

Re-envisioning Everyday Spaces: Photorealism in the San Francisco Bay Area

by

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To Richard McLean, Ralph Goings, and Robert Bechtle

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Abstract

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by

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Photorealism, a style that transfers photographic imagery and conventions to the medium of painting, is one of the few artforms of the 1960s and 1970s that has yet to receive substantive reevaluation. Contrary to critics' derogatory dismissals, the style raises issues of production and interpretation central to postwar aesthetics and critical theory. This study argues that Photorealism's hybrid forms and iconographical dedication to everyday subjects are essential to understanding realism's post-abstract re-emergence, new directions in intermedial practice, and the cultural impact of demographic transformations of the American landscape.

Taking three Photorealist painters—Robert Bechtle, Richard McLean, and Ralph Goings—from the San Francisco Bay Area as case studies, this dissertation considers how the artists are tied to both the region's artistic lineage and its socio-geographic development. Their training and artworks are evidence of the persistent, but frequently overlooked, dialectic of

realist and modernist approaches, both in terms of formal strategies and notions of artistic commitment. Their collective iconography also registers pivotal postwar spatial developments. I contend Bechtle, Goings, and McLean's chosen subjects are not simple distillations of urban, suburban, or rural landscapes, but, rather, places where such categories are continuous—a national phenomenon with great social and ecological impact.

These examinations of form and environment are balanced by a historiographic study of the ways in which Photorealism is key to critical and theoretical debates over contemporary realism. The style functions as a central node in these contentious dialogues, and is tied to both new directions in American figurative art and contemporaneous realist investigations in European literature and theory. These parallels point to a complex network between the visual and the verbal and the American and the European; my research documents how each party borrowed cultural goods to advance their own views on artistic innovation and cultural identity.

Ultimately Photorealism is an essential part of the geographic, aesthetic, and critical discourses of its era. Its forms and subjects are significant artifacts of the spaces of everyday life and offer a fresh view of negotiations between the formal and the vernacular, the modern and postmodern, and new and traditional media.

INTRODUCTION

Photorealism Now

Strolling through a museum collection or gallery of contemporary art today, one is quite likely to encounter paintings based on photographic source material. While Gerhard Richter's blurred canvases loom largest in critical and academic accounts, a number of other well-recognized figures in the contemporary art world—Luc Tuymans, Marlene Dumas, Peter Doig, Elizabeth Peyton, Vija Celmins, Marilyn Minter, David Hockney, and Erich Fischl, to name only the most prominent—likewise paint from photographs. Few of these artists reproduce their sources exactly. Indeed, many use painterly elements to screen the photography's information or precision, and thus they refer to the other medium's lapses and omissions as much as its promises. These strategies inject doubt into the photographic source, implying it to be insufficient as documentary or emotive material. Yet, while the persistent nesting of photography within the painting process often evidences some technological skepticism, it is also an indication of the newer medium's profound cultural and psychological weight. In the early twenty-first century it is difficult to think outside of the photograph, whether that imagery is the material record of histories or the digital profusion that floods the present moment. For painters committed to representing the modern milieu, photography is both an essential source of information and an undeniable component of daily life and visual perception.

Yet, even accounting for the immense role photography plays in contemporary life, the general acceptance of photographic painting remains striking. Though photography now

permeates nearly every kind of artistic practice, just a few decades ago many attempted to proscribe its reach. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Photorealism was rebuked for an excess of fidelity to the photograph: for most critics the style's direct transfer of photograph to canvas breached the limits of mechanical reproduction allowable in painting. In their eyes this strategy produced works that are slavishly dependent on their photographic source material and thus incapable of achieving any aesthetic value greater than the middle-class consumer culture the paintings often depict.

How does one account for the gap between verboten and widespread that has elapsed in only a few decades time? Is it simply a matter of late twentieth-century accelerated stylistic turnover, making what seemed offensive yesterday appear un-noteworthy today? Did the age of postmodernism nullify any sense of critical propriety, ushering in a permanent state of anything-goes with its profound mixture of "high" and "low"? It is perhaps tempting to simply affirm the latter two sentiments, but such panacea-type responses ignore the issues so forcefully raised by the past several decades of aesthetic production. Now more than ever, as photographic media of all varieties becomes increasingly pervasive but painting's cultural force persists, it is incumbent upon historians to articulate how the two have come to share their present terrain. This dissertation, a diverse account of Photorealism's strategies, subjects, and context, is an attempt to bring into focus what is perhaps the fever-pitch incident in the historical relationship between these two media.

If the photographic component of Photorealism raises particularly trenchant material and perceptual issues for contemporary historians, so does the other half of its appellation. As Brendan Prendeville notes, in the twentieth century realism is almost always a modified noun,

indicating particular aims and means, and, moreover, partial or hybrid status.¹ Despite—or perhaps because of—these numerous subcategories, postwar realism remains a neglected terrain. Though realism persists across both the modern and postmodern eras, its aesthetic and ideological slipperiness make it a difficult category of inquiry, particularly in the context of plural and competing usages. This flexibility allowed, for example, both Robert Ryman to describe his abstract white canvases and Philip Pearlstein to refer to his observational nudes as “realist” in the same historical moment.² These gaps though, as Ryman and Pearlstein’s diverse usages demonstrate, also allow for continued relevance: the drive toward some kind of fidelity to reality, either through material or representational means, could adapt to the shifting demands of the particular social, cultural, and aesthetic context. Terminological profusion and inconsistent usage may confuse public reception or stymie critics and historians, but that plurality is also evidence of realism’s productive reinvention.

Photorealism, I contend, is a crucial piece of the postwar realist puzzle. Though the style received considerable press coverage during its heyday, it remains a mere footnote in most accounts of the twentieth century.³ Not only did the Photorealists push the use of photography within painting to an unparalleled height, but they also addressed formal and social issues pivotal to their period. As many begin to acknowledge the constant and critical dialectic between modernism and realism, Photorealism’s unusual fusion of the formal tenets of modernism and the illusions of photography shed new light on that critical relationship. Likewise, Photorealist iconography—subject matter so commonplace that its value was often invisible to its original

¹ Brendan Prendeville, *Realism in Twentieth-Century Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 12.

² On Robert Ryman’s use of the word realist to describe his work, see David Batchelor, “On Paintings and Pictures: In Conversation with Robert Ryman,” *Freize* 10 (May 1993) http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/on_paintings_and_pictures/ (accessed January 9, 2013). For Philip Pearlstein’s views on realism, see David Yezzi, “A Conversation with Philip Pearlstein,” *The New Criterion* (December 2004) <http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/a-conversation-with-philip-pearlstein-1174> (accessed January 11, 2013).

³ For a critical historiography of the style and contemporaneous realist variants, see chapter two.

viewers—offers a crucial window onto American landscapes and material culture of the recent past. Current perspectives perhaps cannot help but be inflected with bits of nostalgia for the 1960s and 1970s cars, homes, and commercial locales the Photorealists recorded, but that distance also hopefully affords clarity on their cultural weight.

Finally, the timing of this dissertation also hinges on a few basic but essential temporal factors. The original generation of Photorealist painters is now in the latter phase of their respective careers—an optimal moment to collect their reflections on their longstanding, consistent commitment to the style.⁴ I was privileged with the extensive cooperation of my artist subjects, Robert Bechtle, Richard McLean, and Ralph Goings; all three shared their memories and opinions with great candor. Likewise, the two New York gallerists fundamental to the Photorealists' careers, Ivan Karp and Louis K. Meisel, spoke frankly about their personal and professional dealings, and also offered generous access to their gallery holdings and personal collections. In particular, I was fortunate to have interviewed Ivan Karp, the first dealer to support Photorealism, just prior to his death this past summer. Personal and professional networks are always crucial to art's making, circulation, and reception; part of my aim is to synthesize these Photorealist links in ways little heretofore observed, to parallel the fluid relationships between the intimate everyday and the world at large crystalized in the paintings themselves.

⁴ A number of younger artists have taken up the original generation's ideas and techniques. See, for instance, John Russell Taylor and Maggie Bollaert, *Exactitude: Hyperrealist Art Today* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009). *Exactitude* was published in conjunction with a series of exhibitions at London's Plus One gallery, which specializes in contemporary realist painting and represents many younger Photorealists. See <http://www.plusonegallery.com/Artist.cfm>. Louis K. Meisel, who has long supported the original generation with his catalog-raisonné type publications and eponymous gallery, also represents a number of the new Photorealists. See <http://www.meisलगallery.com/lkmg/artists/>. As Meisel noted in conversation, many of these artists produce paintings that are even more precise than those of their predecessors, an increased illusionism aided by advances in digital photography. Louis K. Meisel, interview by author, New York, April 13, 2012.

A West Coast Story

The story of Photorealism has been told with a variety of aims, with critical designations ranging from retrograde, conservative realism to the postmodern impossibility of such transparent realist representation. These varying descriptors, however, camouflage the relative uniformity of most narratives: Photorealism is generally seen as an extension of or successor to Pop, slavishly dependent on the illusions of mechanical sources, allied with capitalist culture, and thus cunningly designed to appeal to the basest of popular tastes. Such judgments deem the style an insignificant aberration during a period of more aesthetically “challenging” and critically approved trends like Minimalism and Conceptualism. This dissertation tells different story, one that is both more focused, concentrating on a few Photorealists, and more comprehensive, aiming to integrate those artists’ works with the sites of their production and the social and cultural shifts endemic to their time.

My reframing of Photorealism places the style among pivotal aesthetic and environmental developments in postwar America. Contrary to the frequent assumption that the style reflects very little about artistic innovation or contemporary events, I argue that its strategies and subjects are representative of emergent media trends, the shifting uses and meanings of realism, and the transformation of the nation’s built environment.⁵ Photorealism’s status as a hybrid form with iconographical dedication to everyday subjects speaks to the fruitful interactions between traditional “high art” and vernacular media, new aesthetic values in the contemporary art scene, and the crucial impact of new living spaces. This strategy does not attempt to redefine the works as explicitly political—a reading at odds with both the aims of the

⁵ Critics have generally been quite disparaging toward the style, while historians have done little to rectify the lacuna surrounding Photorealism in decades otherwise nearly saturated with aesthetic scholarship. Aside from the consistently strong work of a few writers like Linda Nochlin, the most engaging discussions of Photorealism often appear in broader discussions of postwar or postmodern culture. For a critical historiography of Photorealism, see chapters two and four.

artists and the subjects they choose—but does contend that there is a politics to the works, each formal and iconographic choice reflecting or refracting changes in American culture and artistic production.

In order to open up these unexplored avenues of critical inquiry, the dissertation takes several approaches. My case studies are three painters that hail from the San Francisco Bay Area: Robert Bechtle, Richard McLean, and Ralph Goings. Though a number of other Photorealists occasionally appear as points of comparison, this dissertation is not a completist evaluation of the style. In addition, I understand Photorealism to be a *style* rather than a *movement*: although virtually all of its original practitioners appeared on the scene at the same time and frequently exhibited overlapping methods and subjects, they did not act ideologically or aesthetically as a collective.⁶ Many of the geographically dispersed Photorealists only learned of their contemporaries' work through press accounts or shared gallery representation.⁷ Hence attempts to comprehensively account for their motives and accomplishments tend to yield scattershot analysis, connecting artists only by categories of subject matter or details of material practice. These links undoubtedly warrant consideration, but their frequent employment has tended to oversimplify a vast and varied body of work. In contrast, Bechtle, McLean, and Goings are anomalous in being the only Photorealists to live, for a time, in a fairly communal setting—a difference that allows for a productive study of their aesthetic innovations and engagement with

⁶ Style, admittedly, is an imperfect term—particularly in light of its very broad and, in the art world, occasionally derogatory connotations—but movement implies a collectivity that was never present among the Photorealists. My use of style here is intended roughly in this sense, “A particular mode or form of skilled construction, execution, or production; the manner in which a work of art is executed, regarded as characteristic of the individual artist, or of his time and place,” which the Oxford English Dictionary traces to the early eighteenth century. “Style, n.” *OED Online* (December 2012) Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/19231> (accessed November 14, 2012). The OED defines movement as “A course or series of actions and endeavours on the part of a group of people working towards a shared goal; an organization, coalition, or alliance of people working to advance a shared political, social, or artistic objective.” “Movement, n.” *OED Online* (September 2012) Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/123031> (accessed November 14, 2012).

⁷ See, for instance, Robert Bechtle and Ralph Goings's comments in “The Photo-Realists: 12 Interviews,” *Art in America* (November – December 1972): 73, 88.

the changing socioeconomic climate of 1960s and 1970s America. While they never formed a cohesive or purposeful group, overlaps in influence, schooling, and iconography, in addition to shared social and professional links, constitute a fruitful dynamic worthy of extended examination.

Focusing on the Bay Area Photorealists offers not only a finite set of case studies among a large, disparate group, but also provides an alternative view to writing on the two best-known, New York-based artists, Richard Estes and Chuck Close. Though these two artists merit the recognition they have received, their work frequently fits more neatly into art-world centric categories.⁸ Moreover, it is my intent to avoid reifying old East-West Coast binaries; while certain aspects of such dichotomies undoubtedly hold true, these comparisons often promote facile equations of New York with a dense cultural center and California as a peripheral site of production. California is ultimately valuable as a case study not only because it is anomalous, offering alternative subjects and spaces of intrigue fostered by its particular geographic and economic histories, but also because it is simultaneously archetypal—a place of model images and lifestyles. As Richard Cándida Smith reflects, “With a history that combines features of both core and periphery, California provides an unusual perspective for studying the relationship of

⁸ Estes has painted New York City scenes for many years, while Close’s portraits often feature well-known members of the art world. It should also be noted that Photorealism makes up only a portion of Close’s output, which is generally more conceptual in format and intent—a likely reason for his better reception. Close has been the subject of a number of museum exhibitions and publications. Foremost among these is Robert Storr’s volume produced in conjunction with a Museum of Modern Art retrospective. See Robert Storr, *Chuck Close*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1998). Estes, while generally received on much more favorable terms than the other Photorealists, is not as widely lauded as Close. There are a number of monographs devoted to Estes’s work; two that rise above the rest are John Canaday and John Arthur’s *Richard Estes: The Urban Landscape* and a recent Italian volume by Sandro Parmiggiani and Guillermo Solana. See John Canaday and John Arthur, *Richard Estes: The Urban Landscape* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1978); and Sandro Parmiggiani and Guillermo Solana, *Richard Estes* (Milan: Skira, 2007). Estes iconography is of great interest to me, reflecting, as with the Bay Area Photorealists, the nuances of New York’s shifting landscape and economy. His work awaits the analysis of a scholar attuned to the finer points of these forces.

economic development, social opportunity, and cultural expression, a perspective with implications for the future of international cultural exchange.”⁹

Bechtle, McLean, and Goings—known respectively for their vivid paintings of parked cars, show horses, and casual eateries—are tied to both California’s artistic lineage and its socio-geographic development. All are indebted to the Bay Area’s particular strain of modernist figuration and persistently choose subjects that reflect everyday life in the contemporary American landscape. Exposure to Bay Area Figuration at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland provided the artists with a model for integrating the figurative and the abstract, a knowledge that would prove essential for injecting the formal advantages of modernism into the dense visual information of their source photographs.¹⁰ Likewise, as all three utilized images of California locales and landscapes, they registered pivotal spatial developments often only addressed in the technical terms of demography or the superficial tones of pop culture. Theirs is the domain of the suburban house, the family station wagon, the amateur horse show, and the local fast food restaurant or diner. Tapping into this rich vein of the everyday, the artists’ collective oeuvre stands as an essential study of both the specificities of Sunbelt living and its larger implications for modeling architectural and economic growth across the nation.

My investigation of how art relates to place incorporates not only examinations of local-level case studies, but also perceptions of national identity both in the United States and abroad. Photorealism, a homegrown style often devoted to the material traces of American capitalism, was popular among both American and European collectors who frequently projected a range of

⁹ Richard Cándida-Smith, *The Modern Moves West: California Artists and Democratic Culture in the Twentieth Century*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 8.

