

The Invisible Helen Levitt

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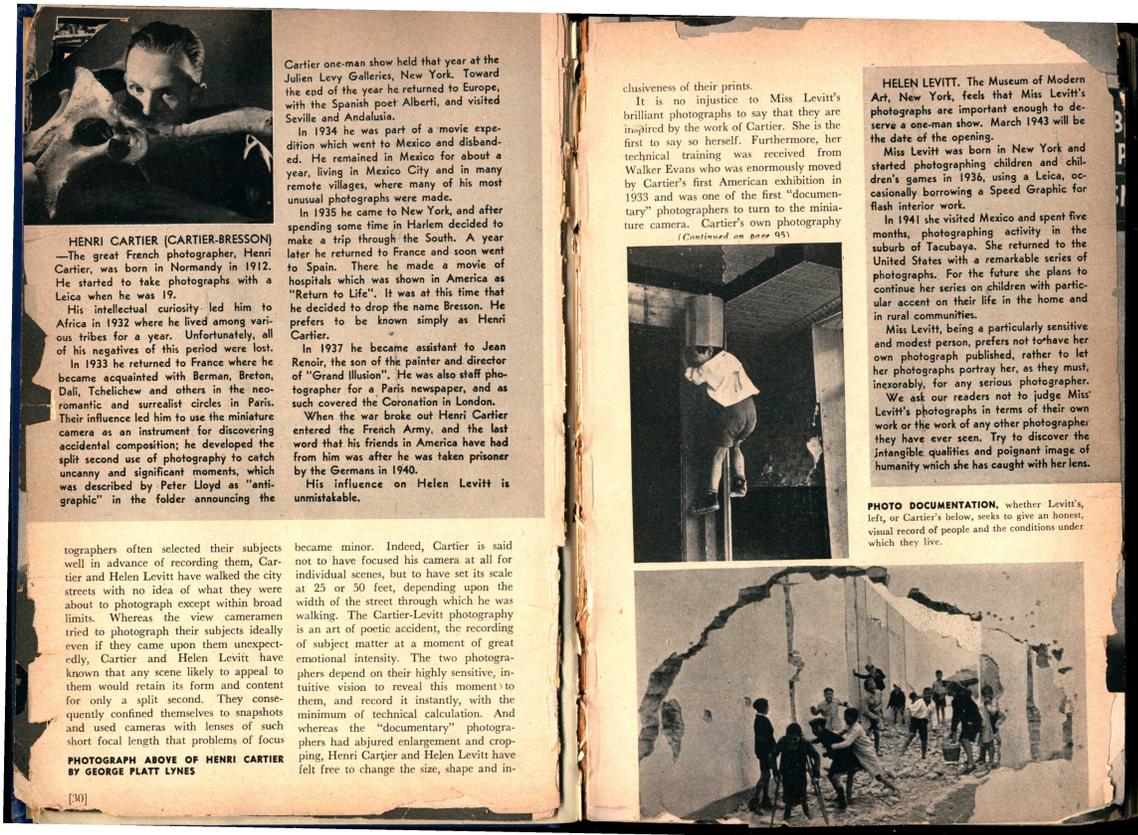
Couched within the layout of the printed pages of James Thrall Soby's 1943 *Minicam Photography* magazine article "The Art of Poetic Accident: Photographs of Cartier-Bresson and Helen Levitt" are two inserted sections. The second page features an aside with a playful headshot of Cartier-Bresson (his face is partially obscured and the focus rests appropriately on his eyes), with a brief summary of his life and work. This biography acknowledges Cartier-Bresson's greatness, lists his influences, describes his personal innovations and successes, and ends with the phrase: "His influence on Helen Levitt is unmistakable" (Soby 1943, 30).

On the following page is a section for Levitt to pick up where Cartier-Bresson leaves off. This section begins not with a photograph, but with a name. In place of a declaration of greatness is a plea for relevance, deferring to the experts: "The Museum of Modern Art, New York, feels that Miss Levitt's photographs are important enough to deserve a one-man show" (Soby 1943, 31). Addressing the absence of Levitt's portrait (an omission made all the more conspicuous by the discussion that replaces it), the editorial remarks:

Miss Levitt, being a particularly sensitive and modest person, prefers not to have her own photograph published, rather to let her photographs portray her, as they must, inexorably, for any serious photographer. We ask our readers not to judge Miss Levitt's photographs in terms of their own work or any other photographer they have ever seen. Try to discover the intangible qualities and poignant image of humanity which she has caught with her lens. (Soby 1943, 31)

Unlike Cartier-Bresson, Levitt requires editorializing, explanation, and support—drawing on the MoMA as reference, for instance—in order to establish her critical weight. The shaded tones of the photographs rhyme with the rectangular biographical sections, visually equating the photographers' personal narratives (including Cartier-Bresson's portrait) with the photographic work itself. The body of the essay, in contrast, is left floating on the white page. The layout of the first page of Soby's article features two photographs by Levitt. The second page features a half-page photograph by Cartier-Bresson. On the final page (the right-hand side of the image above), Levitt's biographical excerpt shares the page with one of her photographs and one by Cartier-Bresson. Placing the two images together on the page in this way encourages direct comparison between Levitt and Cartier-Bresson's photographs and asks the readers to note their similarities. Making the comparison more overt, the first complete sentence on this page claims "It is no injustice to Miss Levitt's brilliant photographs to say that they are inspired by the work of Cartier"; and then, speaking on behalf of Levitt, Soby points out that "she is the first to say so herself" (Soby 1943, 31). Though the article tries to bring in Levitt at every possible opportunity, its efforts to do so underline her refusal to participate. By not appearing (for the article, at the request of the critic, or for the reader) Levitt apparently leaves her photographs vulnerable to potential misunderstanding by the article's contemporary audience. Unattended, the social and aesthetic value of these often ambiguous images can be too easily discounted. Levitt's absence foregrounds the question: Can, or should, a work

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James T. Soby. "The Art of Poetic Accident: Photographs of Cartier-Bresson and Helen Levitt." *Minicam Photography*, March 1943 (30–31).

speak for itself? The editorial says yes, it can (for any serious photographer, it must), yet Soby's hedging and pleading suggest otherwise. My own question takes a slightly different form: What happens to Levitt criticism—and to Levitt's critics—when (as in this *Minicam Photography* article) the photographer fails, or rather *refuses*, to appear? How does the performance of gender affect the reception of Helen Levitt?

