AHS 008: Assignment #2
Handout: Using Quotes Effectively

For this assignment, you may cite course texts informally, using parenthetical citation (as in the examples below). However, if you choose to bring in any outside texts or materials, you should provide full citation information, including a Works Cited page. In general, you may use the citation format of your choice (MLA-style, Chicago style, etc.), but you must use it correctly and consistently.

Regular quotes (whether complete sentences or snippets of text) should always appear in quotation marks – except for long citations (four lines or more), which should presented as block quotes, indented and single-spaced, but without quotation marks.

What is most important is to integrate quotes and other authors' ideas into your text in a clear and thoughtful way. Rather than simply dropping in a quote, it is much better to set it up, in order to indicate whose quote it is, to introduce necessary information and context, and to situate it in your analysis.

Do not assume that a quote can simply "speak for itself." After a quote, it is useful to parse out the key terms and assumptions – and, if you choose to, to question them.

When you set up a quote, try to avoid using "says" (e.g. "Sontag says that …"). It is too informal, and also incorrect, as we are generally referring to written sources. Find good specific verbs to use instead: argues, proposes, concludes, describes, outlines, suggests, etc.

Incorporating Quotes into your revised essay will take some work. You have to decide what is most important to you in the readings, and what points or arguments most resonate with you. And of course, you may agree or disagree with the quotes or points that you choose. To integrate them will probably require not simply extending but also rearranging your essay somewhat, and perhaps rethinking or revising your own argument or analysis.

EXAMPLE 1:

Diane Arbus described the camera as "a kind of license" that allowed her to transgress social boundaries and have access to people's intimate lives. As she notes, "A lot of people, they want to be paid that much attention and it's a reasonable kind of attention to be paid" (Arbus, p. 3). Thus, in a portrait like *Young man with curlers at home on West 20th Street, NY* (1966), the young man's candid gaze and gestures convey his own investment in the attention and interest Arbus brought to their encounter. If going to shoot new subjects was, as Arbus suggested, like "a blind date," we feel that it involved risk and excitement for both her and her sitter.

EXAMPLE 2:

In the statement published in the catalogue to her posthumous 1972 exhibition, Diane Arbus famously outlined what she termed "the flaw": "Everybody has that thing where they need to look one way but they come out looking another way and that's what people observe. You see someone on the street and essentially what you notice about them is the flaw" (Arbus, p. 3). For Arbus, this "flaw" seems

to be not simply a matter of external appearance, but a sign of a larger social malaise. In *Child with a toy grenade, Central Park, NY* (1962), we understand the boy's freakish outward appearance as a sign of distress that is both personal and social …

EXAMPLE 3:

In her essay, "America, Seen Through Photographs, Darkly," the cultural critic Susan Sontag criticizes Diane Arbus's work for making visible – and in essence exploiting – states of private distress. She explains how Arbus uses the frontal portrait form to present her subjects for our vision:

> In the normal rhetoric of the photographic portrait, facing the camera signifies solemnity, frankness, the disclosure of the subject's essence. That is why frontality seems right for ceremonial pictures (like weddings, graduations) but less apt for photographs used on billboards to advertise political candidates … What makes Arbus's use of the frontal pose so arresting is that her subjects are often people one would not expect to surrender themselves so amiably and ingenuously to the camera. Thus, in Arbus's photographs, frontality also implies in the most vivid way the subject's cooperation (Sontag, 37-38).

It is telling that Sontag describes this as an act of "surrender," for, to Sontag, these people are already social victims, who are further victimized by Arbus. But while Sontag fixates on the frontality of Arbus's photographs as a sign of intimacy and cooperation, she fails to address what it means for Arbus to present socially marginalized subjects, like drag queens, dwarves or transvestites, in this type of formal centered format. Since the portrait confers importance, Arbus has in effect chosen to monumentalize and confer honor on figures who even in the 1960s were considered part of the social margins, and often denigrated …

EXAMPLE 4:

In the end, *Two girls in matching bathing suits, Coney Island, NY* (1967) is an embarrassing image. We do not want to be those girls. And ultimately, we feel that this image, and others like it, say far less about the photographed subjects than about the photographer. As Susan Sontag concludes, in her insightful critique of Arbus's work:

> What finally is most troubling in Arbus's photographs is not their subjects at all but the cumulative impression of the photographer's consciousness: the sense that what is presented is precisely a private vision, something voluntary. Arbus was not a poet delving into her entrails to relate her own pain but a photographer venturing out into the world to *collect* images that are painful (Sontag, p. 40).

And indeed, what is ironic about *Two girls* is that the scene is painful only in Arbus's perverse vision: she manages to capture the moment when two otherwise not unattractive girls look awkward and miserable, as if this misery says something profound about them, and their ultimately, about us too …