¹⁰ The California College of Arts and Crafts (CCAC) is now known as California College of the Arts (CCA). The institution changed its name in 2003 to reflect a broader purview (and perhaps avoid the negative connotations of the word craft); the original name reflects the founder, Frederick Meyer’s involvement with the Arts and Crafts movement. See “California College of the Arts History,” <http://www.cca.edu/about/history> (accessed December 21, 2012).

nationalistic ideologies onto its everyday subjects. Additionally, the style was employed by a number of European theorists engaged in redefining the terms and effects of realism, many attracted to the form not only for its aesthetic innovations, but also its contemporary social implications. Reciprocally, Photorealism was also connected by American critics to European realist novels—both in the cases of advocates seeking to shore up Photorealist accomplishments through reference to erudite continental literature and critics disparaging painting and novel's shared tendency toward copious, "dry" visual detail. Accordingly, the chapters that follow oscillate between the micro and macro, probing issues of geographic identity and representation in local, national, and international contexts. This varied siting points to a complex web of exchange, and ties the case studies to both the broader postwar revival of American realism in the visual arts and to literary and theoretical meditations on realist form in Western Europe.

The dissertation demonstrates Photorealism's relevance in multiple forums, rather than offering a singular interpretation or counterargument against earlier critical dismissals. Looking back, it is easy to see that the style was a prescient indicator of major trends to come: postmodern appropriation and medium hybridity, the widespread use of photo-based painting, and the elevation of large-scale color photography. While these predictive elements are telling, Photorealism is also a pivotal case study of its own time, dialectically engaging the formal and the vernacular, the modern and the postmodern, and new and old media. Within its banal scenes of everyday life, much aesthetic and cultural reckoning takes place.

Defining the Everyday: Lived Experience and Spatial Analysis

In order to express the import of the Bay Area Photorealists' new landscapes, my research uses literature from several fields to articulate a nexus of visual, social, and spatial

issues. The dissertation borrows much from urban and suburban studies: the vast historical debate surrounding suburbia is essential to understanding how these apparently “middle-class” paintings were received. Likewise, accounts of the Bay Area’s rapid socio-economic growth—the fruit of new technological industries cultivated during the Cold War—in both historical appraisals and memoirs provide concrete particulars for the visual milieu of Photorealist painting. On a broader level, theories of the everyday and material culture, especially those by contemporaneous French theorists grappling with their own nation’s accelerated experience of modernization, supply foundational methods for my research.

Theory of the “everyday” is now a broad field with many uses and a wide variety of adherents. I have chosen the term as part of this study’s title not simply to describe my Photorealist case studies’ ordinary subjects—clearly family cars, suburban houses, fast food restaurants, and even horse shows are the stuff of regular life for a broad swath of Americans—but to tap into the larger investigatory framework pioneered by French sociologist Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre’s work is both dense and sprawling; his *Critique of Everyday Life*, begun just as World War II came to a close, grew over several decades to a multi-volume project.¹¹ But, as Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross note, it is also historically specific in a manner directly relevant to the parameters of this dissertation:

Everyday life, defined elliptically as ‘whatever remains after one has eliminated all specialized activities,’ is, Lefebvre argues, a limited historical phenomenon. It is inextricably tied to two parallel developments: first, to the rise of a middle class and the demise of the great ‘styles’ formerly imposed in western societies by Church and

¹¹ As noted, there are now many theorizations of the everyday. Of the works that follow Lefebvre’s, Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980) is the most widely referenced. While de Certeau’s emphasis on urban experience is relevant to this study, his formulations are from a distinctly later perspective than Photorealism’s mid-sixties origins. Lefebvre speaks in a moment when the shifting cultural and demographic landscape was troubling, but also a potential site for transformation. These aspects of the everyday are much more codified by the time of de Certeau’s writing, leading him toward an emphasis on the (often phenomenological) “tactics” that offer resistance, but not permanent change: “The actual order of things is precisely what ‘popular’ tactics turn to their own ends, without any illusion that it will change any time soon.” Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 26.

Monarch; second, to the vast migration of those middle classes to urban centers, spaces where their everyday activities would become increasingly organized—hence perceptible.¹²

Though the origins of the modern everyday lie in the nineteenth century, it was not until the post-World War II era that it became a pronounced object of study in France—critical attention fostered by the concentrated economic and population boom of the years known as *les trentes glorieuses*.¹³ The nation also saw a notable influx of American culture, ideologies imported through the currency of quotidian commercial products (movies, jeans, cleaning products, etc.) and the economic aid of the Marshall Plan.¹⁴ Yet, as Kaplan and Ross note, despite the aspirations toward American capitalism pivotal to French theories of the everyday, American academics of the period tended to formulate questions of lived experience in the older terms of morality or existentialism.¹⁵ Unlike French structuralism, which was quickly and widely adapted in the States, Lefebvre’s dialectical model remained largely overlooked here until the rise of postmodernism in the seventies and eighties.¹⁶

If American academia lagged behind the French in theoretical dissections of the everyday, other documents of the period reflect pivotal perspectives on quotidian matters. Notably, the American Women’s Liberation Movement drew attention to the plight of women

¹² Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross, “Introduction,” *Yale French Studies* no. 73, *Everyday Life* (1987): 2.

¹³ *Les trentes glorieuses* [the glorious thirty] refers to the roughly thirty-year period following World War II, during which time France (among other western nations) saw increasing economic prosperity, urbanization, and marked population growth. The period ended with the economic recession triggered by the 1973 oil crisis.

¹⁴ Perhaps the most compelling document of shifting French material culture during this period is Roland Barthes’s *Mythologies*, an ideological critique infused with the writer’s earliest interests in semiology. In the text’s original introduction, Barthes describes its short essays as “written one each month for about two years, from 1954 to 1956, on topics suggested by current events. I was at the time trying to reflect regularly on some myths of French daily life... The starting point of these reflections was usually a feeling of impatience at the sight of the ‘naturalness’ with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history.” Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 11.

¹⁵ Kaplan and Ross, 2.

¹⁶ Among the postmodern theorists that look to Lefebvre’s work are Frederic Jameson, Edward Soja, and David Harvey.

trapped within the confines of expected domesticity. The oft-quoted opening passage of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* crystalizes the problems of gender inequality in distinctly everyday terms:

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—‘Is this all?’¹⁷

While an explicit theorization of the everyday equaling mid-century continental thinking may be absent in American critical discourse, it clearly permeates the contemporary politics of domesticity.¹⁸ Suburbia—particularly its associated consumerism and environmental footprint—was a central site for these debates over the everyday.

Lefebvre, too, paid great heed to shifts in postwar demography. Though his status as a sociologist is often construed in a fairly abstract sense, focusing on the philosophical origins and implications of his formulations, much of his work involved empirical studies of architecture and city planning.¹⁹ In Lefebvre's view, it is in the urbanization of society that humanity's existence becomes ordered and repetitive, and thus generates quantifiable routines and a visible everyday. However, neither “urbanization” nor the theorist's famed slogan of the collective “right to the city,” should be mistaken for a singular emphasis on traditional city cores. Just as America witnessed a postwar explosion of ex-urban development, France likewise wrestled with

¹⁷ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963), 15. Friedan was criticized early on for putting forth an analysis mainly applicable to middle-class white women. Yet, the terms of the critique itself are an important part of the suburban debates; suburbia and its relation to the everyday are discussed in chapter three.

¹⁸ For a discussion of perhaps the most overtly political debate concerning domesticity, the so-called “Kitchen Debate” between Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Krushchev, see Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 242-83.

¹⁹ On the relationship between Lefebvre's empirical studies and his philosophical positions, see Lukasz Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

appropriate architectural models for new industries and a rapidly growing population, both of which appeared in peripheral locations; as Lefebvre pithily observes, “Here the city has grown an appendix.”²⁰ His objects of study frequently included the “New Towns” erected from scratch to support new industry, the critically loathed “*pavillons*” (single-family, detached suburban homes) widely desired by the French populace, and the “*grands ensembles*” (collective housing estates) at the center of much debate over functionalist modernism.

Lefebvre devoted considerable reflection to such spaces in the fifties and sixties; watching the construction of the “New Town” of Mourenx, built to house workers following the discovery of new oil wells, the theorist wonders whether “we are entering the city of joy or the world of unredeemable boredom?”²¹ He finds this ready-made settlement troubling—an unsurprising reaction given the workplace hierarchy projected on the housing structures, which segregated workers by occupational categories. Yet, despite the town’s over-determined, “impoverishing legibility,” it is, in Lefebvre’s view, not without redemptive possibilities. Ultimately he sees the new built environment as a challenge—a system of alienated, abstract relations that can encourage a return toward the intimacies and freedoms of yore:

No, we will not find a style for our age in a place like this. But we will find the way towards it. For it is here that our age must face up to the challenge. And if one day, by luck or by judgment, it does find its style in everyday life, and if it does manage to resolve the duality between the ‘technical object’ and the ‘aesthetic object’, then surely the success will be all the more dazzling because of the setbacks, and the tremendous efforts involved. ‘Transform the world’ – all well and good. It is being transformed. But into what? Here, at your feet, is one small but crucial element in that mutation.²²

²⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume 1*, trans. John Moore (Verso: London, 1991), 43.

²¹ Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity*, trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 1995), 119. On the history of Mourenx and Lefebvre’s connection with the western Pyrenees, see again Stanek, 106-33. The housing estates built in Mourenx include both large structures resemble urban housing projects in the United States and detached single-family homes more akin to our suburban model.

²² Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity*, 126.

Lefebvre's project is one that consistently seeks to alleviate the alienation he sees as a product of the division of labor that defines modernity's everyday. In this way his writings became pivotal for many members of the New Left and are often cited as key inspirations in the sea change of May 1968. Most famously, Lefebvre was an inspiration for the Situationists in their efforts to reclaim the space of the city, pressing the use of its physical spaces into playful subversions (the *dérive* or drift) that liberate the urban sensorium ("psycho geography").²³

This strong association with the postwar avant-garde, and, moreover, his consistent (if not orthodox) Marxism, may seem to preclude linking Lefebvre's analysis with an art form lacking explicit political motivations and frequently devoted to representing the products of American capitalism. Yet, Lefebvre does not command a systematic methodology, but rather encourages a multiplicity of approaches, "a range of attentions that place it radically within a framework of critical interdisciplinarity."²⁴ His guidance for analysis of the everyday is central to my analysis. A (purposefully) common, modest example provides the model:

Thus the simplest event—a woman buying a pound of sugar, for example—must be analyzed. To understand this simple event, it is not enough merely to describe it; research will disclose a tangle of reasons and causes, of essences and 'spheres': the woman's life, her biography, her job, her family, her class, her budget, her eating habits, how she uses money, her opinions and ideas, the state of the market, etc. Finally I will have grasped the total sum of capitalist society, the nation and its history. And although what I grasp becomes more and more profound, it is contained from the start in the original little event. So now I can see the humble events of everyday life as having two sides: a little, individual, chance event—and at the same time an infinitely complex social event, richer than the many 'essences' it contains within itself. The social phenomenon may be defined as the unity of these two sides. It remains for us to explain why the infinite complexity of these events is hidden, and to discover why—and this too is part of their reality—they appear to be so humble.²⁵

²³ On Lefebvre's association with the Situationists, see Edward Ball, "The Great Sideshow of the Situationist International," *Yale French Studies* no. 73, *Everyday Life* (1987): 21-37; and Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2001), 137-42.

²⁴ Highmore, 143.

²⁵ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume 1*, 57.

Again, as Kristin Ross reflects, Lefebvre's feat is in formulating the everyday as a concept: "to wrench it from the continuum in which it is embedded (or better yet, the continuum that it is), to expose it, examine it, give it a history, is already to form a critique of it."²⁶

Ultimately Lefebvre's dialectical model renders the everyday not only the center of critique, the space where the modern economy has rendered life isolated and unfulfilling, but also the site of potential transformation. It is banal, trivial, and repetitive, but also profound—the "lived" of life itself.²⁷ For Lefebvre the everyday is neither "nothing" (as the positivists might have it) nor "everything" (the metaphysical view), but "something"—"A mixture of nature and culture, the historical and the lived, the individual and the social, the real and the unreal, a place of transactions, of meetings, of interactions and conflicts, in short a level of *reality*."²⁸ This dissertation's debt to Lefebvre is thus twofold: Photorealism's subjects are just such a "something," individual traces of living that visually interpret the social or historical level of reality.²⁹ In a more meta-sense, my analysis attempts to reintroduce this something of Photorealism's everyday into the expanse of its larger networks, reintegrating it with questions of reality and realism, representation and aesthetics, and culture and landscape central to its period of production.

Though his analysis of the everyday was a life-long project, Lefebvre is now more widely known for his discussions of space, particularly his 1974 work, *The Production of Space*. The study effectively nullifies any lingering notions that space can simply be treated as an empty

²⁶ Kristin Ross, "French Quotidian," *The Art of the Everyday: The Quotidian in Postwar French Culture*, ed. Lynn Gumpert (New York: Grey Art Gallery, 1997), 20.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume 2*, trans. John Moore (Verso: London, 2002), 47.

²⁹ The hints of postmodernist thinking or postmodernism avant la lettre visible in Lefebvre's work are not only intriguing—and indeed, pivotal to the thinking of central postmodern theorists like David Harvey and Edward Soja (see note 7 above)—but also, in my view, parallel to Photorealism's position as a style just on the cusp of that aesthetic/sociological prism. On Lefebvre's parallels with Jameson, see again Highmore, 131-47.

container by asserting its status as a social product—a means of production, power, and control. *The Production of Space*'s model involves a conceptual triad composed of “spatial practice,” “representations of space,” and “representational spaces.” The first element denotes society’s “secretion” of space, the movement by which it “produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it.”³⁰ The second term refers to conceptualized space, the discursive realms of planning and analysis undertaken by scientists, engineers, urbanists, and “a certain type of artist with a scientific bent.”³¹ Finally, “representational spaces” are those lived, but also open to imaginative possibility: “the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users,’ but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who *describe* and aspire to do no more than describe. This is the dominated—and hence passively experienced—space that the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects.”³² As Rob Shields contends, Lefebvre’s conception of *perçu-conçu-veçu* (perceived-conceived-lived) spatial elements reveals “that the system of space is not just spatial practice, in the sense of its social construction, but equally the representations of it and discourses about it, and it is also equally its reflexive effects, promoting here, limiting there.”³³

Photorealist landscapes could be fitted within the second or third category of Lefebvre’s triad, depending on whether one views their representations as essentially conservative and ideologically confining or open to new conceptions of social space.³⁴ This dissertation, of course,

³⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 38.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 39.

³³ Rob Shields, *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle: Spatial Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 1999), 154.

³⁴ Lefebvre’s discussions of visual art generally center on either Classical representations or the historic avant-garde; he is mostly interested in exploring how these forms reflect the spatial transformations of their era. Landscapes are particularly problematic for Lefebvre, for in his opinion they allow the viewer to falsely claim the image as her own—the instant consumability that encourages the delusion of participating in the work. See *Production of Space*, especially 189, and 300-5.

hinges on the latter argument. But even if Lefebvre may have deemed Photorealism an image of false clarity, his work on space, as Ben Highmore argues, is most usefully thought of as a continuation of his critique of the everyday: “By understanding the urban as a general condition of modern life (to be found in small towns and suburbs, etc.), Lefebvre allows for a more inclusive approach to modern everyday life.”³⁵ This inclusivity offers a place for the “middle-class” subjects and spaces of Photorealism, comprehending their imagery and formulation as both registrations of the ordinary present and the “superior realms of social practice”:

The human world is not defined simply by the historical, by culture, by totality or society as a whole, or by ideological and political superstructures. It is defined by this intermediate and mediating *level*: everyday life. In it, the most concrete of dialectical movements can be observed: need and desire, pleasure and absence of pleasure, satisfaction and privation (or frustration), fulfillments and empty spaces, work and non-work. The repetitive part, in the mechanical sense of the term, and the creative part of the everyday become embroiled in a permanently reactivated circuit in a way in which only dialectical analysis can perceive.³⁶

This dissertation takes Lefebvre’s perspective as a starting point for examining Photorealism. It does not posit Photorealism as an explicit critique of the everyday, nor does it engage Marxist analysis. But it does seek to tug at these works from the perspectives Lefebvre so artfully defined, seeing the ways in which these images of ordinary objects and spaces contain vital traces of their culture, economy, and history. Accordingly, the following chapters alternate between smaller and larger foci, turning from the intimate associations of Bay Area aesthetics in chapter one to the wider terrain of postwar realism in chapter two, and from the specific spaces of West Coast demographic transformations in chapter three to the broad networks of American and European collectors and theorists in chapter four. It is my hope that this dual attention to detail and larger fabric will revivify the form’s aesthetic and social relevance.

³⁵ Highmore, 137.

³⁶ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume 2*, 45.