This essay seeks to answer these questions by tracing intersecting paths of discursive history. In what follows, I demonstrate why Levitt's work is characterized as lyrical, embodied, compassionate, and dancery. By establishing some historical context, I show why these terms are initially attributed to her work; however, my account of critics' desire to narrate Levitt's work further demonstrates why the application of these terms remains fundamentally unchanged since the late 1930s. Levitt's anonymity is bound in the "neutral" discourse of documentary history, the history of "modern" figures such as the flâneur, and in the kind of invisibility that comes with her gender and the classes, genders, races, and ages of the subjects she photographs. Levitt's photographs demonstrate her ability to understand, anticipate, and identify with the gestures and movement of the people around her. As a result, she is able to make quick decisions, aligning herself (and her camera) with her subjects in such a way to make photographs that might otherwise seem unlikely, or even impossible. Because of this suggestion of sympathetic movement inherent in the depiction of her photographic subjects, Levitt is given a free pass to photograph whomever and wherever she sees fit. At the same time, her refusal to offer a stable narrative for her own biography and practice leads to critical frustration and stagnation. It performs a politics of invisibility that is essential to the production of

her photography and film work and the development of her critical legacy. But if Levitt is connected with some privileged depiction of humanity, as critics such as Nancy Newhall and James Agee suggest, then in the discourse of her contemporary moment she is also connected with complicated perceptions of race, dance, poetry, and grace; with the fantasy of democracy her modern walking seems to embody; with the infantilization of women; with the choreography of factory labour; and with the complicated views about what makes a “true American” in New York’s diverse neighbourhoods (Newhall 1943, 8). Beyond the images themselves, Levitt’s method of “control” mutes critical discourse when she refuses to speak. The result is that, with few exceptions, Levitt discourse has not advanced significantly since the publication of Soby’s article. In what follows, I examine these issues as they play out in her street photography as well as her films, tying both to questions of the machinic and auto-mobility in mid-century America. My aim here is to suggest that Levitt’s work, and the body of criticism that frames her, deserves a closer look.

Invisible Woman, or “You Don’t Like Talking, Do You?”

Helen Levitt (1913–2009) “was born in the Italian-Jewish neighbourhood of Bensonhurst in Brooklyn; her family came from both heritages” (Rosenblum 1994, 311). She worked under a portrait photographer after high school and would visit the Photo League dark rooms to print photographs in the 1930s. In addition to making her own photographs and attending “museum exhibitions, dance performances, and foreign films,” Levitt “taught art to East Harlem children under the Federal Arts Project in 1937,” around which time she also “began photographing children at play” (Rosenblum 1994, 311). She first exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in 1939 (at the age of twenty-six) and had her first solo photography exhibition there in 1943. Levitt is often aligned with photographers such as Cartier-Bresson, Ben Shahn, and Walker Evans. Despite this history, Levitt scholarship is surprisingly thin. As Sandra Phillips notes, there is very little early criticism of her work. In addition to the Soby article, there is an essay by Edna Bennett and one from Nancy Newhall. All three are from 1943. These, Phillips claims, “comprise the only critical writing on Levitt until the 1970s,” at which point Levitt scholarship increases (Phillips 1991, 40). However, the articles Phillips lists are not the only ones that address Levitt’s work during this thirty-year period. In limiting the scope of early Levitt criticism to three articles, all from similar sources, Phillips’ treatment is symptomatic of a greater tendency to underestimate the larger scope and context of Levitt’s work.

Admittedly, there are plausible explanations for this assumed absence of Levitt scholarship. In addition to Levitt’s reclusive professional persona, there are complications that contribute to the supposed gap in her photographic output. Levitt’s photographic work was not her only activity. For more than a decade, Levitt had a career in the film industry. She “worked as assistant editor in [the] Film Division of [the] Office of War Information, 1944–45” and collaborated on films such as *In the Street* (1945–46), and *The Quiet One* (1946–47) (Rosenblum 1994, 311). When she returned to still photography in 1959 (making the switch from black and white to colour), she did so with the support of Guggenheim fellowships. When Levitt suffered a robbery around 1970, however, many of her film negatives were stolen. This loss had a material impact on her output and no doubt limits the kinds of archival materials left for posterity.

My treatment of Levitt here does not escape the indulgence of biography. I draw her body into the conversation, while nevertheless critiquing the tendency other critics have toward biographical analysis. I do so, in part, to introduce Levitt to readers who may not already be familiar with her

work. At the same time, I perform my own version of Levitt biography in order to take this conversation beyond its well-rehearsed bounds. To do so, I pay attention to Levitt's persistent invisibility in its various forms: through documentary discourse and the history from which her work emerges; regarding her physical place as a white woman walking and photographing on the streets of Spanish Harlem; and with respect to the technological advances of her contemporary moment. I also consider Levitt's invisibility in relation to the conventions of attribution in the film industry (as much of Levitt's film work goes uncredited), and in terms of the way art criticism tends to downplay writing that addresses her film work. The notion of "invisibility" is also relevant to critical discourse surrounding Levitt when she asks critics to let her photographs speak on her behalf. Like the ambiguous gestures in her images, Levitt's photography remains largely defined in terms of what we do not know, what she would not tell. In challenging the ways in which the performance of her body is unquestioningly evoked within history and criticism, we can add nuance to the way we consider her photography, as well as being mindful of how critics project their own desires into the interpretations of artists who refuse to offer an authoritative account of their work. While articles such as Soby's champion Levitt's sensitivity and seriousness and include analyses of her photographs and her personality, not every writer takes such a diplomatic approach. Consider the thinly veiled frustration of Levitt's 2004 *New York Times* interviewer, Sarah Boxer. Boxer introduces the piece with a warning: "You might get the wrong impression about Helen Levitt from her photographs. They are dying to talk. She is not" (Boxer 2004). Throughout the conversation, Levitt apparently responds to Boxer's prompts and questions with brief, unhelpful replies. The interview ends abruptly, and in the same tone it began: "'You don't like talking, do you?' [Boxer asks]. 'No,' [Levitt says]. 'I sure don't.'" (Boxer 2004). In the end, we are left with a few memorable lines from Levitt, but even these are framed within the article as evidence of the interviewer's struggle, rather than unpacked or offered as insight into the photographer's work.

In their 1991 exhibition catalogue entitled *Helen Levitt* (perhaps the most influential and comprehensive account of Levitt's career) Sandra Phillips and Maria Morris Hambourg fill in much of the historical, social, and aesthetic context Levitt withholds. As Phillips explains, for an artist to have an intrusive presence or personality was, in the 1930s, "an affectation to be avoided" (Phillips 1994, 34).¹ In addition to exhibiting her work in MoMA and receiving the museum's first-ever photography fellowship in 1946, Levitt is situated within the greater context of photography in New York from the 1930s on—particularly in the emergence and popularization of social documentary photography. She shared darkrooms and rubbed elbows with members of the Photo League, yet refrained from taking up their political commitments. Following Cartier-Bresson, she makes photographs of "people," she often says, rather than social "conditions." Levitt's photographic aesthetic, though seemingly "artless," is not unstudied—she went to art galleries, attended shows, worked with other photographers, looked at photographs, and studied films, often watching them repeatedly. Phillips describes Levitt's "style of anonymity" as "an accurate reflection of her own personality, which has always, and rightly, put the attention on the pictures rather than on the person who made them" (Phillips 1991, 16). In making this claim, however, Phillips echoes Soby's approach in presenting Levitt's work as an outcome of her shy personality, and Cartier-Bresson's work as a result of his unique aesthetic mastery. Phillips's personality-based description of Levitt echoes one of the central tropes of Levitt criticism, which tethers her work to her person. Like much of the work dealing with street photography, Levitt criticism is preoccupied with the performance of the photographer's body. Rather than allow Levitt to disappear from the work, critics draw her back in by emphasizing her physicality, her dancer-like manoeuvring through the city, her athletic sense of timing and movement.

