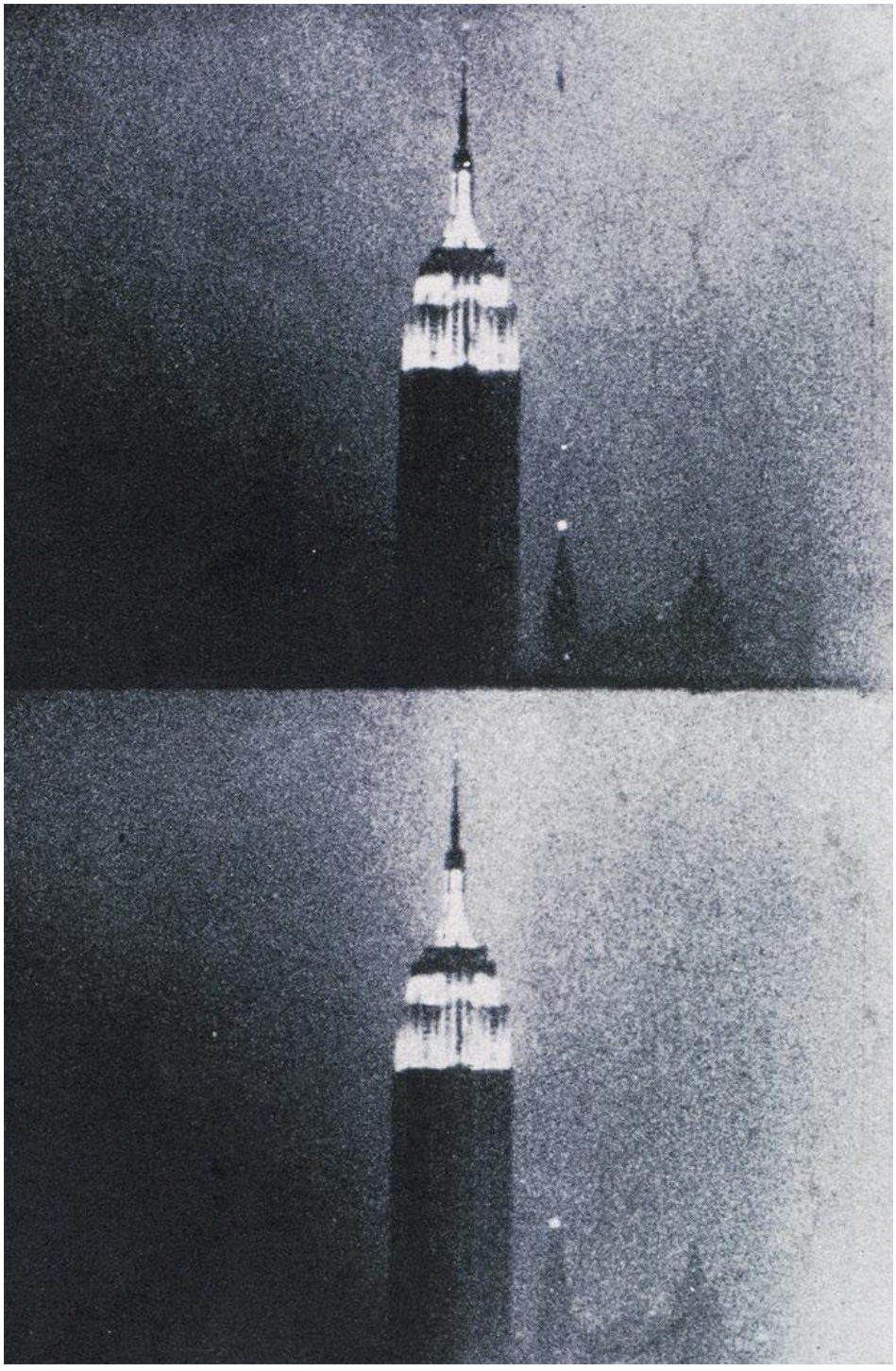

**Image 21. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**Empire, 1964, Andy Warhol**

**Image 22. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.**

**16 Jackies, 1964, Andy Warhol**

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