The Hybrid or Intermedial: Photographs as Painting

In addition to the question of what Photorealism depicts—its everyday contents—there is the question of how it represents. The latter issue is itself manifold: the style has been fitted into several representational categories including the broad field of realism and a number of its specific period or national variants, the advent of postmodernism, and the proliferation of “hybrid media” practices. Realist traditions and postmodernism are discussed at length in chapters two and four; here I would like to reflect on general matters related to hybrid or intermedial art—a brief summation of period energies that helps set the stage for Photorealism’s particular strategies and innovations.³⁷

While media hybridity is not unique to the postwar era, the fifties, sixties, and seventies witnessed a seeming explosion of intermedial practices. New ways of engaging with medium yielded a number of novel processes and techniques—many of the latter indebted to industrial or mass media technologies. Likewise, the era saw an expansion of what medium itself could be, as artists increasingly engaged with the stuff and spaces of everyday life or utilized the body as a primary form of expression. Indeed, the latter half of twentieth-century art history can in some ways be summed up as a time when materiality becomes complicated or rethought—not simply a progression toward dematerialization or even a nullification of “high” and “low,” but rather a general rethinking of what it means to engage with both subject and process through an expanded purview of material composition.

³⁷ As with Photorealism, terminological profusion is an issue here. Both hybridity and intermedia are used widely today, often interchangeably. Both also have longstanding scientific uses; hybridity gained traction in the art world with the debates of postmodernism and contemporaneous work in postcolonial theory. Usage of intermedia perhaps has a slightly earlier origin, namely Fluxus artist Dick Higgins’s 1965 eponymous statement on the subject. Higgins uses the term to describe contemporary avant-garde practices such as Robert Rauschenberg’s “combines” and Allan Kaprow’s “happenings”: “[Intermedia is] not governed by rules; each work determines its own medium and form according to its needs.” The artist sees the trend as one spurred by contemporary social problems, problems that “no longer allow a compartmentalized approach.” Dick Higgins, “Intermedia,” *Something Else Newsletter* 1, No. 1 (Something Else Press, 1966), reprinted in *Leonardo* 34, no. 1 (February 2001): 49-50.

Unlike a number of more radical or ephemeral practices of the sixties and seventies, Photorealist works are still clearly delineated objects and—despite the contentions of scornful critics—make definite claims to being works of art. Nonetheless, the style does destabilize medium boundaries, generating a newly productive dialogue between painting and photography. The relationship between the two mediums has a long and fraught history; nearly two centuries of competition and collaboration have yielded rich material and ideological friction, each form testing the other’s boundaries through appropriation of style or technique, or, moreover, usurpation of social or aesthetic function. In the art world’s estimation painting has generally maintained its rank as superior progenitor, but it too has often scrambled to match photography’s documentary precision and claims of contemporaneity. The overlap between the two art forms has generated a strangely illuminating succession of high art and vernacular practices, ranging from realist giant Thomas Eakins’s disguised use of photographic source material in the 1870s to the plethora of hand painted photographs that circulated in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³⁸

The fifties and sixties register an increasing emphasis on painterly uses of photography, most evident in the work of Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol and their adaptation of commercial processes and imagery. While this turn of events has often been interpreted as a transformative progression, as Michael Lobel argues, the artists’ chosen techniques were often low-tech: “In many cases, photography was not used to update or refine the craft of painting. Rather, it was employed to emphasize qualities of awkwardness or hamfisted-ness, or to

³⁸ The body of literature on Eakins is, of course, vast and varied. For a technical discussion of his use of photographs, see Mark Tucker and Nica Gutman, “Photographs and the Making of Paintings,” in *Thomas Eakins*, ed. Darrel Sewell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). The most insightful analysis of these images comes from Michael Leja. See Michael Leja, *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 59-92. On the tradition of painted photographs, see Heinz K. Henisch and Bridget A. Henisch, *The Painted Photograph 1939-1914: Origins, Techniques, Aspirations* (University Park: Pennsylvania University State Press, 1996).

introduce a sense of historical anachronism.”³⁹ Photorealism separates itself from neo-Dada and Pop practices in generally shunning the “lo-fi” quality those aesthetics embraced: though the works emphasize their painstaking manual recreation of mechanical images, they also trade in precision. Photorealist paintings are not exact duplicates of photographs, but are constructed with a level of illusionistic fidelity strong enough to blur the boundaries between photographic “fact” and painterly “fabrication.” The style has historical resonance, though of a distinct form from the playful anachronisms or expressionistic elements of its predecessors. As Jonathan Weinberg reflects, Photorealist technique has the ability to conjure “something of the sensation of what it must have been like to see the first photographic images in all their wonder and horror. By transposing photographs to a different scale and a different medium, we sense their extraordinary illusionism and their utter artificiality: photography becomes strange again.”⁴⁰

The interchange Photorealism fosters between painting and photograph can be classified under Jens Schröter’s rubric of “transformational intermediality,” or the “representation of one medium by another.”⁴¹ At first the form seems questionable—examples such as a filmic imagery

³⁹ Michael Lobel, “Something Old, Something New,” in *Shared Intelligence: American Painting and the Photograph*, eds. Barbara Buhler Lynes and Jonathan Weinberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 123. The volume in which Lobel’s essay appears, published in conjunction with an exhibition at the Georgia O’Keeffe museum, is one of the best recent considerations of the painting-photography relationship, taking up many of the issues first set out by Van Deren Coke in *The Painter and The Photograph: From Delacroix to Warhol* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1972). Another worthwhile museum contribution to the field is the Hayward Gallery’s *The Painting of Modern Life: 1960s to Now* (London: Hayward Publishing, 2007). While publications devoted to individual artists working between painting and photography are common, more comprehensive studies are fairly scarce; Steve Edwards recent article on Gerhard Richter is particularly intriguing as one of the few pieces to consider the current critical favorite with an eye toward historic practices of coloring photographs. See Steve Edwards “A ‘Pariah in the World of Art’: Richter in Reverse Gear,” in *Where is the Photograph?*, eds. David Green, Joanna Lowry, and David Company (Brighton: Photoforum, 2003), 31–46.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Weinberg, “Introduction: Making it Real,” in *Shared Intelligence: American Painting and the Photograph*, 21.

⁴¹ Schröter defines four types of intermediality: “synthetic” (the fusion of two or more media into a new medium), “formal or transmedial” (the concept that formal properties or structures are shared by different media), “transformational” (discussed above), and “ontological” (the idea that media always exist in relation to one another; as noted, the flip side of transformational intermediality). Jens Schröter, “Four Models of Intermediality,” in *Travels in Intermediality: Reblurring the Boundaries*, Bernd Herzogenrath (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2012), 15–32.

of a text or a painted representation of music hardly seem a thorough meshing of media. But, as Schröter asserts, the relationship is not necessarily superficial: by referring to another medium, one medium can comment on another, even in such a way that its “everyday, normal states of being are defamiliarized or transformed.”⁴² Moreover, the implications of such transformations are ultimately ontological:

In order to be able to observe a transformation, or a “displacement”... a knowledge of what the represented medium (allegedly) *is* has to be there, as well as what the representing medium (allegedly) *is*. *Fundamental* differences have to be ascertained making it possible to describe what was added to represented medium by the representing medium; that is, just how it was ‘displaced.’⁴³

Presumably because of painting’s superior art-world status, Photorealism’s relational operations have often been pulled in the direction of that medium. Not only do the style’s practitioners consider themselves painters rather than painter-photographers or some other hyphenate appellation, but the art world, adhering to historical precedent, also generally perceived the works as an invasion of painting by photography.⁴⁴ Few have considered how Photorealism reflects back on photography, particularly its elevation of previously disvalued forms: family, snapshot, and, above all, color photography. For contemporary viewers used to seeing ubiquitous, large-scale color works by Thomas Struth, Rineke Dijkstra, Jeff Wall, and their contemporaries, it is easy to forget that this particular trend had yet to debut when Photorealism arrived on the scene.⁴⁵

⁴² Ibid., 27.

⁴³ Ibid., 27-8.

⁴⁴ Logically so—most all were trained as painters and the majority of their labor resides with the canvas rather than the camera. A few photography critics of the era did see the infringement operating in the reverse direction; see chapter two.

⁴⁵ The painters’ relationship to vernacular photography is discussed further in chapter one; for more on the art world’s belated acceptance of color photography, see chapter two.

One of the most prescient expositors of media is perhaps the most quoted source on the subject—Marshall McLuhan. His 1964 work *Understanding Media* is not a collection of hackneyed catchphrases, but rather an eclectically profound reflection on the roles, interactions, and impact of contemporary media. McLuhan is especially attuned to hybrid forms, observing that such comingling produces favorable opportunities to observe structural components and properties. Artists, in his view, are particularly suited to this task, and are “always the first to discover how to enable one medium to use or to release the power of another.”⁴⁶ Given the many artistic/technological experiments of the last few decades, these conclusions may now seem commonplace, but a further statement is particularly revelatory. Tucked into a discussion of radio toward the end of *Understanding Media*, McLuhan clarifies a fundamental tenet of his argument: “Although the medium is the *message*, the controls go beyond programming. The restraints are always directed to the “content,” which is always another medium. The content of the press is literary statement, as the content of book is speech, and the content of the movie is the novel.” McLuhan’s assertion that the content of any medium is “always another medium” distills the historic continuum; this pattern does not preclude innovation, but reveals the imbrication of media relations and the overlapping nature of media evolution.

In the case of photography, this nested historical content could either be the sketch (for its direct observational method) or the print (the predecessor in reproduced imagery); painting would likely be considered an expression of drawing content.⁴⁷ Defining the particulars of these relationships is in fact somewhat difficult, until, that is, the terms are reversed. By taking photography as painting’s content, the Photorealists not only revivify their own medium, but also

⁴⁶ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 49, 54.

⁴⁷ One of photography’s pioneers, William Henry Fox Talbot, titled his account of his photographic discoveries *The Pencil of Nature*. The metaphor was often employed in the nineteenth century.

enact an important structural and historical reversal. The painters may see their own practice as using photographic source material to disrupt painterly tradition and provide a conduit to undervalued subjects and techniques, but their works also tell us how photographs work. By enlarging photographic formats, utilizing the other medium's compositional structures, monocular vision, and precisely articulated depth of field, the Photorealists direct the viewer's attention back toward the almost invisible properties of photography, generating encounters that are nearly uncanny for their revelatory clarifications of a medium often unthinkingly absorbed and accepted.

Methodological Notes/Open Works

Just as this dissertation concerns a hybrid form, its methodology likewise combines a number of approaches. The four chapters that follow incorporate writings from recent urban and suburban studies, French literary theory, mid-century American and French novels, memoirs of the West Coast, and art criticism and theory of many different stripes. My overarching aim is to demonstrate the style's relevance in multiple forums, indicating how many pivotal moments in aesthetic theory and production are tied to or have laid claim to Photorealism's methods and subjects.

As indicated above, the chapters oscillate between focused examinations of the three West Coast case studies and larger frameworks of reception and interpretation. Chapters one and three center on detailed discussions of Bechtle, Goings, and McLean, with the aim of expressing both the socio-geographic particularities of their practices and the works' relevance to national demographic trends. The first chapter in part lays traditional groundwork, supplying relevant biographical, social, and historical details, but also uses these components to home in on the

central operations of their aesthetic. The heart of chapter one's visual analysis is twofold, first teasing out the realist-modernist dialectic the Bay Area Photorealists inherited from their local predecessors and adapted to the demands of photo-based painting, and secondly discerning the role vernacular photography plays in their work, in relation to both social and visual conventions. Chapter three examines how these artists offer acute understandings of landscapes in transition, focusing attention on spaces that blur urban, rural, and suburban boundaries. My research here employs not only general, historical accounts of the Bay Area's postwar growth, but also on-site examinations of particular painting locations. These details, alongside comparative imagery from contemporary film, painting, and photography, offer a new argument for Photorealism as a prime example of how the built environment and aesthetic perception evolve in tandem.

Chapters two and four balance the more finite focus of one and three with broader issues related to competing modes of contemporary realism, the reception of Photorealism, and networks of monetary and aesthetic exchange. These chapters are aimed at generating a new critical historiography, one that follows the realist dialogues of the 1960s and 1970s into their various, and often contradictory, ideological niches. Chapter two sketches the realist debates within contemporary American painting in order to ascertain how Photorealism fit among a multitude of postwar neo-realist practices. Rather than refute or even discard the mass of negative criticism lobbed at the style, I attempt to locate the driving forces of such critiques to uncover their social motivations in addition to their aesthetic biases. The chapter concludes with the debates of postmodernism, and thus ties earlier meditations on realist form to the later conclusions of such theorists as Frederic Jameson and Jean Baudrillard. Finally, chapter four is perhaps the most diverse of the dissertation's components, winding its way through several American and European Photorealist collectors, American critics' attempts to link Photorealism

to postwar French literature, and again, the retrospective appraisal of Photorealism as hyperreal or postmodern, this time in the context of issues national identity. Collectively these figures and their many texts reflect how the style was connected to an international network of aesthetic debates, discourses inflected with the dominant social and political currents of the postwar era. The final chapter thus balances the local with the national and the international, revealing not only the fluidity of exchange but also the persistence of national labels in the dawning age of globalization.

Initially it may seem strange to assert that artworks so purposefully specific can be relevant to the number of academic and social realms I investigate. But that is exactly the point: Photorealism has been neglected by art historians not only because of its association with the more mundane or transparently consumerist aspects of middle-class American culture, but because interpretively it is supremely hard to pin down. It is neither a style that provides forthright commentary on its subjects, nor, moreover, is the everyday a form that lends itself to straightforward analysis. In this sense Umberto Eco's well-known concept of the "open work" is a key inspiration for my heterogeneous musings. Eco's words are a potent reminder of how such productively ambiguous forms reflect the relationship between art and life:

All this explains how contemporary art can be seen as an epistemological metaphor. The discontinuity of phenomena has called into question the possibility of a unified, definitive image of our universe; art suggests a way for us to see the world in which we live, and, by seeing it, to accept it and integrate it into our sensibility. The open work assumes the task of giving us an image of discontinuity. It does not narrate it; it *is* it. It takes on a mediating role between the abstract categories of science and the living matter of our sensibility; it almost becomes a sort of transcendental scheme that allows us to comprehend new aspects of the world.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Umberto Eco, "The Open Work in the Visual Arts," in *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 90. For Eco the concept of the open work implies not simply that the work can be interpreted in a range of ways, but that such a range is in fact demanded by the work itself. As with Lefebvre, Eco mostly writes about avant-garde practices (*l'art informel*, etc.), but I contend that his ideas are still relevant to Photorealism. Perhaps the best proof lies in the painters' repeated use of the word "neutrality" to describe their work, by which they mean not anemic renderings of reality, but representations that purposefully generate

Realism is, in a sense, always epistemological; Photorealism refigures this investigatory inclination by taking photographic documents as the central fodder for its painterly experiments—we see in its canvases a reconstruction of the multitudinous images that now constitute our visual knowledge. As such it is indeed a form of open work rife with possibilities of interpretive exploration.

interpretive indeterminacy. For example, see again remarks by Bechtle, McLean, Goings, and Don Eddy in “The Photo-Realists: 12 Interviews,” 73-89.

CHAPTER 1

Making Artworks in and of a Place

By the mid 1960s, though photography was yet to be deemed aesthetically coequal to other visual media, photographic imagery and reproductive processes were becoming increasingly prevalent in contemporary art. Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, James Rosenquist, Ed Ruscha, Richard Artschwager, and Gerhard Richter, among many others, had discovered fruitful new methods of reproducing and manipulating photographic imagery or directly incorporating photographic materials into mixed media works. As critic Leo Steinberg observed in his landmark 1972 essay, “Other Criteria,” the new “flatbed picture plane” artists were experimenting with—the method by which many such mass media or mechanically reproduced images filtered into the world of fine art, turning the picture plane into a receptacle for diverse, information-dense materials—was not simply a matter of surface distinction, but rather “part of a shakeup which contaminates all purified categories.”¹ Given the increasing permeation of photographic materials in a range of contemporary art, particularly in Pop’s focused attention on common consumer goods, Photorealism’s arrival in the mid-sixties would seem to many simply a logical extension of earlier impulses. If a press photograph could be silkscreened ad-infinitum to intriguing effect, why not simply paint the photograph itself? The wholesale reproduction of photographs in paint could easily serve as a cheeky provocation to an

¹ The result, in Steinberg’s view, was profound: “The deepening inroads of art into non-art continue to alienate the connoisseur as art defects and departs into strange territories leaving the old stand-by criteria to rule an eroding plain.” Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth Century Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 91.

art world not long ago infatuated with ideas of expressionistic subjectivity and fidelity to a single medium, while also falling in line with the approved success of Pop art precedents.