This tendency to fetishize Levitt's grace and physicality has the effect of infantilizing her. It makes her work seem chance-based and ethereal rather than a product of both talent and practice—a legacy that casts its shadow over Levitt criticism to this day. This process is already evident in one of the earliest examples of Levitt criticism, Nancy Newhall's 1943 curatorial statement (written on the occasion of Levitt's first solo exhibition). The first sentence, presented alongside one of Levitt's now iconic photographs, remains characteristic of descriptions of Levitt. "Helen Levitt seems to walk invisible among the children," Newhall announces (Newhall 1943, 8). "She is young, she has the eye of a poet, and she has not forgotten the strange world which tunnels back through thousands of years to the dim beginnings of the human race" (Newhall 1943, 8). Though Newhall does not acknowledge this, both Levitt and the children pictured are hard at work—the serious work of play, and of practice. By attributing Levitt's photography to a fundamental connection with "the dim beginnings of the human race," Newhall unwittingly establishes a precedent for discounting the time she spent researching her images, her long walks and careful observation, her contemporaneity, and the physical and historical specificity of her practice. While readers are often offered accounts of photographer Walker Evans at work, Levitt is figured as moving, or dancing, through the streets, apparently showing what passes naturally into her field of vision. Her practice is not presented as labour, but rather seems to remind her critics of the childhood play Levitt photographs, thus calling into question the seriousness of her work.

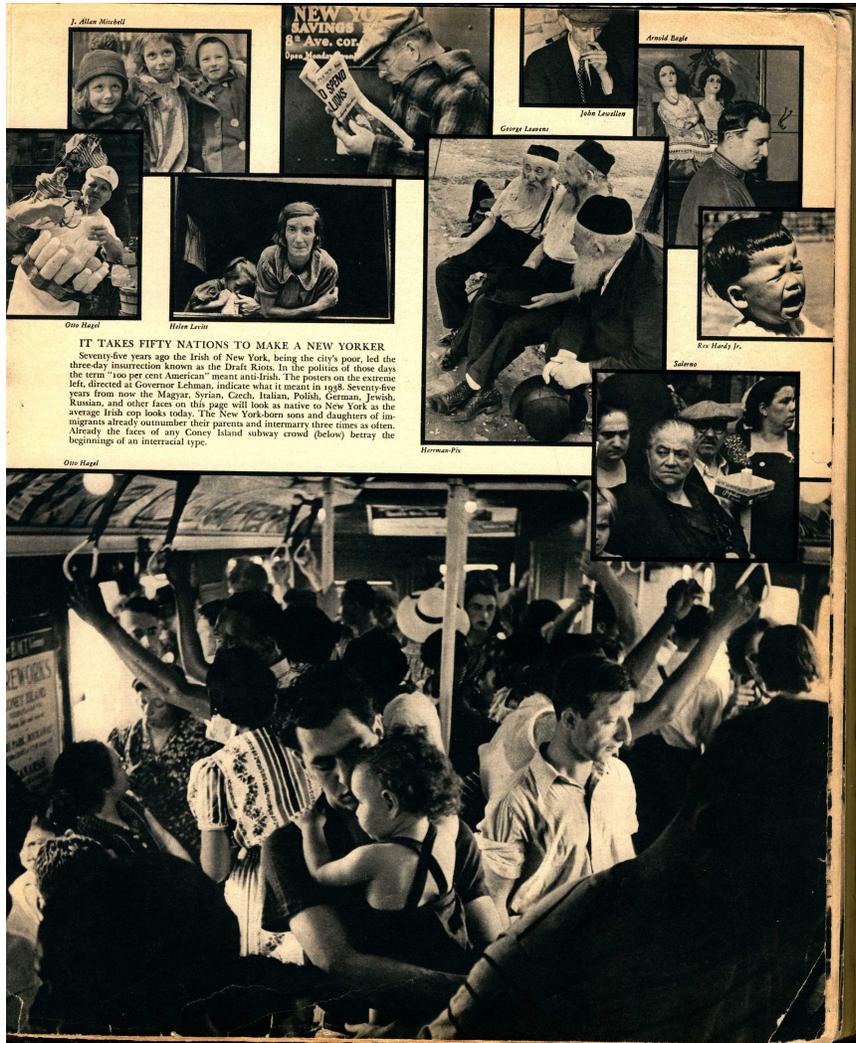
Despite this focus on the particularity of Levitt's bodily performance, some critics strive to contextualize Levitt within a greater photographic history, albeit with a specific, stylistic critique. Roberta Hellman and Marvin Hoshino are not alone in placing Levitt as the successor to a genealogy that includes Cartier-Bresson and Evans, as well as Bill Brandt, André Kertész, Brassai, and Shahn (Hellman and Hoshino 1978, 729). For Hellman and Hoshino, these photographers share the fact that they all "made pictures which blur the difference between people and things" which suggests an "irreverence toward subject matter . . . matched formally by a wilful indifference to distinctions between stillness and stop-motion, flatness and depth, and negative and positive space" (729). This blurring is central to the thirties style they characterize as "white style," and of which, they claim, Levitt is the "purest example" (731). They define this "white style" as the kind of fully automatic, active collaboration with chance to which photography has apparently aspired since its inception—that is, it is "a photography of near perfect transparency" (731). Its intangibility seems to extend beyond form and content into criticism. Noting the long-standing debate between documentary and pictorialism, Hellman and Hoshino suggest "photographers such as Walker Evans have been needlessly shuffled from 'concerned documentary photographer' (Genus FSA) to 'Modern Artist' (albeit a devious one for having hidden his Art so long)" (723). Levitt, in contrast, "never having been subjected to such critical scrutiny . . . has been admired by both sides simultaneously—without anyone noting a contradiction" (732). Lacking a tradition of rigorous criticism, Levitt is viewed as either a "social realist committed to the examination and documentation of urban life, especially among the minority poor with all its attendant liberalisms, and only incidentally interested in the beautiful photograph," or else as "a 'photographer's photographer,' astonishingly sophisticated about formal issues and only indirectly concerned with subject matter" (732). For Hellman and Hoshino, Levitt's work includes "some of the most complex pictures in all of photography," and therefore the jury is still out. Levitt does not fit neatly on one side or the other. In their words, "The 'white style' has yet to yield its point of view" (732). Like Levitt herself, the work remains inconclusive. Though Hellman and Hoshino note the lack of critical scrutiny for Levitt's work, this gap seems to be presented as a natural consequence of the "purity" of her style. The automatism of this "white style" also suggests a hangover of the intuitive, pedagogical, anti-intellectual stance of MoMA's Department of Photography in the 1940s.

Hellman and Hoshino's account fails to acknowledge the striking double meaning that "white" plays in the "white style." The kind of invisibility Levitt is allowed results in part from her technique, and in part from the privileged "invisibility" of her white, female person. But if Levitt's whiteness lends invisibility, the fact itself is not without complication. As Peggy Phelan argues, there is a problem of identity politics that runs parallel to the suggestion of the photographer as invisible: representation does not necessarily equal power (Phelan 1993, 10). On the one hand, this formula undercuts the notion of Levitt's power. On the other, it complicates the politics inherent in her representation of others.

