

REPORTAGE: ITALY

I wanted to get away from everyone else's subject matter, the man on the street, and deal with things I understood better - the confusing nature of beauty, the uses of power, and the isolation of creative people. It wasn't that I didn't know about people in the street. It's that I knew something different from what Helen Levitt knew.

Richard Avedon, February 1993

In the 1940's when Avedon was still developing his style he spent a period of time in Italy where he took a series of street photographs. While in many ways they appear an anomaly in relation to his later work they in fact illustrate many of the interests that he was later to develop into the trademarks of his oeuvre.



Zazi, street performer,
Italy, 1946



Rudolf Nureyev, dancer,
Paris, 1961

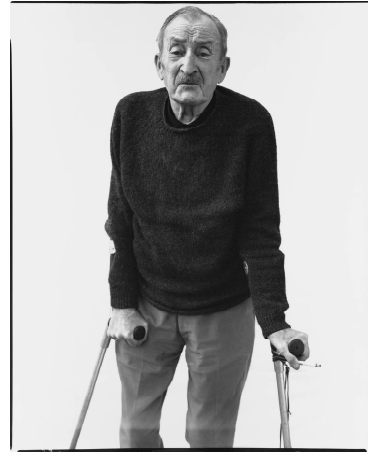
POINTS OF DEPARTURE:

1. Above is a picture of Zazi taken by Avedon as she performed in the street. Describe the picture. In what way does Zazi present herself to the camera?
2. Compare this reportage image to the later portrait of Rudolf Nureyev taken by Avedon. How does the image differ from the image of Zazi and in what ways is it similar? Throughout his life Avedon was fascinated by the subject as performer, by the 'surface' which people present to the world. In what way do both of these photographs

illustrate this fascination?



Italy #9, Boy and Tree,
Sicily, 1947



Alexey Brodovitch, graphic
designer, France, 1970

3. In the quote at the top of the page Avedon describes himself as knowing 'something different' from other photographers at the time. In this period many reportage photographers were obsessed with the idea of the photographer as an objective, often hidden, eye. In what ways does the composition of both the Zazi image and the picture of the boy and tree above contradict this idea of the reportage photographer?
4. In Italy #9 the context is virtually obliterated; sky and ground merge, the tree is almost an abstract. Writing about these images Jane Livingston describes the 'pressure toward weightlessness' shown in this series of images. What relation can we draw between this early reportage image of a little boy and a far later portrait of Alexey Brodovitch? How would you describe Avedon's attitude towards the background in both his image of Zazi and of the little boy?
5. Having looked at these two images from the Italy series in what ways do you see these images as part of Avedon's larger body of work and what recurrent themes can you see illustrated in these early images?