Yet, as Photorealist pioneer Robert Bechtle's recollections reveal,² the move to painting photographs did not seem comfortably preordained, but rather evoked ambivalent feelings of approval and guilt.³ Richard McLean, Bechtle's friend and fellow Bay Area painter, was similarly of two minds concerning Bechtle's new practice:

At that time I was into a mixture of quasi-figurative elements and hard edge abstraction in my own work and suffering considerable confusion about what it all meant. Bob's paintings represented something which completely skirted the issues I was struggling with and were, at one and the same time, exciting and disquieting to me. It took me a while to accept their deadpan, non-event attitude. He broke ground for me that allowed me to try things that I probably wouldn't have tried until some time later. He was the pioneer out here in the serious use of the photograph in painting.⁴

McLean's mixture of admiration and unease distills a number of issues central to Photorealism's nascent moment. Equally important as the choice to use photographs was the attitude that

² Bechtle's first use of photography was in 1964 for *Nancy Sitting*—at the time more of an improvised practical solution than a purposefully conceptualized method: the artist made a reference photograph to accommodate his pregnant wife, who was posing for the picture. The first time Bechtle made a photograph with the specific intention of gridding and proportionally transferring it to the canvas was for '56 *Chrysler*. Louis Meisel's first Photorealism compendium, *Photorealism*, dates this painting 1964, while the Bechtle retrospective catalog produced by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art dates the painting 1965. The painting is now owned by the Oakland Museum of California, which also dates it to 1965, making the later date seem more likely. (A preparatory sketch for the painting reproduced in the SFMOMA catalog is dated 1964.) The artist made his first painting with a projected slide, '56 *Cadillac*, in 1966. Bechtle is undoubtedly the earliest producer of Photorealist works on the West Coast; whether he is the first American Photorealist is hard to ascertain. Adding to the confusion is the contradiction between Meisel's publications: *Photorealism* contends (New York-based painter) Audrey Flack's *Kennedy Motorcade* was "the first true Photo-Realist work produced," while the most recent volume, *Photorealism at the Millennium*, erroneously states, "As pointed out in volume 1, Bechtle was the first artist to make a true Photorealist work." British painter Malcolm Morley also began reproducing photographs wholesale in 1964-65, though these works differed from most American Photorealism in both their use of commercial sources and the placement of those sources in clear quotations (frequently through the use of a white border). Many of the other first-generation of Photorealists began experimenting with the style in the late 1960s; as noted in the introduction most of the painters arrived at the style independently from one another. See Louis K. Meisel, *Photorealism* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1980), 25, 241; Louis K. Meisel and Linda Chase, *Photorealism at the Millennium* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), 39; Janet Bishop, *Robert Bechtle: A Retrospective* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2005), 18-20; Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, *Malcolm Morley: Itineraries* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 23-32.

³ Bechtle quoted in Barbara Buhler Lynes and Jonathan Weinberg, *Shared Intelligence: American Painting and the Photograph*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 156.

⁴ McLean quoted in Dan Tooker, "Richard McLean," *Art International* 18, no. 7 (September 20, 1974): 40.

accompanied that choice—a “deadpan” quality markedly distinct from McLean’s pre-Photorealist involvement with the legacy of abstraction, and, more locally, Bay Area Figuration.

However, if such legacies were initially the cause for a radical break toward the use of photography, they did not entirely vanish from the Photorealist approach: modernist influences, particularly those native to the West Coast, would continue to inflect the work of all three Bay Area Photorealists. This chapter reassesses Photorealism’s origins through examination of such dialogues between the old and the new, fleshing out iconographic and stylistic overlaps in order to reveal greater formal and social complexities folded with the style’s local history. It is perhaps now commonplace to say that modernism and realism remained foils throughout the twentieth century, but few have attempted to locate these dialectics within the supremely illusionistic territory of Photorealism. Uncovering these relationships not only gives Photorealism grounding beyond its basic debt to Pop art, but also reveals the Photorealists’ subtle strategies for clarifying and giving weight to their everyday subjects.

In addition to reframing the Bay Area Photorealism’s local origins and modernist influences, this chapter examines the significance of its overlapping iconography. Rooting Bechtle, McLean, and the third Bay Area Photorealist, Ralph Goings, more firmly within their own environment provides a concrete basis for seeing Photorealism as invested in and evidence of the key social and aesthetic concerns of its time: shifting patterns of artistic exchange, class-based elements related to both production and content, and a sustained engagement with social and architectural environments. With respect to the latter category the complementary lenses of place and space are paramount: place as a measure of cultural and geographic interactions, and space as an issue of representational and social relationships. Both are thus simultaneously concrete and abstract, tying formal strategies to their societal implications—offering a way to

understand, for instance, how adopting the look of a snapshot imbues the Bay Area Photorealists' subjects with particular points of viewer access and qualities of cultural affect.

Ultimately I argue that grouping the Bay Area Photorealists together is useful not merely because of their shared art school history, social ties, or propensity to paint similar locales, but because of the rich commentary their collective oeuvre engenders. Their understanding of everyday spaces helps nuance understanding of the western United States during a time of pivotal demographic transformations. As noted in the introduction, Lefebvre's theories of space help illuminate just how such relationships work. In Lefebvre's formulations space operates as both the product and predictor of social and political structures: "Though a *product* to be used, to be consumed, it is also a *means* of production; networks of exchange and flows of raw materials and energy fashion space and are determined by it."⁵ Space is thus social, with every society producing its own space; "representational spaces"—as discussed above, the category in which Lefebvre fits some artists' production—show space as "directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols."⁶ This, I contend, is what the Bay Area Photorealists aim to accomplish: to reveal how the everyday is part and parcel of essential socio-historic structures, using the most ordinary of scenes and settings to elucidate the power of contemporary vernacular forms. As Lefebvre articulates, it is a project of "some artists and perhaps those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who *describe* and aspire to do no more than describe," but also "the space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate."⁷ Bechtle, McLean, and Goings's works operate precisely within this dialectic, transcribing their surroundings, but also adapting them through subtle means in order for viewers to understand their construction and import.

⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 85.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 31, 39.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

The Bay Area Scene: Art School and Art “Work”

Though the Photorealist style wasn't underway until the mid-1960s, to understand its Bay Area roots one must begin in the early 1950s, when all three painters attended the California College of Arts and Crafts (CCAC) in Oakland. Founded in 1907, the institution has generally been regarded as a more practically grounded alternative to its innovative neighbor across the San Francisco Bay, the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI).⁸ Regardless of such institutional contrasts, the larger, shared significance of California art schools is paramount. As Paul Karlstrom, former West Coast regional director of the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, has noted, “In California, more than in New York and other art centers, schools have been and remain the basis for the creation and maintenance of a viable art culture ... Art education in California remains the central factor in the continuing development of an art world traditionally disadvantaged in terms of galleries, market, and criticism...”⁹ For Bechtle, McLean, and Goings, all of who grew up in small towns largely removed from urban culture, CCAC provided exposure not only to extensive study of art and art history, but also a novel experience of artistic community and exchange.¹⁰ Art school was thus not merely a point of biographical convergence, but a pivotal node for the Bay Area Photorealists' shared social networks, formal influences, and nascent ideas of artistic labor and self-definition through issues of class.

⁸ Frederick H. Meyer, “Why an Art School? An Unfinished Autobiography” in *Artists of Invention: A Century of CCA*, California College of the Arts (San Francisco: California College of the Arts, 2007), 4.

⁹ Paul Karlstrom, “Art School Sketches: Notes on the Central Role of Schools in California,” in *Reading California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900 – 2000*, Stephanie Baron et al (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2000), 85.

¹⁰ Both Goings and McLean attended junior college prior to studying at CCAC, their first experience with formal art training. Goings attended school in Monterey, following being stationed at Fort Oregon. In Monterey he came under the tutelage of California watercolorist Leon Amyx, who encouraged him to pursue further studies at Arts and Crafts. Ralph Goings, interview by author, Santa Cruz, CA, May 3, 2010. McLean was at Boise Junior College; he was drawn to Oakland by the opportunity to study in a place with extended family members nearby (and thus decided not to attend his other option, the Chicago Art Institute). Richard McLean, interview by author, Castro Valley, CA, April 27, 2010.

The environment at art schools in the late forties and early fifties was determined in large part by a very particular student body: veterans returning home and beginning or resuming their education with the assistance of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, commonly known as the G.I. Bill. Richard Cándida-Smith has written compellingly about the scope and effects of postwar government educational assistance in Northern California. Though G.I. enrollment declined somewhat from its majority post-World War II proportions while Bechtle, McLean, and Goings were attending school in the 1950s, Congress approved an extension of the bill in 1952 to cover veterans of the Korean War, encouraging another generation to pursue higher education.¹¹ Perhaps even more noteworthy than the statistics regarding G.I. enrollment are the academic tendencies of these students' preferred course of matriculation. Early studies revealed that, contrary to administrator expectations, most veterans pursuing college-level education "preferred liberal arts education over professional training." As Cándida-Smith explains, these less practical pursuits were committed to wholeheartedly: "If pursuing personal desire was frivolous, public subvention allowed the adventure to be engaged in a serious manner, increasing the pressure on the individual to live up to his expectations, to make the gamble, which was his country's as much as his, less risky."¹²

Both Bechtle and Goings have reflected on this seriousness of purpose among G.I.s at CCAC. For Goings, the oldest of the Photorealist Bay Area trio, art school was a privilege afforded by his service in the armed forces.¹³ Goings's comments on his own class background

¹¹ Richard Cándida-Smith, *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 82, 85.

¹² *Ibid.*, 80, 86.

¹³ Goings reflects: "I went into the army right out of high school, and in those days the G.I. Bill was incredible, they would pay the tuition anywhere, so I went to the College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland." Goings quoted in Linda Chase, *Ralph Goings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988), 17.

and the way this committed student body responded to various stylistic approaches resonate strongly with Cándida-Smith's argument for a tenor of persistence and risk among G.I. students:

Most of the males at the college were ex-GIs, and we were a few years older than students normally are, so there was a high degree of seriousness and intensity about going to school. A lot of the guys were like me, from poor families. Without the GI Bill, we would never have been able to go to this very expensive school, and in a way we were in awe of where we were and what we could do. Even though we often didn't like the assignments, we did them, sometimes three- and four-fold, simply because we wanted to be professionals. On the other hand, there were these few faculty members who were interested in abstraction, and they were the ones who encouraged us to go home at night and try things that were not related at all to what we were doing in the academic classes.¹⁴

In the early fifties, of course, abstraction was still fresh, a decade away from becoming the formulaic mandate for expressive painterliness the Photorealists eventually sought to escape. In this sense Goings epitomized the many veterans at CCAC, SFAI, and elsewhere dedicated to the rigors of academic instruction but also deeply invested in exploring new formal means. These experiences also indicate Photorealism's relationship to abstraction to be more than simply reactionary; early lessons in compositional structuring, color, and surface relationships would prove fundamental to a style that looked to be the antithesis of its expressive predecessor.

Bechtle's initial stint at CCAC began in 1950; as an undergraduate he viewed Goings and his older colleagues from a more youthful perspective:

Coming just out of high school, I was your basic junior jitterbug... Then all of a sudden I was at Arts and Crafts [CCAC], and Arts and Crafts at that time was full of GIs from the Second World War who were still going to school. They were no nonsense, they were working their tails off. And then there were a smattering of people like myself who were really wet behind the ears, right out of high school.¹⁵

Though he recalls these early years as inflected with typical youthful naiveté, Bechtle too was guided by a sense of practicality. Despite being fuzzy on the details of what a career in

¹⁴ Ibid., 18.

¹⁵ Oral history interview with Robert Alan Bechtle, conducted by Paul Karlstrom, Berkeley, CA, September 13, 1978 – February 1, 1980, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Bechtle, AAA interview, September 13, 1978 – February 1, 1980).

commercial art might entail, he signed up for a major in graphic design, “Because no one at that time, especially coming from a middle class situation, thought it was possible to make a living as a painter.”¹⁶ After completing his undergraduate work in 1954, Bechtle was drafted into the army and served two years, stationed in Berlin with the relatively insulated position of company mail clerk.¹⁷ Describing Berlin as an ideal place for someone just out of art school, Bechtle’s time abroad convinced him that upon return he would pursue painting rather than design. Likewise the sojourn also provided a clarifying distance in guiding his choice of subject matter; it was during this period that Bechtle became interested in the “appearances of California.”¹⁸ McLean, the youngest of the three, completed his undergraduate work at CCAC, was likewise drafted following graduation, and spent two years stationed in Okinawa.¹⁹ One simple and direct result of army service for this generation was a delayed career trajectory. As Goings recalls, he and many of his colleagues were not only attending school on the G.I. Bill and thus slightly older, but also by that moment had wives and families to care for, accounting for the “no nonsense” attitude and directed drive with which they pursued their artwork.²⁰

The work ethic developed early on as the children of working and middle-class families and veterans returning home to complete their higher education remained central to Bechtle, McLean, and Goings’s Photorealist practice. Work, as both a leftist political stance and an aesthetic practice that utilized industrial materials and working methods, was a kind of philosophy for many of the most prominent artists of the sixties and seventies. As Julia Bryan-Wilson has documented in her study of the New York based Art Workers’ Coalition, work

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Bishop, 15.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ McLean also recalls aesthetic experiences related to his service days, if a bit more comically, such as his superior officers’ inability to pronounce papier collé—the medium he was then working in. He too maintained his commitment to becoming an artist during his service years. McLean, interview by author, April 27, 2010.

²⁰ Goings, interview by author, May 3, 2010.

became a defining issue just as the American economy began its postindustrial phase, shifting away from its base in skilled manual labor to a service economy and a delocalized marketplace.²¹ For the Photorealists the issue of work generally lacked such explicitly political motivations, but rather was more centered on questions of aesthetic production and a vested interest in maintaining their own class identities. In 1972, Goings responded to the loaded question of whether adhering to a regular workday schedule made him a “bourgeois rather than a radical artist,” with a mixture of perplexity, practicality, and defensiveness:

Are we still struggling with those nineteenth-century distinctions? I work long hours because I’m a compulsive painter—I like to paint. The kind of results I want demands the time and the discipline. I’m damned glad to at last be able to devote as much time to painting as I do. No more squeezing in painting time around a survival job.²²

Bechtle agrees that his fellow Photorealists like to “to play up the idea that they’re working in a process that isn’t romantic and guided by sudden flights of inspiration,” a fact he attributes to a desire to break from the expressionist tendencies of the previous generation.²³ But he also notes that the interest in working process extends beyond self-centered investment; they are likewise fascinated by their colleagues’ processes, and freely admire the inventiveness of others’ technical solutions and formal strengths.²⁴

Not only is labor emphasized by the artists themselves, but the work of Photorealism has also been a constant source of fascination for journalists, curators, and others reacting to and writing about the movement. Numerous publications include images either of paintings in process or artists at work: these photographs operate both as a kind of demystification of process and proof of labor, illuminating the way in which technology and old fashioned craft come

²¹ See Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

²² Goings quoted in Linda Chase, Nancy Foote, and Ted McBurnett, “The Photo-Realists: 12 Interviews” *Art in America* (November – December 1972): 90.

²³ Robert Bechtle, telephone interview with author, June 22, 2010.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

together. The Photorealist method, generally speaking, is one that mixes the technological—photographic sources projected onto the canvas or gridded for transferal, and often the use of airbrushes to achieve even, illusionistic surfaces—with painstaking quantities of routinized labor; working layer by layer or section by section, many artists describe their routines as a continual grind of eight to ten hours per day, six to seven days a week.²⁵ In *Realists at Work*, John Arthur writes: “... these painters are intelligent, strong-willed, committed, and believe deeply in their work... all of them have very regular work habits and put in long hours each week. That is necessary to accomplish what they have done. Innate ability and intelligence are certainly key ingredients, but little or nothing can be accomplished without personal industry, endurance, and ambition.”²⁶ For (the relatively few) advocates of Photorealism, championing old-school value of artistic commitment was a clear way to push against the rising tide of negative critical reaction.