Gesturing in New York

Not limited to the museum, Levitt's work was also represented in popular magazines. In 1939, *Fortune* magazine published a special "New York"-themed issue (*New York* 1939, 77). One of Levitt's photographs is included on the spread of a page with a number of others, organized in a style that recalls an informal scrapbook. Levitt's photograph is visually underlined by the title "It Takes Fifty Nations to Make a New Yorker." The line of capitalized text mimics the cropped-out windowsill of the woman's tenement apartment. As the copy explains, "The New York-born sons and daughters of immigrants already outnumber their parents and intermarry three times as often. Already the faces of any Coney Island subway crowd . . . betray the beginnings of an interracial type" (*Fortune* 1939, 77). The explanation seems designed to denote a form of progress. It also speaks to the complicated identity of the American/New Yorker and the way it is tied with immigration and therefore has changed, and will continue to change, over time.

Despite the magazine's claim of "100 per cent American," the way the photographs are arranged also undercuts any straightforward reading of unqualified racial harmony. The arrangement creates a sequence of broken sightlines; none of the figures in the photographs meet the eye lines of the people in the other images. Levitt's portrait of the woman in the windowsill (with the small girl hiding her face beside her) provides an interesting counterpoint to this phenomenon: though some of the figures on the page are presented facing the direction of the camera, Levitt's is the only one that gazes directly out at the viewer. Rather than presented as caught in the shuffle of faces, shapes, and textures of a crowd (and the collage), the woman in Levitt's photograph is outlined by the flat, black space that surrounds her. She leans out the window, as if out onto the street, and seems to look directly at us. The collection of snapshots, like the short article, culminates in a large photograph of the Coney Island subway. The subway itself "was a setting that prompted meditation on the common experience of the common man. In many ways the subway became a symbol of the 1930s" the way the skyscraper was for the 1920s; instead of dizzying expanse and optimism, the concern and sobriety of the subway reflect the tone and the sense of limbo more characteristic of the decade that follows (Greenough 1991, 17–18). Rather than building up, it also suggests a retreat underground. The form of mass transit also visually highlights the large quantity of people mixing—both physically and genetically—within such a small space.



Helen Levitt. *New York Special Issue. Fortune magazine* (July 1939). Helen Levitt photograph included as part of the “It Takes Fifty Nations to Make a New Yorker” page spread (77).

Refusing to classify Levitt’s photographs as fantastic moments, plucked out of space and time, Alan Trachtenberg recognizes that, “without explicit commentary Levitt’s pictures are dense with signs of a specific urban political economy” (Trachtenberg 2012, 3). Offering an alternative to the common reading that race, class, and labour exist outside of Levitt’s photography, Trachtenberg re-frames Levitt’s photographic locations as “the unqualified visibility of poor people, a predominantly nonwhite underclass on the margins of mainstream white society. Signs of class division appear everywhere on these streets” (Trachtenberg 2012, 3). Although Phillips characterizes Levitt’s work as imaginative, joyful, and rarely discordant, a number of Levitt’s critics do register the darkness milling around the edges of her photographic frames. As a result, her photography is not only a record of certain neighbourhoods at specific moments in 1930s and 1940s New York. It also lends itself to some combination of documentary, sociological, aesthetic, and performance-based studies. Looking at it today, we can begin to re-frame her practice in terms of questions of visibility and invisibility that are central not only to the way we see Levitt, but also the way (and the fact that) we can also see her subjects. In this sense, Levitt’s work offers a model of documentary that includes sociology and the particularity of embodied gesture, both for her subjects and the photographer

herself; it traces a history of the discursive and aesthetic values of both the art museum and its critics.

Throughout Levitt's work, the photographs where adults touch and engage in conversation—such as *New York, 1939*—are celebrated for their tenderness and their respectful distance.² In this photograph, (what appears to be) two women stand on the sidewalk near the base of a subway platform. A boy negotiates with a small, wheeled vehicle on the sidewalk past them. His gaze looks out of the frame toward something or someone else. The women seem to be engaged in conversation. The taller of the two looks over toward the child, even as she holds her right hand reassuringly atop the other woman's shoulder. The woman on the right looks up at the other, and it is hard to tell—by her upturned gaze, her waiting expression, and her clasped hands—whether she is trying to regain the other woman's attention in order to make a plea or to thank her. The photograph offers a simultaneous occurrence of thoughts, words, actions, and events. It shows the way multiple factors and players interconnect. The photograph also suggests that this otherwise private moment is penetrated by more than the distraction of a child's activity in the corner of the frame. Levitt is there, too, and she approaches distracted subjects unnoticed. Framing this scene of touch and attention are advertisements, worn city structures, and at least one precarious-looking puddle surrounding her subjects. Not only are we privy to a moment of personal, private discussion, but viewers are also given the opportunity to see the social and economic locations and conditions that play into those personal lives. More telling than the appearance of the sidewalk on which the women stand, Levitt's camera leads the viewer right along the split seam and right into the torn pocket of the taller woman's coat. Paired with the ripped cloth, then, both the steadying hand that would dig into this pocket and the gestures of the clasped hands beside it, seem particularly telling. Levitt's gaze keeps its distance, albeit necessarily; this private moment could not exist if she were known to be a part of it. She shows the affection of touching and interaction. In doing so, however, she claims a level of "dignified distance" that does not necessarily extend to the conditions (the various torn pockets, lifted skirts, and unguarded expressions) of her subjects.

Levitt chose to photograph in immigrant neighbourhoods because there (as early MoMA curatorial statements acknowledge) she could find people moving, acting, living, playing, and congregating in the streets. These subjects remain anonymous. But this dignified distance takes on a different valence if we consider the claim that Levitt was supposedly wary of the adults in the neighbourhoods where she photographed. As Roy Arden notes, "although she [Levitt] mainly pictured children, it is clear both from the photographs and interviews that she didn't especially like children but instead saw them as people who were more accessible and less guarded than adults" (Arden 2002, 103). This suggestion sheds light on Levitt's use of the right-angle viewfinder that allowed her what Trachtenberg calls "functional invisibility" and enabled her to be hidden yet still "present and active in the scene of the picture" (Trachtenberg 2012, 5). This combination of presence and reticence, or distance, is evident in the very photographs that critics tend to qualify as showing a sense of dignity for (or respectful distance from) the subjects whose lives Levitt edges into.



Helen Levitt, *New York, 1940*. From *Helen Levitt*. Powerhouse Books (2008): 49. © Estate of Helen Levitt. Courtesy of the Estate of Helen Levitt.

Levitt's photograph *New York, 1940* is fitted with a characteristically nondescript title. Here is a scene that seems to have been staged just for her camera. She seems to be the one person looking in

the exact right way at just the right time. This sense of serendipity echoes Walter Benjamin's characterization of the flâneur, the walker who looks and moves at cross-purposes to the masses of the modern city (Hammergren 1996, 56). The flâneur's movement and vision are such "that things reveal themselves in their secret meaning" and "only the flâneur who idly strolls by . . . receives the message" (Hammergren 1996, 56). Like the flâneur, Levitt is apparently privy to the secret images lost on those around her. The flâneur's "strolling" is associated with privileged receptivity, masculinity, and idleness; however, those qualities ultimately highlight Levitt's difference from the flâneur. Levitt is a woman from a working-class background, and her movement through city streets is generated as a form of her labour; it is not idle strolling.