Emphasis on labor was motivated by a number of forces, including traditional justifications for the merits of diligence and devotion in defining an artist’s success, the audience’s desire for a “peek behind the curtain” of Photorealism’s impressive illusionism, and the artists’ purposeful sense of drive and self-presentation. For the Photorealists labor is not only the essential ingredient in their process, it also forms a part of their identity as artists. An illuminating example is the photograph and text devoted to Bechtle in photographer Bill Owens’s 1977 publication *Working [I Do It For the Money]*. Owens is himself Bay Area native; his first, iconic photobook, *Suburbia*, documents the everyday lives and culture of “crabgrass” residents of Livermore, California in the early 1970s. Much like *Suburbia*, this lesser-known work showcases a range of ordinary people in their native environments, each photograph

²⁵ Bechtle, Goings, and McLean use slide projection but not an airbrush; are all oil painters.

²⁶ John Arthur, *Realists at Work* (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1983), 9. The book includes a section devoted to Ralph Goings and fellow Photorealists Chuck Close and Robert Cottingham.

accompanied by a caption—usually a quotation from the subject. Owens’s work deftly yields unexpected nuances from the relationship between image and text; the subjects’ comments tellingly reflect personal aspirations mixed with ingrained cultural norms and class backgrounds, not infrequently contradicting their projected appearance. Bechtle is photographed paintbrush in hand, apparently putting the finishing touches on *Watsonville Chairs*, a brightly lit back porch scene of a deeply tan elderly man seated in profile (fig. 1). The caption reads, “I’m a new-realist painter. People think it’s glamorous to paint but it’s just hard work. Each painting takes two to four months to complete. The possibility of getting national acclaim is almost nil.”²⁷ Perhaps Bechtle is obliquely responding to the by then abundant criticism of Photorealism in the art press, asserting that these works were too slickly mechanical, and unthinkingly reified the lowest common denominator of middle-class consumer culture—a general atmosphere of elitist disapproval that might account for his seemingly defensive tone.²⁸ The book itself reiterates the sense of working without recognition: Bechtle is unnamed in the caption, just one among the varied range of Owens’s anonymous, laboring subjects.

Yet, if Bechtle’s comments and painterly poise lend a serious air to the document, both Owens’s sequencing choices and subsequent events partially temper the somber image of the artist-as-anonymous-worker. The page featuring Bechtle is humorously juxtaposed with a podiatrist who proudly proclaims the utility and satisfaction of his chosen profession (fig. 2). Bechtle, by comparison, seems almost a parody of a very old cliché—the devoted artist doomed to toil on in obscurity. Ironically, the very painting he is working on in Owens’s photograph

²⁷ Bechtle quoted in Bill Owens, *Working [I Do It For The Money]* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), n.p. Bechtle comments that Owens’s chosen “one-liner” likely would not have been his preferred statement, but does not seem irked by Owens’s selection. Robert Bechtle, interview by author, June 22, 2010.

²⁸ Likewise, an economic element could be at play: because most of the painters need several months to complete a single work, their starting price point has to cover this period of labor—a factor which raises prices and undoubtedly contributed to the perception of Photorealism as market-fueled work.

would become a cover image for *Art In America* in 2005.²⁹ Yet, regardless of the ultimate accuracy of Bechtle's professional pessimism, these traces of self-presentation are essential to understanding the Photorealist project. Work, as defined by Bechtle, McLean, and Goings's experiences in the armed services, training at CCAC, and ultimately as professional painters, meant maintaining one's identity as a regular member of the middle class—holding fast to the principles of regular labor and eschewing any sort of vanity associated with art-world fame. Moreover, this self-definition also tied the painters to their own subjects; continued identification with the everyday routines of ordinary life ensured their paintings of middle-class places and people were untainted by disdain or irony.

Realism and Abstraction: Bay Area Figuration and Bay Area Photorealism

This work ethic ideal also stemmed from another immediate model. Richard McLean recently recounted how impressed he was at a young age by the painting habits of his most influential teacher, Richard Diebenkorn—commitment that implied a kind of “moral rectitude,” and became a model for his own habits.³⁰ Likewise, Bechtle cites a “philosophical idea of being an artist, unique to the Bay Area, honest and grounded,” as part of the key legacy of the Photorealists' Bay Area Figuration forbearers.³¹ Commitment, of course, could be regarded as one of the core tenets of the previous generation; much of the Abstract Expressionists' reputation rested on the apparent physical and psychological intensity of their laboring process, a kind of courted spontaneity that would serve as a model for many followers, sincere imitation eventually

²⁹ See *Art in America* (October 2005).

³⁰ Recalling an incident when his friend and colleague Gerald Gooch contacted Diebenkorn for a recommendation only to have the painter's daughter inform him that their teacher was painting and could not be disturbed, McLean was immediately struck by Diebenkorn's commitment to the working process. Richard McLean, interview by author, April 27, 2010.

³¹ Robert Bechtle, interview by author, June 22, 2010.

leading to rejection and parody. With the advent of Pop and Minimalism, art often took on the look and style of industrial production; the Photorealists' working methods involved something at once more radical and conservative. The Photorealist process consciously courted “dumbness,” utilizing rote techniques such as gridding and slide projection to reproduce mechanical images through the distance-providing layer of photography.³² Eager to escape the mandates of Abstract Expressionism and its emphasis on personal struggle and medium purity, appropriating readymade imagery from another medium offered a radical departure for the new generation.

But closer examination unearths a more complex dynamic between the Bay Area Photorealists and their modernist predecessors. Rather than dismissing the formal lessons offered by modernism, they found a way to integrate them within highly illusionistic paintings. The resulting dialectical tensions—between depth and flatness, surface and content—break down preconceived binaries of real versus abstract, invented versus appropriated, formal versus social, and interior versus exterior. These productive modernist-realist tensions speak to the formative role of local models, revealing the painters' progression toward Photorealism generating not from Pop, but rather beginning much earlier and passing through their final aesthetic pit stop with the cultural and iconographic permission granted by that later movement.

Interviews and artist statements reveal the Bay Area Photorealists to be deeply invested in the rigors of formal structure. Bechtle's comments are representative of this recurrent mode of thinking:

³² “Dumb” is a word that Photorealists frequently use to describe their technique—a word they like because it not only implies the “just the facts” nature of the photograph, but also a counterpoint to the heavily interpretive or expressive models of art and art criticism weighted down by personal struggle, existential angst, and so on. Richard McLean still likes this word to describe the efforts of his work. McLean, interview by author, April 27, 2010. Bechtle has used it interviews too. See, for example, Bechtle quoted in Chase, Foote, and McBurnett, “The Photo-Realists: 12 Interviews,” 74.

I'm interested in design and formal relationships in a very real sense, in shape and color and so on, not just simply as vehicles for carrying some message, but in and of themselves... To some extent I am a Formalist, you see; to some extent my interest really is in formal issues. But obviously if I were only interested in that I would paint abstract paintings, which I don't. ³³

Temporarily putting aside his all important ending caveat—one that acutely defines the ever provocative tension between formal values and the focus on contemporary subject matter at the heart of the Photorealist project—it is worth considering what kinds of formal influences and interests guided Bechtle, Goings, and McLean. In the Bay Area, the model of modernism was notably fluid. The foremost local painters of the 1950s and 1960s—David Park, Richard Diebenkorn, Elmer Bischoff, James Weeks, and others known collectively as the Bay Area Figurative artists—carefully tread the line between realism and abstraction with potent results. Emerging from the shadow of Abstract Expressionism, particularly as embodied by Clifford Still and Mark Rothko at the California School of Fine Arts, Park and his contemporaries returned to representation but inflected their work with a sense of materiality, color, and scale learned from years as abstract painters.

For Bechtle and McLean, the Bay Area Figurative painters were their primary source of painterly inspiration.³⁴ The “holy trinity”—McLean and Bechtle’s playful moniker for Diebenkorn, Park, and Bischoff—taught at various Bay Area art schools, with Diebenkorn in residence for a stint at the three Photorealists’ alma mater, the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland.³⁵ In fact, both artists remember the local scene as almost overwhelmingly

³³ Bechtle quoted in Robin White, “Robert Bechtle, Interview at Crown Point Press, Oakland, California, 1982,” *View IV*, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 9.

³⁴ Goings, who began art school several years earlier, was more immersed in learning the lessons of the then ascendant New York school; his local predecessors, such as Wayne Thiebaud, are discussed more fully below.

³⁵ McLean, interview by author, April 27, 2010.

saturated by Bay Area Figuration at the time.³⁶ For Bechtle, Diebenkorn's authority was so great the younger painter avoided enrolling in his classes. Recalling this choice in subsequent years, Bechtle laments his decision, noting that despite his attempts to avoid imitating Diebenkorn, Bay Area Figuration became a profound influence on his work.³⁷ McLean likewise remarks that it was "a very heavy quasi-tradition to have to work your way out of."³⁸ As longtime local critic Thomas Albright points out, the style's rapid spread was due in large part to the teaching activities of main practitioners Diebenkorn, Park, Bischoff, and James Weeks at Bay Area art schools.³⁹

Many artists outgrow early influences; the point is how formidable Bay Area Figuration was for young Northern Californian painters, and, moreover, to suggest what Bechtle and McLean's work might have retained from such gestural, expressive painting. Originally Diebenkorn's model lay in expanding the field of acceptable ways of making modern art: as they watched one of the most renowned local painters move away from pure abstraction and reintroduce figurative elements, the two young Photorealists felt they were granted permission to "paint things more or less the way they looked."⁴⁰ But, as Bechtle has reflected, there was more at stake than simply inching toward realism—lessons which took time to absorb. Early attempts to mimic the modernist gesture and action painting surface gave way to a more sophisticated understanding of what Bechtle describes as the elements "behind" the Diebenkorn look.⁴¹

³⁶ As McLean recalls: "When I was at Arts and Crafts as a student in the mid-Fifties I was, like most everyone else, very much influenced by what was called Bay Area Figurative painting. Dick Diebenkorn was one of my teachers and was directly responsible for my decision to be a serious painter. His particular style, as well as that of David Park and Elmer Bischoff, virtually dominated the student work at the time." McLean quoted in Tooker, 40.

³⁷ Bechtle, AAA interview, September 13, 1978 – February 1, 1980.

³⁸ McLean quoted in Tooker, 40.

³⁹ Thomas Albright, *Art in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945-1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 71.

⁴⁰ Bechtle, AAA interview, September 13, 1978 – February 1, 1980.

⁴¹ Ibid.

For McLean, a more nuanced understanding of Diebenkorn involved avoiding his subject matter—in McLean’s words a ubiquitous “syndrome” of imitation. The elder painter’s color and surface sensibility, however, proved irresistible; Diebenkorn’s *Berkeley* series held a particular place of honor—these were the works that convinced McLean to become a painter.⁴²

Intriguingly, his recollection of the series’ impact speaks as much of general artistic conviction as specific painterly lessons.⁴³ By contrast, some of Bechtle’s early figurative works bear a more direct resemblance to Diebenkorn’s representational works from the late 1950s. Bechtle marks two early realist works, *Nancy Reading* (1963-64) and *Nancy Sitting* (1964) as a personal turn away from Bay Area Figuration, tightening his style, and, in the case of the later painting, using a photographic reference for the first time (figs. 3, 4).⁴⁴ Nonetheless, these canvases bare a clear debt to Diebenkorn’s similarly themed group of women seated near large windows, such as *Woman in Profile* (1958) and *Woman in a Window* (1957) (figs. 5, 6). Bechtle admits that this “French Impressionist look... filtered through abstraction,” attentive to the qualities of light and focused on ordinary activities, offered supreme sanctioning for the kind of subject matter he was interested in.⁴⁵

Not only does Bechtle retain the introspective mood of his forbearer, he also utilizes a strikingly similar compositional structure; the window’s strong horizontals and verticals provide both sectional divisions that order and balance the canvas and a geometric girding for the play of light. *Nancy Sitting* bears an especially strong debt to *Woman in Profile*; though photo-based and made more concrete by the particulars of the table’s place setting, Bechtle’s subject and tone

⁴² Tooker, 40; and McLean, interview by author, April 27, 2010.

⁴³ Oral history interview with Richard T. McLean, conducted by Jason Stieber, Castro Valley, CA, September 20, 2009, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C (hereafter McLean, AAA interview, September 20, 2009).

⁴⁴ Bishop, 16.

⁴⁵ Bechtle, interview by author, June 22, 2010.

remain nearly as impenetrable as Diebenkorn's woman, with both female faces masked by the intense exterior light.⁴⁶ Gerald Nordland's analysis of Diebenkorn's figurative paintings might easily be applied to the early Bechtle figure studies: "It is clear that the artist works on at least two levels: constructing a picture in which shapes (colors and spaces) form a set of unique relationships, independent of subject matter, while at the same time capturing and preserving the physical and emotional overtones aroused in him by visual experience."⁴⁷

Though Bechtle aimed to divest himself of the weight of Bay Area Figuration, his early works retained Diebenkorn-esque subjects and compositions. Ironically, he seemed to absorb the formal lessons of his predecessor's work as he moved more fully into his own subjects and style:

I've always seen Diebenkorn's painting as having to do with the surface, you know, it's about the picture plane and so on. It's about forms that are locked together on the surface and at the same time make a shallow space because of color changes and because of overlapping forms. It's a classic modern painting problem... the physical locking of one shape against another shape. It can happen in painting which is extremely realistic as well. I would say that particular sense of structure, strange interlockings of diagonals, edges, and so is still a part of the painting, a very strong part.⁴⁸

These elements are manifested in Bechtle's earliest Photorealist canvases, namely his iconic parked cars on residential streets. These works, despite their increasingly precise rendering, are relatively flat and often largely comprised of broad swaths of uniform color; their forms are convincingly three-dimensional and yet, as Bechtle explains, "locked together on the surface."

'67 *Chrysler* (1967), *Kona Kai* (1967), and '60 *T-Bird* (1967-68) illustrate these principles well

⁴⁶ Intriguingly the original version of *Woman in Profile* contained a large palm tree dividing the center of the composition; when the work was first exhibited critic Sarah Grissom focused on the tree in her review for *Arts Magazine*, calling it a "decorative" element. Diebenkorn was apparently loathe to have this adjective applied to his painting; this sentiment is not too surprising—recall the great modernist arbiter Clement Greenberg's later statement, "Decoration is asked to be "merely" pleasing, "merely" embellishing, and the "functional" logic of Modernism leaves no room, apparently, for such "mereness." Clement Greenberg, "Detached Observations," <http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/detached.html> (accessed February 5, 2013); originally published in *Arts Magazine* (December 1976). What this might imply about the frivolousness of the Californian environment and its many palm trees remains unsaid. Sarah Grissom, "San Francisco," *Arts* 32 (May 1958): 21.

⁴⁷ Gerald Nordland, *Richard Diebenkorn: Paintings and Drawings, 1943-1980* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), 30.

⁴⁸ Bechtle, AAA interview, September 13, 1978 – February 1, 1980.

(figs. 7-9). In each painting horizontal bands of road, car, and architecture are precisely balanced, with the sidelong view of the automobile and tonally even or precisely striated grey roadways providing an additional sense of shallow surface geometry. The paintings' relatively clean, uncluttered compositions likewise promote clarity of formal organization; though incidental detail is not absent, each painting has the look of reality distilled. A source slide for '60 *T-Bird* reveals that distracting elements such as the diagonal shadow of an unseen utility line, the contents of the figure's breast pocket poking out of their sartorial niche, and additional foliage, have been edited out of the final image (fig. 10).⁴⁹ Though it is difficult to track each translation from source photograph to final painting, Bechtle's frequent tendency to omit minor details results in more coherent pictorial surfaces: eliminating bits of clutter allows the viewer to digest compositions as simultaneously engaging games of balance and "all-overness"—two quintessential modernist strategies.

Many of McLean's works evince a similar format, particularly paintings from the sixties and early seventies, which are based on photographs appropriated from horse magazines. These images' adherence to the conventions of show-horse photography lends a sense of static stylization. Their posed nature also provides less extraneous detail, resonating with the early Bechtle arrangements and continuing the legacy of Diebenkorn-dictums. The profile view of the horses combined with bands of sky, turf, and foliage or architecture that appear in *Pasadena Fancy* (1967) and *Lexington Winter* (1970) indicate a similar investigation of surface geometry and play between depth and flatness (figs. 11, 12). As with Bechtle's paintings, large expanses of color, horizontal orientations, and architectural or landscape ordering emphasize flatness but do

⁴⁹ Bechtle has experimented with editing his source materials in a number of ways, ranging from creating composite images to taking their material verbatim; he remarks that, "A certain amount of editing and decision making goes on constantly with painting, happening as you're progressing through the painting; intense scrutiny while you're painting is key to making it work." A number of other editing instances and their effects on composition and tone are noted below. Bechtle, interview by author, June 22, 2010.

not deny their subjects' vital, spatial status. Bechtle and McLean's early works utilize the lessons of abstraction to remind one of the status of photograph itself as a simultaneously two and three-dimensional object, recording the space of everyday life, but also leveling and compressing it in reproduction.

At almost precisely the same moment as Bechtle and McLean were making these paintings Diebenkorn began work on his *Ocean Park* series (1967 – 1988). Though this series marks a return to abstraction, the structural rigor and surface sensibility the two Photorealists so admired now takes center stage. Managing a striking dialectic between the flatness of the pictorial surface and the spatial illusion conjured by alternating fields of color and seemingly internal luminosity, Diebenkorn's series subtly hints at the ubiquitous contemporary aesthetic challenge of balancing formal and worldly concerns. Placed side by side, canvases such as *Ocean Park No. 66* (1973) appear distant cousins to Bechtle and McLean's works from the sixties (fig. 13). Here one can see how the structures of the *Ocean Park* series provided a painting task of formal complexity that would adequately balance the Photorealists' commitment to neutrally reproducing the world around them. Again, horizontal and vertical stackings provide the painters with an integrative, asymmetrical structural tension; Bechtle's early Photorealist works also share Diebenkorn's predilection for a soft palette reminiscent of the sun-bleached tones of the California environment.⁵⁰ McLean has commented, "I like to think that even though our images... differ greatly, [if] you put these horses up against Diebenkorn's *Ocean Park* series. I'd like to think we still share a lot of the same kind of formal concerns."⁵¹ Likewise, Bechtle later included a clear homage to Diebenkorn in the architectural setting-cum-abstract-grid of *Berkeley Stucco* (1977) (fig. 14).

⁵⁰ Diebenkorn's palette also differentiates his works from that of his East Coast contemporaries. Berkeley Art Museum, "Richard Diebenkorn, Matrix/Berkeley 40," (Berkeley: University Art Museum, 1981), n.p.

⁵¹ McLean, AAA interview, September 20, 2009.

The critical division on whether Diebenkorn's series qualifies as "landscape painting"—i.e. the literal meeting of "ocean" and "park"—seems to be mostly a rhetorical game of categorization. The artist himself once declared, "Temperamentally, I have always been a landscape painter," though his reference to temperament rather than practice is itself somewhat ambiguous.⁵² Edward Casey's argument for a quasi-cartographic impulse in the *Ocean Park* paintings provides some fruitful new thinking in this respect.⁵³ Whereas a landscape ostensibly mimics the natural world, maps are both geographic representations and conceptual abstractions. Bechtle and McLean, of course, are making images based on photographs, images much more readily recognizable as components of the American landscape. Photorealism's process of abstraction is more conceptual than literal, i.e. the generative process which replicates not the world itself but duplicating an image of the world—a method that allows for explicit conceptualization of how 'unstructured' reality can become structured pictorial form. For Bechtle and McLean, Diebenkorn's model provided an essential pictorial structure in this translation process. Ultimately all three evoke a sense of place-based visual comprehension: Diebenkorn in taking the raw elements of local landscapes and reformulating them into complex configurations of nearly abstract painting, Bechtle in extracting a formal elegance from the specificities of the local and domestic, and McLean in revitalizing the heavily mythologized tropes of the American West through painterly distillation.

Diebenkorn, like Bechtle, almost always has a "West Coast" descriptor appended to his works. Time in New Mexico, the San Francisco Bay Area, and Los Angeles proved both enormously fruitful and reflected (or perhaps induced) shifts in style and subject matter. Recently some writers have attempted to downplay this geographic label, arguing it promotes a limited

⁵² Robert T. Buck, Jr., *Richard Diebenkorn: Paintings and Drawings, 1943-1980*, (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), 42.

⁵³ Edward S. Casey, *Earth- Mapping: Artists Reshaping Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 123-37.

view of Diebenkorn as a provincial painter.⁵⁴ Though admittedly his work is less well-recognized than that of his contemporaries in the New York School, these locales do inform his work's trajectory; while his "landscapes" are mostly abstracted, their palette, high "horizon lines," and hilly topography clearly resonate with the West Coast environment.

Bechtle's places tend to be incredibly specific, with works from the 1980s onward often identified by street names, neighborhoods, or even particular intersections. Yet, these mostly San Francisco-based works again return to a Diebenkorn precedent, reconfiguring elements of his predecessor's cityscape.⁵⁵ While living in Berkeley in the early 1960s, Diebenkorn painted a group of landscapes focused on the topography of the surrounding urban areas, including *Ingleside* (1963) and *Cityscape I* (1963) (figs. 15, 16). Here prominent compositional angles extend upward and deeper into an illusionistic space, indicating the paths of city roadways incised into the Bay Area's ubiquitous hills. In these images the viewer is looking up, foregrounding the tilting surfaces of homes, blacktop, and open, undulating greenery.

Diebenkorn's *Ingleside* finds a striking parallel in Bechtle's *Inglesipe Street* (1986) (fig. 17).⁵⁶ In both paintings a curved road leads the eye toward a set of neatly situated parallel streets, houses lining their incline like brightly colored children's blocks. Bechtle's adaptation responds to a time when real estate has consumed more of the landscape and open hillsides have been

⁵⁴ See, for instance, Jane Livingston, *The Art of Richard Diebenkorn* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1997).

⁵⁵ The aesthetic traditions of the San Francisco cityscape and their socio-historic implications are considered in much greater detail in chapter three; at present, the issue of Diebenkorn's influence is pertinent in terms of the formal rigor and invention of Bechtle's later works.

⁵⁶ It is unclear whether this painting is mislabeled in reproduction (Meisel's *Photorealism Since 1980* is the only reproduction I am aware of) and in fact does refer to the same San Francisco neighborhood as Diebenkorn's painting. Perhaps Bechtle invented the street name (there is no "Ingelsipe Street" in San Francisco) or misspelled it, though both would be highly unusual for this generally precise artist. Of the Diebenkorn paintings, Bechtle comments that this series gave him "permission" to paint similar subjects, but were not the original genesis of the idea for his first streetscapes. The latter was already developed when Bechtle painted *56 Plymouth*, the first picture to feature a parked car, in 1963—the same date as Diebenkorn's cityscapes. Bechtle, interview by author, June 22, 2010.

supplanted by orderly, segmented front lawns. Yet, the formal innovations on display here are just as striking as the demographic transformations resultant from the passage of time. In *Ingleside* Diebenkorn again plays depth against flatness, with the houses toward the rear rendered as rough, single sided blocks of white pigment, each building's architecture melding into that of its neighbor. By angling our view of the parallel streets, Bechtle at once offers us their uniformly flat facades and the cascading rhythm of their ascending rooftops; the perspective is almost vertiginous as we gaze down the winding street in the foreground and up at the row houses in the distance. Whereas Diebenkorn ultimately remains more interested in the patterning of paint on canvas and the balancing of color and light, Bechtle begins with the city, using its geography as an avenue to investigate how compositional, depth and surface based principles occur with remarkable complexity in the everyday.

Cityscape I is the most complex of the Diebenkorn landscapes; its structure is analogous to Bechtle works such as *Sunset Intersection—40th and Vicente* (1989) (fig. 18). Indeed, the view up the hill is one of the core motifs of Bechtle's San Franciscan works, providing him innumerable configurations of inclined roadways, with cars, houses, and the occasional pedestrian cutting across their slopes. *Sunset Intersection*, with its invented stormy sky, asymmetrical view of the two sides of the street, and high horizon line, in particular recalls the Diebenkorn painting's balancing of broad swaths of bold lights and darks and indications of anecdotal detail (fig. 19).⁵⁷ As with the *Ingleside/Inglesipe* case, Bechtle improvises on the Diebenkorn structure, using it as a springboard for variations on the original composition. *Sunset Intersection* is one of many works that pushes objects to the periphery, making the viewer intensely aware of the composition's cropping. This latter trait indicates a clear debt to

⁵⁷ The source photograph for this painting reveals the stormy sky is the artist's addition. This addition, its art historical model, and the demographic import of this neighborhood are discussed further in chapter three.

photography, as the paintings clip the landscape into rectangular fragments anomalous to human vision. These compositions also play on the dialogue between empty centers and concentrated peripheries powerfully put in play by Diebenkorn's *Ocean Park* series; again, Bechtle integrates modernist strategies and contemporary photographic imagery.⁵⁸ This synthesis makes ordinary spaces more legible, elucidating their contents with subtle guidance for the viewer's eye and thus reopening the everyday to connotations of significance. Little may transpire in Photorealist works—a parked car sits on the street, a person poses for the camera—but by investing these scenes with the rigors of modernist structures and enlarging their slide sources to sizes comparable to modernist painting, the contemporary earns a subtle visual gravitas.⁵⁹

Bay Area “Pop”

Much has been said about the formidable influence of Diebenkorn on McLean and Bechtle. Congruencies of subject matter make links between the former and the latter particularly potent; Diebenkorn and Bechtle are firmly rooted in their particular environments—places that often coincide. During these years McLean was more immersed in distant subjects, utilizing the medium of appropriated photographs as a kind of aesthetic barrier, a choice he indicates helped “authenticate” the works for him, in that this approach had already been proved aesthetically valid by Rauschenberg and others. Perhaps the influence of Diebenkorn was less direct for this reason, though his assertion that transitioning between abstraction and realism was “easy” suggests how well Diebenkorn's own fluid oscillation helped pave the way.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ My thanks to Michael Fried for suggesting the empty center link between Diebenkorn and Bechtle's work.

⁵⁹ While Bechtle, McLean, and Goings's works are not quite as large as some of the other Photorealists' (i.e. those of Audrey Flack or Franz Gertsch), there is still a striking sense of enlargement from ordinary snapshot photographs. See figures for individual painting dimensions.

⁶⁰ McLean, interview by author, April 27, 2010.

Goings, exposed in his formative years to Abstract Expressionism rather than the slightly later Bay Area Figuration movement, cites Jackson Pollock, Jack Tworkov, and Willem de Kooning as early influences and emphasizes a continued love of paint as the continuous thread between his early abstract practice and later realist works. Though Photorealism precluded the kind of “goeey” texture he explored with abstraction, in his view the artist maintains his painterliness on a less “flamboyant,” more “intimate” level, visible only at close range.⁶¹ The issue of facture recalls another prominent local figure occasionally connected to Goings, Wayne Thiebaud.⁶² While Thiebaud is most well known for semi-Pop related subjects such as diner and cafeteria-type food displays, it is his work in more “traditional” genres (figure studies, landscapes) and elements of technique and composition that link him to Goings. If, for Goings, the physicality of paint was the most compelling aspect of Abstract Expressionism, Thiebaud’s work is an essential bridge for the Photorealist between the dictums of high modernism and the subsequent return to figuration. Thiebaud explains his relationship to his painterly predecessors and contemporaries this way: “I was very much influenced by the California figurative school but particularly by de Kooning, for whom paint manipulation was a real issue. There is a long tradition of painting that I happen to admire, in which the painting is obviously manipulated by hand.”⁶³

In Thiebaud’s work, the looseness of Abstract Expressionism’s application is harnessed into a more linear, textural element. An iconographically-inclined, more literal interpretation might describe the works’ rendering as “frosting-like,” though such subject-derived reading occludes his skillful formal manipulation of the medium. As seen in paintings like *Confections*

⁶¹ Goings, interview by author, May 3, 2010.

⁶² Albright, 218.

⁶³ By “California figurative school” Thiebaud presumably means Bay Area Figuration. Thiebaud quoted in Arthur, *Realists at Work*, 120.

(1962), the artist uses paint to conjure the texture of objects but also to subvert them to the larger rhetoric of the canvas (fig. 20). While the images' bright palette, and sweet, accessible subjects create a playful mood, the viewing experience is equally dictated by their orderly, carefully articulated surfaces, the figures hovering over shallow, resolutely blank spaces.

Thiebaud generally views his own work in terms of a realist lineage—as opposed to the frequently made critical connection to Pop.⁶⁴ A notable example of the currency of particular realist ideas and investigations are Thiebaud and Goings's portraits from the 1960s. Goings's series, referred to as the *California Girls*, are clearly indebted to the slightly earlier paintings by Thiebaud.⁶⁵ Much like in the case of Bechtle's early Diebenkorn-inspired works, Goings has used Thiebaud's compositions as a springboard for formal experimentations, employing the earlier painter's work as a foundation for an increasingly precise realism. Here too the subjects are strikingly similar: bright portraits of West Coast "girls" attired in swimsuits and sundresses. Not quite provocative pin-ups, these women are nonetheless visually alluring, their vitality speaking to the perceived image of California as the American mecca of sun-kissed, youthful sexuality.

And yet, if these "real" girls are desirable, they are also somewhat distant, isolated in blank, pale fields of uniform color. As Goings recalls, this blankness defined his main avenue of

⁶⁴ Henry Hopkins, *50 West Coast Artists: A Critical Selection of Painters and Sculptors Working in California* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1981), 68. Thiebaud generally disdains being called a Pop artist; his first exhibitions of Pop-like subjects were in 1960, a bit earlier than the displays of food-related Pop works of Andy Warhol and Claes Oldenburg. Widespread recognition, however, came with his inclusion in Sidney Janis's "The New Realism" Pop show of 1962; thereafter the label stuck. His connections to the "New Realist" moment are discussed in further detail in chapter two.

⁶⁵ Goings recalls that he was aware of the Thiebaud works, but wasn't purposefully emulating his elder Sacramento colleague. Goings, interview by author, May 3, 2010. Goings also made a series of paintings that "collaged" appropriated pop culture sources in provocative ways, much like the work of Pop Artist James Rosenquist. In general both McLean and Goings seem to have had a stronger (albeit in both cases brief) flirtation with Pop than Bechtle, whose style is more deeply rooted in Bay Area Figuration, as discussed above. Bechtle did make sketches of "billboards and cornflake boxes" and the like in the early 1960s, and notes that seeing Pop art shows in London and New York on the way home from his service in Germany was a pivotal moment. He left feeling he could "skip over Pop," in some sense combining its lessons with those of Bay Area Figuration, but also allowing him to get straight to painting what was around him. Bechtle, interview by author, June 22, 2010.

inquiry: he wanted to see how the figure itself could “create space.”⁶⁶ Thiebaud’s portraits such as *Girl in White Boots* (1966) and *Girl with An Ice Cream Cone* (1963) do articulate spatial recession, but the painterliness of Thiebaud’s execution maintains a strong surface presence (figs. 21, 22). The figures in Goings’s *Girl on the Wall* (1968) and *Linda* (1967), on the other hand, appear almost trompe l’oeil-like in the way their precisely rendered bodies emerge from blank backgrounds (figs. 23, 24). *Girl on the Wall* develops this illusionistic play with perception most fully, the work’s overhead orientation making the subject appear almost as if she is hovering mid air. Though difficult to see in reproduction, these paintings also adapt one of Thiebaud’s core strategies: his propensity for using bright colors in place of shadows, a technique which simultaneously increases spatial depth and calls attention to the distinct sense of pure pigment on canvas. This limned effect, as seen in the blue, green, and orange tracing *Linda*’s figure, again, is subtler and less painterly in Goings’s works, but provides a way for him to engage the fruitful territory between real and abstract (fig. 25).

Though the figure would virtually disappear from Goings’s work following this series until the mid-seventies, these early paintings reveal a crucial juncture of reckoning with the influences—both formal and thematic—of the Northern California art scene. Notably the subjects of *Girl on a Wall* and *Linda* are in fact the same woman; an initial sense of specificity and individualized portraiture partially gives way to thinking about the formal investigations of works in a series. Clearly what kind of real world interests these painters maintain matters—their choice of the stuff of the everyday is a defining quality of their aesthetic pursuits. But their consistent subject matter and rigorously defined parameters were not only a means to get closer to the realities of life in America’s increasingly standardized postwar environments, but also a

⁶⁶ Goings, interview by author, May 3, 2010.

way to invest that subject matter with the weight of formal rigors then mostly associated with modernism. Repeated spaces, objects, bodies, and architecture offer the chance for subtle forms of painterly investigation. As literary theorist Toril Moi has convincingly argued, realism can share in modernism's self-referentiality and consciousness.⁶⁷ The Bay Area Photorealists, looking to their local predecessors, sought not aesthetic legitimacy, but a way to utilize their formal training in depicting contemporary subjects. These strategies provided structure for dense, slice-of-life photographs, endowing the mundane with a visual clarity that allows the viewer to more readily comprehend its spatial construction and absorb its social significance.