Of *New York, 1940*, Jeffrey Rosenheim suggests that, even though we recognize that the glass—the remnants of a mirror—is scattered on the sidewalk and being collected up by the children, we still feel the image might somehow be real, that the boy in the mirror might be a reflection rather than a figure showing through its empty frame (Rosenheim 2012). This sense is heightened by the mixture of innocence and darkness on display in the image, the precarious combination of small hands and sharp glass. I argue we see the boy on the tricycle because of the shattered mirror, not in spite of it. He is reflected to us through, and because of, a different mirror—that of Levitt's camera. As in the Soby article, here is yet another frame in which Levitt refuses to appear, performing her invisibility instead by disappearing before a broken mirror. Indeed, this refusal calls to mind the kind of erasure and withholding Phelan identifies in the work of female artists such as Lorna Simpson and Sophie Calle. In turning their backs on a phallogocentric visual field in which they are always positioned as other, their work indicates that absence itself can be mobilized to evade assimilation and control (Phelan 1993, 165).³ Here, Levitt's framing performs a similar function, and she offers up the image of the boy's body in place of her own.

Rather than reading this photograph as a unique and magical occurrence, as some critics suggest, the elements of this scene could be acknowledged for the participation, teamwork, and the timing they require. It takes multiple hands and various players to hold up the unstable frame that makes this photograph possible. There are hands clutching the various bicycles – one riding toward the expanse of the broken mirror, and one riding alongside it. There are also two sets of hands holding up the frame of the mirror, as their owners gaze absently in either direction. There are hands held up in a gesture of empathetic reflection or instruction (the boy on the far left) and hands obscured by being stuffed into pants pockets (the boy on the far right). Behind the children is the storefront for a laundry, where, inside, there will be hands at work folding and washing. The teamwork and labour on display on the sidewalk also suggest the work that takes place in the businesses behind the children. The image takes place within a larger frame, and so asks that we place the moment, and the picture, within a wider context. We must consider Levitt's presence, and her camera's presence, in relation to both the subjects pictured and the wider socio-economic frame. Rather than simply providing a metaphor for Levitt's so-called "unique way of seeing," *New York, 1940* calls attention to the ways in which Levitt's practice is dependent on her position in a specific place and time. Her work is therefore place and time-specific, and it requires a particular convergence of social, technological, and economic conditions. Levitt's aesthetic emerges, in part, from an intersection between the photographer and the particular social and historical moment in which she is working. Indeed, some years later, when the neighbourhoods change and families move inside to watch television instead of playing in the streets, Levitt loses her subject matter. She roams New York's districts in search of new subjects to catch her eye.

The Woman, The Machine

If Levitt avoids appearing in picture frames and portraits, then she also arguably hides through her use of the camera itself. The camera holds the power to both obscure and enhance its operator. According to Rosalind Krauss, “Camera-seeing” can be defined as “an extension of normal vision, one that supplements the deficiencies of the naked eye. The camera covers and arms this nakedness, it acts as a kind of prosthesis, enlarging the capacity of the human body” (Krauss 1981, 32). Carol Armstrong takes up a similar idea when she contrasts the role of the camera in the work of photographers Lee Friedlander, Garry Winogrand, and Diane Arbus. Both Friedlander and Winogrand, “in their different ways, stress the role of the camera in the capture of the world—as a prosthetic, if not phallic, extension of the body” (Armstrong 1993, 47). Both repeatedly align themselves with their machines, and in doing so “they consistently produce a kind of street-shot framing that helps to characterize their photographs as the immediate products of their moving, viewing, machinic/phallic bodies” (47–48). Though never characterized as phallic, Levitt (like Friedlander and Winogrand) uses a 35mm Leica, a camera well suited to moving through city streets. Whereas Levitt often seems synonymous with her handheld device, Arbus “emphasizes her discontinuity with the camera” by selecting a Rolleiflex, a machine that requires little connection between “bodily movements, decision-making, and image production” (Armstrong 1993, 48). Rather than focusing on the photographer’s own embodied place within the world, Arbus’s photographic framing highlights “the relationship between her subjects and the edges of the images that *they* inhabit” (48). In doing so, Arbus de-centres and de-stabilizes notions of the gendered body and its performance, flattening the notion of gender into a collection of other flaws and peculiarities. It is in this “margins-of-physicality zone,” Armstrong claims, that Arbus locates the “femininity” of her practice (48–49). Although Armstrong provides a convincing distinction between Arbus and her male counterparts, this model cannot adequately account for the complicated performance of gender in both Levitt’s photography and its critical reception. How does Armstrong’s distinction between phallic engagement and Arbus’s feminized, off-centre relationship with her camera speak to a performance like Levitt’s?

Levitt shot with a Leica with a trick right-angle viewfinder, making it nearly impossible for her subjects to know they are being photographed. (When she seems to others to be pointing her camera forward, her lens is actually looking to the side.) Despite this inherent misdirection, critics are in no rush to accuse her camera of being invasive. Her ambulation is not called predatory. In Levitt criticism, the immediate products of the photographer’s moving, viewing body are figured as neither machinic nor phallic, despite her choice of camera. Instead, Levitt’s movement is characterized in terms of grace and athleticism. Her body is that of a dancer, her eye a metaphor for a uniquely humanizing vision. The machine is a tool for, and an extension of, her humanity. She informs *it*, not the other way around. The physicality the Leica demands is integral to any understanding of Levitt’s work. Even Levitt’s celebrated “invisibility” is conspicuous in that her restraint and tact are considered instrumental to the success of both process and production of her work. Indeed, though she moves through public streets, Levitt’s status as a female and a former dancer seems to protect her from criticism.⁴ This status goes unquestioned. If Levitt criticism is to engage the subject of her body, however, that body—including its relationship to its subjects, environment, and its critics—must be taken seriously, and addressed in relation to location, gender, race, and class.

My initial reaction to this lacuna in Levitt criticism was that the characterization of Levitt's movement as dancerly is symptomatic of the way in which Levitt's critical reception responds to her work, and her gender, by dismissing her labour as dance. But this reading betrays my own set of biased assumptions, as dance itself is, of course, a form of laboured movement. Rather than discard the language of "dance," then, why not ask this persistent metaphor to do more than simply drape the language of grace and athleticism overtop of it, obscuring the conditions of Levitt's practice?⁵

One way to complicate the notion of Levitt's dancerly body is to place it within the discourse of her urban surroundings. Jane Jacobs offers a productive model for applying the language of dance to the discussion of pedestrian movement through the city. Jacobs details the intricacies of sidewalk use as the mark of a successfully homogenous city. There is an order to a functioning sidewalk economy, she explains, "all composed of movement and change, and although it is life, not art, we may fancifully call it the art form of the city and liken it to the dance" (Jacobs 1961, 50). Jacobs' dance is not a mob of uniform movement, but rather "an intricate ballet in which the individual dancers and ensembles all have distinctive parts which miraculously reinforce each other and compose an orderly whole" (50). The ballet is neither frenetic nor stressful; its "general effect is peaceful and the general tenor even leisurely" (54). The urban choreography Jacobs describes is necessarily unique to each city street, and its key component is its constant, organic, improvisation. This complementary choreography relies on a complex order and a combination of regular neighbourhood members and anonymous passers-by—all engaged in a negotiation of movement, space, and function. While Levitt's own movement can be tied to different histories of gesture and dance, she is also subject to (and a part of) the "sidewalk ballet" Jacobs describes. None of her images, or the bodily movements that made them possible, could come about without the varied and complex social, economic, and architectural contexts in which her walks take place.

Labour and Movement

Jacobs' humanistic take on the sidewalk and the ambulatory rights of the pedestrian in the modern metropolis comes in for critique by Nick Blomley, who re-presents the sidewalk as a tool designed to regulate flows and administratively govern sanctioned and efficient movement through public space (by, for example, discouraging loitering and panhandling).⁶ Blomley's critique of what he calls "pedestrianism" accords with Felicia McCarren's discussion of the discourse of Taylorism. As McCarren explains, with its proliferation after the First World War, the scientific management system of productive efficiency known as "Taylorism" must be counted as a central choreography of the machine age" (McCarren 2003, 46). With its focus on "maximum 'productivity,'" Taylorism "focused on two elements also found in contemporary reflection on dance: first, the essential gesture, calculated to help the worker work at his 'best speed'; and second, group coordination" (McCarren 2003, 129). Both elements relied on a form of "anonymity, with the worker's body being subsumed by the rhythm of his own gesture and that of the group . . . the effect of both was an erasure of individual identity" (129). This erasure pervades numerous forms of dance and theatre in the early 1900s (130). In fact, many styles of dance adopt machine-like movement—they "internaliz[e] the machine into the body"—with the aim to both mimic and mock the machine, or idealize it (130).⁷

Gesture and movement are essential elements in Levitt's work. According to Ellen Handy, the scenes Levitt depicts can contain "elements of a game, an improvisation, and an impromptu dance lesson. But who is to say that these children were playing?" (Handy 2001, 207). For Handy, the

children’s “concentration is palpable; in fact, they are at work, and their work is performance” (207). Handy notes the importance of Levitt’s own photographic performance—the fact that she is attentive, present, and yet removed enough to identify and record the moment without interrupting it. She is, importantly, “an unobtrusive observer rather than participant” (207). In Levitt’s photographs, the children are at play, but play itself is a form development. It is hard work. The children’s gestures are not simply casual or random; their “continuing performances render the streets as not only a theater but also a factory of identity in which they labor to form themselves through their engagement with the world” (207). I want to linger on Handy’s statement for a moment, particularly because I am interested in her change of analogy, from theatre to factory.

As such, we might further consider the relationship between body and industry by reading the tension between gesture and the machine through the work of Antonio Gramsci. Levitt’s tendency toward the organic and the balletic is consistent with Gramsci’s critique of the control of workers’ movements in the factory. According to Gramsci, in the early twentieth century, industrialists control their workers’ movements within the factory, but their influence also extends to the labourer’s private lives, including views on morality and lifestyle. Gramsci suggests these attempts at extended control, though they fail, are significant because they are symptomatic of a concerted attempt in America to develop “a new type of worker and of man” (Gramsci 2000, 290). Though Taylor’s notion of the factory worker as a “trained gorilla” suggests a level of cynicism about the American worker,

Taylor is in fact expressing . . . the purpose of American society—developing in the worker to the highest degree automatic and mechanical attitudes, breaking up the old psycho-physical nexus of qualified professional work, which demands a certain active participation of intelligence, fantasy and initiative on the part of the worker, and reducing productive operations exclusively to the mechanical, physical aspect. (Gramsci 2000, 290)

What Gramsci calls “puritanical” initiatives of industrialists such as Henry Ford requires that the humanity, spirituality, creativity, and humanism of the worker be snuffed out. The worker must necessarily reach an external and mechanical “psycho-physical” equilibrium, which will help prevent their exhaustion and collapse from work—but for this balance to be internalized, the worker must seem to take it on, rather than having it imposed on them (Gramsci 2000, 291). In the face of this cynical view of the labouring body, Levitt’s organic movement, along with her intuitive ability to improvise, present an important contrast to the mechanization of the modern worker. According to Gramsci, it is in the interests of the industrialists to keep “a stable, skilled labour force, a permanently well-adjusted complex, because the human complex (the collective worker) of an enterprise is also a machine which cannot, without considerable loss, be taken to pieces too often and renewed with single new parts” (291). Levitt’s ability to anticipate movement with her camera foregrounds this tension between body and machine, and body-as-machine. Reading the discourse of dance and gesture in and around Levitt’s work through Gramsci, it is apparent that concerns and theories of industrialism and mechanization are interrelated with the formal language of dance at that time. These discourses also overlap with the rhetoric of modernist poetry and film, social life, leisure, and—more widely—to developing conceptions of the body in a capitalist society.

The language, labour, and politics of the interdependence of dancing bodies with machines, particularly in the early decades of the twentieth century, also complicates any reference to Levitt’s body as a dancing body. It also stands to reason that Levitt’s work would be characterized with respect to her supposedly dancier movement, as well as in terms of the lyricism of the photographs

themselves. In his introduction to Levitt's *A Way of Seeing* (1965), James Agee echoes Newhall's claim that Levitt has "the eye of a poet." For Agee, the photographs combined in *A Way of Seeing* "seem to . . . combine into a unified view of the world, an unisistent but irrefutable manifesto of a way of seeing, and in a gentle and wholly unpretentious way, a major poetic work" (Agee 1981, viii). Levitt, he claims, is "like most good artists . . . no intellectual and no theorist" (xi).

Agee goes to great lengths to place Levitt on the side of anti-intellectualism. Levitt's work—and, by extension, Levitt herself—is necessarily "unisistent," "gentle," and "unpretentious." The woman, like the work, is anti-theory. In place of intellectualism and theory, Agee aligns Levitt with poetry and improvisation. In other words, Levitt is a jazz artist. With "a few complicated exceptions, our only first-rate contemporary lyrics have gotten their life at the bottom of the human sea," Agee claims, and "aside from Miss Levitt's work [he] can think of little outside the best of jazz" (xii). According to Agee, Levitt's subjects necessarily "embody with great beauty and fullness not only their own personal and historical selves but also . . . a natural history of the soul" (xii). Agee introduces Levitt's *A Way of Seeing* with his characteristic heavy-handed romanticism. Based on his formulation, it is difficult to untangle the work from the photographer, and the photographer from her subjects. Though he offers many of the common tropes for "lyric" photography at this time, it is often unclear whether Agee is more preoccupied with Levitt's intuitive, improvisational photographic style or with his own ideas about the people she photographs.

In his discussion of the "strange world" Levitt depicts, Agee, like others, refers to these public spaces as a kind of "living room," where the neighbourhood's otherwise internal plays are turned inside out. These performances dramatize what Jürgen Habermas describes as the domain of the private developing in the semipublic domain (just as, correlatively, public discourse develops within private homes).⁸ Speaking in similar terms, Agee sets the stage for the preface to his cinematic collaboration with Levitt and Janice Loeb, a short film entitled *In the Street*.⁹ "The streets of the poor quarters of great cities are, above all, a theater and a battleground," Agee claims. "There, unaware and unnoticed, every human being is a poet, a masker, a warrior, and a dancer, and in his innocent artistry he projects, against the turmoil of the street, an image of human existence" (Agee 1981, xii). Despite the masculine pronoun, this line seems to turn Levitt—the "poet," "masker," "warrior" ("warrior" is the only term here that might give me pause), and "dancer" who goes "unaware and unnoticed" through the streets—into a figure of the everyman (thus, it seems, the need to make the pronoun "neutrally" masculine, though simultaneously evoking and erasing Levitt in the process). This passage aligns the photographer with her subjects, presenting her play in the public streets as one and the same.