Artist Portraits

The comparison of works by Bechtle, McLean, and Goings reveals a vital circuit between the artists and their environment. The Bay Area offered unique local influences in its homegrown take on abstraction and early return to figuration, and also provided direct inspiration for a new kind of painting—one hybridized with the medium of photography and immersed in the subjects of the everyday. Though again, Photorealism never styled itself as a united movement nor did these three painters constitute a purposeful school, their collective works document pivotal points of overlap. Perhaps the most obvious testament to their relationships are the portraits both Bechtle and McLean made of each other and Goings. These works not only illustrate the close social ties among Bechtle, Goings, and McLean but also illuminate the way they blended personal experience with aesthetic pursuits.

For Bechtle these works fit within the traditional category of artist portraits but also are a part of his larger, continued interest in painting figures—almost always people familiar to him,

⁶⁷ Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 17-36.

which he feels he can capture much more successfully than strangers—and mesh with his focus on particular kinds of everyday scenes.⁶⁸ Bechtle’s images of people posing near their cars or at backyard gatherings balance the sense of specific documents and broad cultural tendencies constantly at play in his work: here are his family, friends, and fellow artists, seamlessly absorbed in the spaces and occupations of ordinary middle-class life. Likewise, McLean’s portraits of Bechtle, Goings, their families, and other art world friends are unassuming documents of these relationships, frequently given to their subjects. But if fairly inconspicuous, the portraits are also telling distillations of the artists’ practices: they illustrate the continuum between personal and professional, everyday life and painting work, and occasionally even indicate a major shift in artistic process. They are thus essential for unpacking the complexities of Photorealist making and seeing.

The first portraits Bechtle made of McLean are the outcome of a joint family vacation in Santa Barbara. McLean recalls breakfasting at their hotel when he noticed the striking light outside and decided the two should go out and take some pictures.⁶⁹ Five works by Bechtle resulted: a series of images called *Santa Barbara Patio* done in charcoal (1981), color lithography (1982), watercolor (1983), and oil (1983), which picture McLean sitting at a patio table in bright sunlight, surrounded by deeply shaded hedges, and *Santa Barbara Chairs* (1983), a self portrait set in the same space, but viewed from a different angle (figs. 26-28).⁷⁰ The photograph for the latter painting was actually shot by McLean, thus while the finished product is in Bechtle’s hand, its generative process was collaborative. These images speak to the aesthetic fruitfulness of Bechtle and McLean’s relationship—a relationship deepened by several

⁶⁸ Bechtle, interview by author, June 22, 2010.

⁶⁹ McLean, interview by author, April 27, 2010.

⁷⁰ Several of these portraits, in addition to Bechtle’s painting of Goings (*Sacramento Montego*, discussed below), were owned by Richard Brown Baker. Baker’s relationship to these works and his role as a Photorealist collector is covered in chapter four.

years of sharing a studio space—and the fluidity of their personal and professional lives.⁷¹ While the shared setting obviously unifies the *Santa Barbara* works, other elements intimate deep affinities between the two artists. Not only are both men similarly attired in reddish button-down shirts and jeans, but their posture and general comportment are also strikingly alike, held in reflective solitude by both the cover of their sunglasses and their location toward the rear of the depicted space. For a seemingly picture-perfect Californian day, the contemplative mood of these men in chairs provides a sense of unexpected gravity—there is nothing frivolous about their pristine environment and its elegantly distilled foils of light and dark and natural and manmade.

Bechtle's portrait of Goings shares this sense of ordinary life amplified by stark staging. *Sacramento Montego* (1980) pictures Goings standing outside his home, leaning against the car parked in his sun-saturated driveway (fig. 29).⁷² Taken on the occasion of a group outing to Lake Tahoe in the early 1970s, the image marks another Photorealist gathering without fanfare—again, its title indicates the setting (and car brand, a frequent component of Bechtle's titles), rather than naming the subject.⁷³ Much like the *Santa Barbara* works, *Sacramento Montego* defines its figure and setting through intense patterns of light and dark, crisply capturing the strong illumination of California sunshine and its reciprocal “heavy and dense” shadows.⁷⁴ Similarly dramatic amplifications of the everyday are found in Bechtle's other outdoor portraits of the period, such as the painting pictured in Bill Owens's photograph of Bechtle working, *Watsonville Chairs* (1976, fig. 30). Breaking from his even, flat lighting of the 1960s pictures,

⁷¹ Bechtle and McLean shared a studio from the mid-1960s until the early 1970s. Bechtle, interview by author, June 22, 2010.

⁷² The source photo was again used for multiple works, a watercolor (1975) and an oil painting (1980), both titled *Sacramento Montego*.

⁷³ The McLean's and the artists' gallerist Ivan Karp and his wife Marilyn were also present. Goings has never seen either the watercolor or oil version of *Sacramento Montego*; by the time both were made he had resettled in upstate New York. Goings, e-mail message to the author, June 4, 2010.

⁷⁴ “Heavy and dense” is how Goings aptly describes the shadows on the West Coast. East Coast shadows by comparison are, according to the artist, “wimpy.” Goings, interview by author, May 3, 2010.

these paintings are dominated by high value contrasts and a saturated color palette. They also constitute Bechtle's most "precise" period—the moment when his rendering is the sharpest; setting figures illusionistically defined by bright light against dark shadows, like Goings's *California Girls*, lends a near trompe l'oeil quality.⁷⁵

One exception to these casually staged outdoor portraits is a portrait of McLean from 1995, *A Painter in His Studio (Richard McLean)* (fig. 31). Made for McLean on the occasion of his retirement from teaching, the watercolor pictures McLean at work on a painting, his back turned to us and attention focused on his canvas; Bechtle took the source photograph, unknown to McLean, in 1970 when the two shared a studio.⁷⁶ Beyond its documentation of a close working relationship, the portrait taps into central elements of the larger discourse surrounding Photorealism. As indicated above, the focus on process and work is nearly ubiquitous in both interviews with the artists and press accounts of Photorealism, yet this is the only image made by a Photorealist depicting the making of a Photorealist painting.⁷⁷ The image was significant enough for Bechtle to return to twenty-five years later; the source photo can be dated from the painting McLean is working on, *Lexington Winter* (fig. 12).⁷⁸ The work's temporal span is further extended by a historical reference: Bechtle's chosen title and composition is a nod to

⁷⁵ Another Bechtle painting related to this group of artist portraits is *Berkeley Pinto* (1976), which features realist sculptor John De Andrea. Unlike the paintings of Goings and McLean, De Andrea is pictured with his family, though the arrangement is similar to Bechtle's portraits of his own family from the 1970s.

⁷⁶ McLean, interview by author, April 27, 2010.

⁷⁷ There are works Photorealist works that reference the making of paintings, such as Audrey Flack's and Ben Schonzeit's images of painter's tools. Those works are decidedly traditional though in that they depict objects used by most painters—paint, paintbrushes, etc.—and not elements specific to the Photorealist process (cameras, source photographs, projectors, airbrushes, etc.). A Flack still life of small jars of paint, *Rich Art* (1972-73) does, however, include a "Vermeer" brand paintbrush, invoking the same realist tradition as Bechtle. Malcolm Morley and John Clem Clarke have also made works that quote old master paintings, though their work is more appropriate than emulative and thus strikes a more distant, ironic tone, using historical sources to play with traditional codes of realist painting rather than utilizing contemporary source photographs.

⁷⁸ Though Bechtle usually uses contemporary photographs, this is not the only instance where he has used an older source image. His reuse of source photographs is discussed further in chapter three. Bechtle, interview by author, June 22, 2010.

Vermeer's work of the same name (fig. 32). Also known as *The Allegory of Painting*, the choice of the Vermeer model is not merely coincidental. Bechtle's homage not only speaks to the similar staging of a painter pictured from behind, his work-in-progress visibly laid out for the audience, but also to the venerable tradition of realist picture making, specifically the complex evolution of "photographic" processes and appearances.

Vermeer's paintings are routinely described as "modern-looking," both on account of their sharply rendered realism and the everyday occurrences they depict. *A Painter in His Studio* is at once allegorical, featuring Clio (the muse of history) and a number of other metaphorical objects, and a deconstruction of such symbolism, literally lifting the curtain to reveal the painter and his model in the studio. As Bryan Jay Wolf argues, the artist tended to "place his use of symbols in quotation marks, removing them from their usual referents, putting the forces they represent under erasure, and allowing them to stand, stylized and disconnected, as purposefully dysfunctional elements within paintings that they either refuse to explain or allegorize in conventional fashion."⁷⁹

Bechtle's nod to Vermeer in his portrait of McLean is indicative of both Photorealism's deep historical roots and its dramatic changes to the realist tradition. While many scholars agree Vermeer likely employed a camera obscura, there is no direct evidence of that device here, only traces of its use in the depth of field qualities of the softly blurred draperies hanging over the edge of the table.⁸⁰ Many aspects of Vermeer's process are not revealed in *A Painter in His Studio*, while some of the details on display are known to be false: his palette is missing, the implication that he applied color directly to the canvas with only a chalk outline to guide him

⁷⁹ Bryan Jay Wolf, *Vermeer and the Invention of Seeing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 199.

⁸⁰ The camera obscura (or "dark room") is a centuries-old technique that focuses external light to reproduce a projected, reversed image of the exterior surroundings. It was often used to produce more accurate drawings, and is a precursor to the modern-day camera. See Steve Edwards, *Photography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 73-75.

omits his known use of a traditional underpainting, and the appearance of a maulstick at this preparatory stage is unlikely. Vermeer, as Daniel Arasse contends, has “embarked on a double game: he has ‘de-realized,’ or allegorized, the painter and his studio, while ‘de-allegorizing’ the allegorical figure, shown with the features of a real painter’s model.”⁸¹

In Bechtle’s image process is made much plainer: McLean’s photographic source is present for all to see, attached to the center of his canvas as he works. Likewise the studio itself has become much more sparse, populated only by the painter, his tools, and a bare white wall. In the journey from Dutch genre painting to American Photorealism allegory shifts to appropriation; whereas in Vermeer’s work play with symbolism, mythology, and artistic tradition is paramount, in Bechtle’s work the layering of levels of representation is of foremost interest—here the conceptually or lenticularly-doubled perspective is not disguised or subtly hinted at but is purposefully displayed. The pull of Bechtle’s *A Painter in His Studio* is not simply its poignant homage to McLean, but also the fascination of a watercolor based on a photograph of another artist making a painting based on a photograph. Yet, as Bechtle explains, there is still some essence of aesthetic interest from Vermeer that remains central to the Photorealist enterprise:

That particular quality of taking a very ordinary moment and somehow causing it to become kind of magical through devices which are not even always apparent is something that interests me a lot. In other words, instead of doing something very dramatic or fantastic where the magic isn’t really magic anymore because it’s all so obvious, but rather doing the opposite, making this thing seem so absolutely bland and ordinary that you have to look twice at it, but causing you to realize that something’s happening there that is quite extraordinary... the artists that I respond to most, the people I consider my real heroes, are those that I think do that kind of thing... Vermeer has that quality.⁸²

⁸¹ Daniel Arasse, *Vermeer: Faith in Painting* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 42.

⁸² Bechtle, AAA interview, September 13, 1978 – February 1, 1980.

Indeed, some of the tricks of the trade are unchanged: the (prematurely appearing) maulstick reappears in McLean's hands, and while McLean does not use an underpainting, Bechtle does, placing him in line with a long tradition of painters rendering complex compositions through carefully built stages.⁸³ Both works take pleasure in the revelation of both complicating and unpacking artistic process—a persistent, self-conscious reflection on how the ordinary becomes “extraordinary.”

As noted, Bechtle's *A Painter in his Studio* was a gift to McLean; McLean has also made a number of watercolors as gifts for their subjects. These portraits, like Bechtle's, mix family members, friends, and a number of artists, and frequently picture the artists in casual snapshot poses, though the surrounding scenery is typically abbreviated.⁸⁴ In addition to the network of Bay Area artists these small works document, McLean's ties to his two fellow Bay Area Photorealists helped produce one work that pivotally altered his artistic process. This painting, *Sacramento Glider* (1973), was commissioned by collector Stuart Speiser and required the inclusion of an airplane (fig. 33).⁸⁵ At a loss as to how to organically integrate aviation with his usual equestrian focus, McLean came up with the idea to use children at play with a model airplane. This necessitated shooting his own source photograph for the painting; Goings and Bechtle helped complete the task:

⁸³ For a detailed look at Bechtle's painting process, see the video segment produced by *Spark*, a local PBS arts show. KQED's *Spark*, “Robert Bechtle,” February 2005, <http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=4813>, (accessed May 26, 2010).

⁸⁴ Among McLean's watercolor portraits of artists and art world friends are: Bechtle, Goings, Ivan and Marilyn Karp, Robert Arneson, John Guttman, John de Andrea, Susan Meisel, Mel Ramos, and Fletcher Benton. All of the artists are or were part of the Bay Area scene. See Jim Whiteaker, *Richard McLean: Master Artist Tribute IX* (Moraga: Saint Mary's College of California, 2012), 15-16. Goings has made a few portraits of friends and family; including *Dan Dee Donut—Shanna* (1975), which pictures his wife, and *Rose Parade* (1971), which includes portraits of Ivan and Marilyn Karp tucked into the large crowd. Goings, interview by author, May 3, 2010. Fellow Photorealist John Salt also appears with Shanna in one of Goings's diner watercolors. See Chase, *John Salt: The Complete Works: 1969–2007* (London: Plus One in association with Philip Wilson, 2007), 39.

⁸⁵ Speiser and his unusual commission are discussed at length in chapter four.

I knew that Ralph—he was living in Sacramento at the time—I knew his daughter had a horse. She kept it at a stable nearby. And I thought, well, you know, where am I going to get a model? Well, I ask Dennis Beal, a colleague of mine out at San Francisco State, and Dennis, he says, yeah, there's a hobby shop there in San Rafael that you might be able to borrow a model from, or something like that.

And I said, I don't want a fancy plane that looks like—it's got to be like one of Bob's cars. He doesn't paint a classic—well, other than that T-Bird he painted with his brother, that the university has, in Berkeley. But it's always a '67 Pontiac or some generic car, you know—he doesn't want to call attention to the thing. So I says, it's got to be an airplane airplane. It's just a plain old generic plane, you know, fuselage and a wing...

So I went up there, got Cameron; she got her horse out, sat on the horse. Had a nice barn situation behind her: the stables, nice red, black, interior behind her, and the horse, and I had my son, Ian, and Kevin, Ralph's youngest son, hold the model, just sort of casually, down at the side, you know. It looks like some kids out having fun as kids. It was a perfect shot, and I snapped it, and that was *Sacramento Glider* (1973).⁸⁶

McLean's anecdote contains several essential clues to his practice. First are the roles both Goings and Bechtle play; they provide both physical models for the source photograph and aesthetic models for McLean's desired tone of everyday ordinariness. While McLean certainly could have made an original source image without the aid of Goings and Bechtle, their support and influence are central to the tone and look of this pivotal photograph. The children, familiar with McLean, express slight disaffection—a registration of the banal task of waiting for the family friend to snap his photograph. Likewise, the plain model airplane draws little attention, avoiding a disjunctive or artificial juxtaposition with the horse and barn. The scene and its subjects are as much everyday as Bechtle's station wagons or Goings's pick-up trucks.