It might be tempting to see a dancing body as one that moves outside of the system of industrialization, with privileged access to "a natural history of the soul," or Newhall's "strange world which tunnels back through thousands of years to the dim beginnings of the human race"; however, this connection also places Levitt's dancing body within discourses of race and gender (including the strategic invisibility Hellman and Hoshino's "white style" takes for granted). As McCarren explains, "like athletes, dancers are often read as moving unconsciously, or naturally, with a kind of animal speed or grace—as if their movement were driven by instinct" (McCarren 2003, 3–4). By this reading, the dancer's "use of movement for expression connects [her] to the realms of the pre-linguistic or pre-technological, the animal or the 'primitive'" (4). Levitt is moving through the streets with her camera at a time when qualities such as sensuality, emotionality, and certain forms of improvisational movement are valued above cerebral, cultural, or intellectual forms. In this sense, Levitt is compassionate toward her subjects in both her visual treatment of them and her

sympathetic movement itself. At the same time, however, she mediates “others” for her audience, offering them up to be looked at.

Alertness and “Automobility”

The reconfiguring of space that comes with the street-as-theatre also acts on, or writes itself onto, the performers themselves. More than domestic spaces and public theatres, however, these are also city streets. Levitt literally moves in the place of the automobile as she makes her way along the urban grid. The inversion is temporary, however, and Levitt (like the children of the neighbourhood) will have to step aside if a car drives through the street. How, then, do we think about Levitt’s place as a street photographer? Remaining mindful of the difference the machine can make, I suggest we seek Levitt’s brand of “decisive moment” within a material history that also includes, but is not limited to, discourses that connect the technology of her camera with that of the car.

It is not uncommon to find 1930s-era advertisements for cars that also feature cameras or vice versa. One argument for buying a car is the freedom and leisure its mobility will afford. What better way to signify that leisure and mobility than by suggesting that you take your family out for a drive and photograph the trip? Both cars and cameras are marketed as tools for making memories. When women are featured in these ads, however, they are often depicted as passengers. They often sit on the passenger side or stand next to the car, camera in hand. In this case, the woman represents the designated family photographer, the keeper of domestic souvenirs. But as a lone woman, and a pedestrian, Levitt’s relation to the car is more complicated. A photographer, Levitt is valued in part for her decisive command of body and machine, her quick, improvisational manoeuvring with the camera. This emphasis situates her firmly within the time in which she is photographing.

Modernity is deeply affected by the invention and dissemination of the automobile, as it was with the development of the subway. The automobile had an unsettling impact on human perception. The so-called “camera obscura in motion . . . the moving automobile . . . demand[ed] that the driver deploy her whole body, and every one of her senses,” connecting the sense of sight with the movement of the body (Duffy 2009, 193). And with “new discoveries such as adrenaline,” Enda Duffy explains, came “a subtle, improvised, but nonetheless radical imaginative rewiring of the human sensory and decision-making processes” (195). By this formulation, the “best person” was no longer the one who “thought out the choice rationally . . . but the one who left the least possible time between seeing, choosing, and acting, whose response was speediest” (195). In other words, “alertness” replaces thoughtfulness, contemplation, theorization, and intellectualization. These same changes in value are evident in photographic criticism in the early twentieth century. Read in light of these values, the tension between the human, organic (and especially female) figure and the machine also highlights the graceful movement of Levitt’s body. Her mastery over the machine and the fluidity of her movement in relation to it serves to highlight her athleticism and physicality. It also emphasizes her figure as an embodiment of decidedly modern values. This tension between the human and the machine underlines the importance of the technology Levitt requires to complete her particular dance. The camera is integral to Levitt’s embodied performance, and it is the contrast with the machine that offers her movement greater social and critical value.

Despite Levitt’s apparently fluid mastery of the machine, there is some danger in accepting Levitt’s camera as an uncomplicated extension of her body, one that simply reflects her instinctive wishes and desires. Kaja Silverman seeks to “[worry] the idea that the camera serves as a tool, rather than a

machine” and challenges the assumption that the camera always “works to the credit of human vision” (Silverman 1996, 131). Even at the time of Levitt’s early photography, there is an impetus to distinguish between what a human eye or body can do that a machine cannot. The photographer’s kinetic movement foregrounds new values of speed and alertness, tied to ways of seeing adapted to and through new technology; but Levitt’s graceful choreography is also articulated as a counterpoint to the camera in her hand, “worrying” anxieties about the body’s relationship to automatism and modernity.

Moving Pictures

Levitt’s photography foregrounds the notion of movement. This is true with both the still images of the Leica and the moving images of her film work. Like her still photography, Levitt’s film work avoids narrative. This refusal is arguably more marked in her film work because of the filmic conventions it resists. In suggesting there is a thirty-year gap in Levitt criticism, Phillips and Hambourg effectively ignore another body of Levitt criticism, the writing on her film work. Their study is limited by disciplinary oversight, and art history generally pays little or no attention to Levitt’s film career, which earned her a 1949 Academy Award nomination for screenwriting. Levitt is active in filmmaking, yet she downplays her involvement in the work, referring to herself as “amateur,” for instance, or working without credit. Jan-Christopher Horak (1995) suggests Levitt’s work is further obscured by a tendency in film history to downplay the contributions of female filmmakers. Levitt is able to disappear within collaborative filmmaking in a way her individual still photography does not allow. Nevertheless, reviews of her films appear in magazines, newspapers, and film journals in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, the supposed gap years of Levitt criticism.

Consider Siegfried Kracauer’s *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (1960), a foundational text in film theory. *Theory of Film* features a relatively rare moment of critical attention for *In the Street*, a collaborative film project that features Levitt’s editing and camerawork. Kracauer addresses the observational quality of *In the Street* (arguably a filmic extension of Levitt’s own photographic practice) and its openness to the contingency of accident and “street incidents” (Kracauer 1960, 202). Kracauer—who makes no reference to Levitt or her involvement with the film—refers to the film as “nothing but a reportage pure and simple,” with “shots of Harlem scenes . . . so loosely juxtaposed that they almost give the impression of a random sample” (202). At the same time, however, Kracauer recognizes in “this reporting job” an “unconcealed compassion for the people depicted: the camera dwells on them tenderly” (202). His account points to the co-existence of documentary reportage and the kind of “tender” lyricism for which Levitt’s photography is known.

As Kracauer’s description of *In the Street* suggests, the same qualities and themes that distinguish Levitt’s photographic work are evident in her films. These elements include her “ability to blend into the environment . . . into the fabric of life around her, to become invisible,” as well as the emphasis on children, gesture, and ambiguous street scenes, and her tendency to position the viewer in an unfamiliar point of view (Horak 1995, 69). Films that bear the hallmarks of Levitt’s stylistic themes and perspective include *The Quiet One* (1948), where Levitt is credited as writer, editor, and documentary photographer, and *An Affair of the Skin* (1963), for which Levitt was a producer and an assistant director. Horak notes both films feature black protagonists, and like many of Levitt’s photographs, they do so without seeming to foreground issues of race. At the time of the films’ production, however, to feature a black actor, particularly in the role of protagonist, is a political statement in and of itself. Writing in 1965, Albert Johnson claims “the part of Janice could have

been played by any actress of any race, which makes Diana Sands' work in *An Affair of the Skin* of chief interest"; in fact, Johnson argues, "It is because she *is* a Negro that her behavior breaks all stereotypes established from the days of Madame Sul-Te-Wan through Dorothy Dandridge" (Johnson 1965, 22). In casting a black actress in one of the lead roles, *An Affair of the Skin* offers a complicated, if mysterious, character engaged in "a kind of a psychodrama previously withheld" from black actors "on the American screen" (24).

Comparing *An Affair of the Skin* with other Levitt films (films where, Horak convincingly argues, Levitt has made more of a mark than she acknowledges), Horak finds traces of Levitt not only in style and composition but also in the fictional film's content. "While Levitt seems to have contributed very little to the film's overall conception and design," Horak claims, "she is very much a part of the picture through the character of Janice"—a black, female photographer—who, as a self-effacing figure, preoccupied with photographing children in Harlem, "seems to have been written as Levitt's alter ego" (Horak 1995, 82). Further, in *An Affair of the Skin*, when the character, Janice, looks at one of her own photographs, it is actually a Levitt photograph that is pictured. Horak argues Janice and Levitt are interchangeable; the character seems to offer a view of the "real-life" Helen Levitt. Even Horak, who clearly recognizes the value of reading work against its "authorial" account, still needs to fill in the gaps Levitt leaves by drawing connections to a (fictional) embodiment of her. He seeks Levitt's body until he finds it in Janice. If Horak's reading is correct, then Levitt's anonymity functions, in *An Affair of the Skin*, in particular, as a means to foreground the black female subject. It allows Levitt to step back as a black woman steps forward. In doing so, Levitt aligns herself symbolically and politically with her. Nevertheless, Levitt's impulse toward surrogation also points to a tendency, evident throughout both her filmic and photographic work, to put other bodies on the line instead of her own. She offers others up to view while keeping herself carefully concealed.

Conclusion

In both her photographic and film work, Levitt negotiates between presence and absence. Her persistent refusals suggest an attempt to eschew representational frameworks by adopting a politics of invisibility. As Phelan argues, to put stock in the value of visibility is itself problematic, as doing so encourages a belief in both the transparency of truth and that idea that representation itself is equivalent to political power. This faith in representation is particularly dangerous for anyone who is already at risk of being marked as other. Indeed, Phelan claims, "Visibility is a trap . . . it summons surveillance and the flaw; it provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonialist/imperial appetite for possession" (Phelan 1993, 6). By refusing to make either her personal life or her artistic intentions clear, and by refusing to make herself visible, Levitt performs a structural politics that enables her to opt out of categorizing (and often condescending) institutional structures—regardless of repeated critical attempts to draw her back into the frame.

Levitt's own discourse consists of a series of refusals: she rejects categorizations such as "portraiture" or "documentary" and produces work that straddles discourses and disciplines.¹⁰ In interviews, she downplays or misdirects, and any narratives she presents are open-ended or inconclusive. As inconvenient as they might be for her critics, these strategies hold a mirror up to Levitt's photographic and film work. Levitt's photographs emphasize the continuum rather than the singular moment, just as she dismisses a single, authoritative narrative or title or caption. As a result, Levitt poses a stark contrast to the show-and-tell, directive nature of much of the documentary and

overtly political work of her contemporaries. In a move that both articulates a major source of Levitt's "compassionate" way of seeing and suggests her claim for her own work as legible to the critic, Kracauer claims her films' subjects "are not meant to stand for anything but themselves" (Kracauer 1960, 202). This model of compassionate, unobtrusive acceptance extends to the level of uncertainty involved in the photographs. As Trachtenberg attests, "It's not always clear—often it isn't at all clear—precisely what [the people in Levitt's photographs] are doing. Most often uncertainty about what's going on is exactly what the picture shows, what it is about" (Trachtenberg 2012, 3). Her eye, he says, "accepts what is withheld and hidden as part of what is there" (16).

Consider, in this regard, one of the few anecdotes Sarah Boxer is able to draw out of her interview with Helen Levitt. This story (which appears almost exclusively in Levitt criticism and is only rarely acknowledged in Evans scholarship) tells of Levitt's contribution to Walker Evans's *Many Are Called* series. In 1938, Evans sits in the New York subways photographing strangers—un-posed and unselfconscious subjects—on their daily commute. Evans uses a 35mm Contax camera hidden in his coat in order to capture the inner essence of his fellow passengers, triggering his secret machine by tugging at a cable release concealed in his right coat sleeve. Rather than working as a lone man, sitting on the subway for long periods of time, Evans knows he must find a way to make himself inconspicuous. "Walker needed someone to go with him in the subway," Levitt explains (Boxer 2004). Evans asked her to join him. She remarks: "I would just sit next to him, so we were just two people in the subway, so people wouldn't stare at him" (Boxer 2004). What Evans clearly realized was that if anyone knew how to be invisible, it was Helen Levitt.

Notes

1. This bias is nevertheless contradicted in the discourse around Margaret Bourke-White, whose career offers a counter-model—the celebrity "crack" photographer.
2. *New York, 1939*, is available for viewing in the Metropolitan Museum of Art digital photography collection at <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/267347> (Accession number 1996.2.7) and is reprinted in a number of Levitt's photobooks.
3. The fact that this photograph features a mirror also suggests the rich potential for a Lacanian reading of this performance.
4. This aspect of her biography is generally offered anecdotally as a point of entry into her personal history and as a guiding term for viewing her photography.
5. As André Lepecki has demonstrated, for instance, much effort has gone into trying to make dance seem natural and timeless. Dance choreography is also discursively connected with other philosophical models concerned with the relationship between bodily movement and the workings of power in society. For a more detailed account, see Lepecki's *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (Routledge, 2006).
6. See Blomley's *Rights of Passage: Sidewalks and the Regulation of Public Flow* (Routledge, 2011).
7. See also Andrew Hewitt's *Social Choreography: Ideology in Dance and Everyday Movement* (Duke University Press, 2005).
8. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (MIT Press, 1989).
9. Helen Levitt, Janice Loeb, James Agee, *In the Street* (shot 1945–46 and released in 1953). Levitt later publishes a book of chalk graffiti photographs, also titled *In the Street*.

10. Adding further complication to the task of teasing out Levitt's professional history, there was another Helen Levitt (Helen Slote Levitt) of a similar age (born 1916) who was also active in filmmaking and screenwriting at this time. Helen Slote Levitt, along with her screenwriter husband, Alfred Levitt, was politically active and outspoken. These Levitts were blacklisted for their communist ties and later played an active part in the 1988 writer's strike.

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