The “perfect shot” McLean achieved here would in fact alter his process; following the success of *Sacramento Glider*, McLean abandoned using horse magazines for source photographs. The shift not only meant his images became more localized, as he began driving to West Coast horse shows for source photograph opportunities, but also now evidenced a clear

⁸⁶ McLean, AAA interview, September 20, 2009.

casualness lacking in the earlier works. Whereas the stylized, formal poses of those appropriated images often elicit a stagey quality, the post-1973 works are more idiosyncratic, capturing both the incidentals of modern life and the minute precision of the camera's split second record. Earlier subjects like those of *Pasadena Fancy* and *Lexington Winter* are still, flattened images representative of the posing conventions and reductive qualities of reproduction native to mass media (figs. 11, 12). *Sacramento Glider* trades such staid profiles for the direct, squinting gaze of fidgeting children. As the artist explains, the new process also led to a significant change in tone: "that distance, removal, aloofness from that society began melting away. I had a more personal stake in it somehow. I became much more at ease toward the animals and the culture, much more neutral. And that was to the good. My pictures got much better."⁸⁷

Social Spaces: Everyday Environments and the Photographic Look

Thus far this chapter has concentrated on the three Bay Area Photorealists' shared roots, influences, and instances of artistic exchange. There is also a case to be made for thematic parallels and collective social significance. Some of these overlaps are easily visually identified, taking the form of shared compositions or subjects, while others are more cultural or sociological in nature. Thematic adjacencies are readily identifiable; my aim is to move beyond simple classification to the implications of such parallel iconographic investigations, probing how the artists excerpt representative aspects of their time and locale. Of key importance is the Bay Area Photorealists' shared exploration of certain photographic conventions. Their works illustrate how the aforementioned modernist building blocks are counterbalanced with photographic source material and brought to bear on spaces of social significance. These new ways of perceiving the

⁸⁷ McLean quoted in Louis Guida, "Another Thing Called Painting," *Equine Images*, Spring 2002, 29.

contemporary environment (literally) bring into focus essential aspects of contemporary life: as Lefebvre asserted, they show how “(social) space is a (social) product.”⁸⁸ While the paintings refrain from overt commentary, the people and places they select intimate much about how ordinary spaces are inflected with elements of gender, consumer, class, and environmental relationships—relationships themselves often in flux during this period.

The three Bay Area artists are, in fact, the only Photorealists to consistently feature people in larger environments; a few others have dabbled in or focus on portraiture, but these works either are generally narrowly focused on the face or body and tend to reveal little about physical or social context. The remainder of the original generation tends to include bodies—if at all—as merely incidental elements of the urban scene.⁸⁹ For Bechtle this thread runs consistently through his work, beginning with the early portraits of his wife (figs. 3, 4), extending through the numerous images of family and friends (see, for example, figs. 9, 14, 26-31), and shifting to images of single pedestrians when he moves to San Francisco in the early 1980s. While Bechtle has made portraits throughout his career, the works under consideration here are from a finite period in the 1970s, when the artist paid particular attention to social gatherings and family outings.

Goings first introduces figures in his pictures of fast food restaurants and their adjoining parking lots from the early 1970s. These bodies are generally somewhat peripheral, loosely

⁸⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 30.

⁸⁹ For example, Chuck Close and Ben Schonzeit make portraits, but these are almost always tightly focused on the subject's face. Richard Estes occasionally includes pedestrians or drivers in his urban scenes, but they are generally not focal points, rather simply another element of the busy city fabric. As is frequently noted, Estes took his source photographs for his early paintings on Sundays, when downtown areas are mostly depopulated. See John Arthur, *Richard Estes: The Urban Landscape* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1978), 31. Jack Mendenhall features figures engaged in leisure pursuits in warm climates, but his images are appropriated from sources like *Architectural Digest* and as such read as artificially staged. See Meisel, *Photorealism Since 1980*, 299-312. John Kacere are also invested in the human figure, though the paintings are obsessively fetishistic depictions of women's scantily clad pubic regions. Perhaps the most interesting parallel case is Franz Gerstch, a Swiss Photorealist whose early works focus on youth culture.

anchored to a car or caught en route to their destination, as in *Bank of America* (1971, fig. 34). Figures become more prominent when the artist begins painting diners in the mid-seventies. Though by this time Goings had moved from the Bay Area to upstate New York,⁹⁰ he carried with him a honed sense of spatial particularity from his earlier Californian works; despite their geographical separation, Bechtle and Goings's figure studies evoke a similar mood and social climate. Both artists developed an interest in the architecture of undistinguished commercial sites early on, as seen in parallel works like Goings's *Bank of America* and Bechtle's *B. of A. T-Bird* (1974), and in the 1970s both made a pointed move toward engaging the figure in these settings (fig. 35). The recorded scenes are ordinary—indeed, they often register substantial ennui—but not one-dimensional, hinting at the shifting mores of contemporary family and work life and the complex vector of relationship the artists straddle as participants, witnesses, photographers, and painters.

The most striking comparison in this regard is Bechtle's *Fosters Freeze, Escalon* (1975) and Goings's *One-Eleven Diner—Cobleskill, N.Y.* (1977) (figs. 36, 37). The works' differences are easily noted: Goings is painting an employee, Bechtle a patron; Bechtle's subject is a young mother with two children, while the young woman in Goings's work is isolated from any social contact; Goings's waitress is enclosed within the interior of the diner, while Bechtle's is outside at a picnic table; Goings's canvas is mostly comprised of the warm tones of the wooden interior, while Bechtle's is an array of cool blues. The two paintings are linked by their similar eatery settings, the female figures' posture and clothing, and the complex angular arrangements of table, figures, and restaurant equipment lining the back walls. There is also a common allusion to

⁹⁰ Goings moved to Charlotteville, New York in 1974. Oral history interview with Ralph Goings, conducted by Judith Olch Richards, Santa Cruz, CA, September 10-11, 2009, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

the psychologically charged spaces of silence contained within the busy environments of public settings. In these in-between moments—moments indebted to the photograph’s arrested instantaneity, wherein a brief pause of reflection, or even simply the transition between two physical tasks, is recorded in perpetuity—the two women hover in a state between boredom and profundity, aloof from the many distractions that surround them.

Katherine Hauser, one of the few writers to consider the social implications of Photorealism, contends that Bechtle’s family paintings made during this period, “display nostalgic desires for the secure families of the past even as they engage with contemporary popular and media-sustained perceptions of the breakdown of the family.”⁹¹ Yet Hauser’s use of nostalgia as a dominant critical reading is problematized by the works’ insistent grounding in the complexities of the present. While the physical traces of previous eras do not cease to exist the contemporary realm, this does not necessarily qualify as nostalgia—in Bechtle’s (and Goings’s) works older cars and slightly dated-looking eateries signify uneven temporal shifts in the physical and social environment. Moreover, frozen as they are in the split second time frame of the camera’s shutter opening, one cannot clearly read a future or past for the women of these paintings. More persuasive is Hauser’s discussion of the works’ palpable female malaise, their projection of subtle disaffection invoking the influence of the women’s movement and its resultant shifts in both everyday life and popular representations of such traditional familial imagery.⁹²

Hauser also points to Bechtle’s presence behind the camera as completing the family unit.⁹³ Indeed, the sunglasses and unused napkin on the near side of the table point to the

⁹¹ Katherine Hauser, “Photorealist Nostalgia and the American Family,” *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies*, vol. 22 (1997): 263.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 277.

father/artist's presence. Likewise, we learn from Goings that the plate of buttered toast in the foreground of *One-Eleven Diner* belongs to the artist, and that he too was acquainted with his subject:

Actually that's my breakfast sitting there. This girl is the daughter of the people who own and run the place. The whole family works there... and they're a wonderful, loving, close-knit family, and it was great to go in there. Not knowing all that doesn't matter because you can—and people will, I know, even if I don't want them to—make up scenarios based on the visual evidence that is in the picture.⁹⁴

Though Goings is somewhat ambivalent about the anecdotal potential of his work and maintains he selects images based in part based on their potential to stymie narrative readings, there is nonetheless something revealing about this background information.⁹⁵ The signs of the artist in both paintings suggest not only the intimacy of their involvement in both situations, but also the multiple perspectives they take on first as participants and observers, and subsequently as photographers and painters. As the sunglasses and unfinished breakfast begin to imply, the scenes and their rendering are traces refracted through a multi-stage process that begins with physical presence and is subsequently filtered through both a mechanical lens and the intense labor of transcribing photographic “fact” to paint on canvas. As if to pronounce this fact of a simultaneously intimate and distanced association, the central figures are viewed at close proximity but their gazes are cast askance, disconnected from their companions and the immediate occupations at hand. The network of their looks directs our attention to the far corners of the canvas and accentuates the equity of figural elements that is a hallmark of Photorealist

⁹⁴ Goings quoted in Chase, *Ralph Goings*, 46.

⁹⁵ Though Goings frequently acknowledges lurking narrative potential in interviews, he refuses it as a driving force: “I’ve consciously tried to find material that has less potential for anecdotal interpretation than some of the earlier pictures might have had. What I look for are people caught in quiet moments, thinking or daydreaming, or whatever—people whose attitude or stance or expression is not fraught with any emotional or psychological baggage.” *Ibid.*, 42.

painting.⁹⁶ Both artists utilize an “all-overness” that borrows in equal parts from the surface and compositional foci of the modernist legacy and the democratic recording capabilities of the camera’s mechanical eye.

Both of these works also have what one might call companion pieces. While neither is part of a series, both paintings find visual and thematic echoes in similar canvases from the same period, Bechtle’s *Fosters Freeze, Alameda* (1970) and Goings’s *Pee Wee’s Diner—Warnerville, N.Y.* (1977) (figs. 38, 39). The earlier incarnation of *Fosters Freeze* has been read as a more blatantly oppressive scenario, with critics inferring that the woman is “weighed down by the ennui of the everyday.”⁹⁷ Ivan Karp interprets the scene even more dramatically, describing it as a “desperate, meaningless moment; the space, almost squalid in its vacancy of amiable textures, a classic instance of American nothingness, merging both terror and decorum.”⁹⁸ Longtime Photorealist advocate Linda Chase has also pondered the existential implications of the style, though she concludes that while the works deal with the core values of human life, theirs is ultimately “an existentialism without existential angst.”⁹⁹ Whether one sees this work as symptom of un-noteworthy boredom or as evidence of a wrestling with the weight of an unfulfilling existence is undoubtedly part of the painting’s power—it does not wear its pathos so plainly as to imply a specific narrative or elicit a singular viewing response. Nonetheless, one decision made in the making of this work, again noted by Hauser, is decisive: the source photograph reveals a large anthropomorphized ice cream cone painted on the wall that Bechtle

⁹⁶ Goings’s work shows more signs of photographic focus, as evidenced by the blurry text on the menus and signs on the wall behind the waitress, while Bechtle renders distant signs legible, alerting us to the idiomatic language of the everyday (“Tacquitos” and “Bar-B-Q-Beef”).

⁹⁷ Joshua Shirkey, “Fosters Freeze, Alameda” in Bishop, *Robert Bechtle: A Retrospective*, 88.

⁹⁸ Ivan Karp, “Robert Bechtle” in Robert Bechtle, *Robert Bechtle: A Retrospective Exhibition* (Sacramento: E.B. Crocker Art Gallery, 1973), n.p.

⁹⁹ Chase, “Existential Vs. Humanist Realism,” in *Super Realism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975), 94. On Chase’s interpretations of French literature (particularly the *nouveau roman*) and its relationship to Photorealist painting covered in this essay, see chapter four.

has omitted in the final composition (fig. 40).¹⁰⁰ The omission both renders the scene more austere and eliminates a whimsical counterpoint to the withdrawn family. The more melancholic mood of this first *Fosters Freeze* yields not only from his wife's more pointedly despondent posture, but also the relatively stripped down scene—here the architectural detail and visual clutter of the *Escalon* picture is foregone as Bechtle homes in more closely on the family drama.

Goings's *Pee Wee's Diner*, like Bechtle's *Fosters Freeze, Alameda*, is set in a different location than that of its companion piece, though *Pee Wee's* Warnerville location is only a few miles away from the other work's Cobleskill locale. If Bechtle's two works call to mind the standardizing of American consumption through the proliferation of fast food chains, Goings's local diner paintings remind viewers of the old adages about the sameness of small towns.¹⁰¹ While the composition is quite different, *Pee Wee's Diner* features an almost indistinguishable female figure, with similar features and nearly identical attire. Here the woman is engaged with her customer, though as Goings describes it, not quite wholeheartedly: "She's sort of bored with this job, and he's the only customer in the place, and he's probably not a very interesting guy but there's nobody else to talk to. You can go on and on with the scenarios."¹⁰² Again, the artist is quick to brush aside any overtly narrative interpretations, though the inclusion of more legible details—the December 1976 calendar, family photos, and sour candies, among other incidentals—and the clear exchange between the two figures renders the scene considerably less introspective than its companion work. One could surmise the scene is symbolic of the bright, open-faced aspirations of the young met with the darker, older figure of the small town everyman, but such interpretations feel heavy-handed. Likewise, it is tempting to read the

¹⁰⁰ Hauser, 274.

¹⁰¹ *Fosters Freeze* is a California restaurant chain; *Escalon* is located about 75 miles inland from *Alameda*.

¹⁰² Goings quoted in Chase, *Ralph Goings*, 42.

beginnings of a smile on both the *Pee Wee's* and the *One-Eleven* waitresses, but no emotion quite so legible materializes—it is as if Goings has caught the moment just before a smile, the nearly infinitesimal look of bemusement that could easily descend into boredom or frustration. Part of the unique craft of these Photorealist painters is to choose moments that appear both happenstance and significant, never firmly settling as only the former or the latter. Though these scenes have been strained through the rigors of each painter's formal devices, they maintain an openness of signification that is a central part of their photographic recordings.¹⁰³

Though many writers have referred to the works' snapshot qualities, few have considered what that particular sub-genre of photography contributes to the Photorealist project. Richard Kalina's article on Bechtle and Eric Fischl, "Painting Snapshots, or the Cursory Spectacle," and Alwynne Mackie's piece, "New Realism and the Photographic Look" are exceptions to this general glossing. Mackie uses the notion of snapshot practices to highlight the subjective choices (as opposed to objective views), which he contends define the artists' photographic practices.¹⁰⁴ Kalina's perspective is a bit more philosophical, attentive to the nuances of viewing imparted by photographic source material: "We understand the visual world firsthand, through direct experience, but we also understand it through the filter of photography... Both understandings operate simultaneously, and it seems natural that realist painters should try to combine these two ways of seeing."¹⁰⁵ While Kalina's reflections illuminate much about the strange allure of a painted photograph, both he and Mackie dance around what defines the snapshot itself. What

¹⁰³ A suggestive parallel lies in Roland Barthes discussion of the "third" or "obtuse" meaning of film stills, which he describes as "the one 'too many,' the supplement my intellection cannot succeed in absorbing, at once persistent and fleeting, smooth and elusive... it seems to open the field of meaning totally, that is infinitely." Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 54-55. Barthes (indirect) relationship to Photorealism via French literature is discussed further in chapter four.

¹⁰⁴ Alwynne Mackie, "New Realism and the Photographic Look," *American Art Review* 4, no. 6 (November 1975): 72-79, 132-34.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Kalina, "Painting Snapshots, Or the Cursory Spectacle," *Art in America* 81, no. 6 (June 1993): 94.

comprises the snapshot look? Is it the amateur practitioner's image, taken in multitudes and collected in albums? Or is it the absorption of that vernacular practice into the mainstream of art photography, as seen in the purposefully offhand rendering of ordinary subjects pioneered by Robert Frank?

The snapshot is a surprisingly abstruse object—it offers up common, even standardized subjects and poses but is part and parcel of idiosyncratic personal histories and thus subject to intense, intimate interpretations. Its domain is the realm of the family, the home, the vacation, and the personal milestone, but, as photographic historian Douglas Nickel relates, “even our own snapshots alienate us from ourselves, our past selves, showing us enigmatic versions of our persons and fragmentary reenactments of our lived experiences.”¹⁰⁶ The West Coast Photorealists took on the snapshot's complex legibility wholeheartedly, embracing its readymade realities as an alternative to the commands of abstraction and interior expression that dominated the world of painting during their formative years. Moreover, the snapshot held particular appeal because of its status as a less aesthetically-polished object; according to McLean, their sources must be “incomplete as photographic statements,” as opposed to the finished products of “art photography” which would leave little room for their own painterly perspectives.¹⁰⁷ As Bechtle frankly explains, “If the photograph is too good and can stand as a finished work of art by itself, there's no reason to make a painting from it.”¹⁰⁸ Thus the artists often choose the very moments that appear inconsequential on film as subjects to be monumentalized in painting. These scenes of minor interactions and their ordinary details—of clothing, furniture, gesture, figures, and setting—are enlarged and subtly refined by various formal adaptations, furnishing elegant studies

¹⁰⁶ Douglas R. Nickel, *Snapshots: The Photography of Everyday Life, 1888 to the Present* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 13.

¹⁰⁷ Tooker, 40.

¹⁰⁸ Bechtle quoted in Chase, Foote, and McBurnett, “The Photo-Realists: 12 Interviews,” 74.

of cultural traces.

Bechtle and McLean often favor posed portraits similar to family photos; using Kodachrome or Ektachrome slides as their source material, these images also chromatically resemble the vernacular practices of color Polaroids or family slide shows. But the works are also infused with “haphazard” intrusions, much like those of the snapshot aesthetic photographers. In mingling these traditions the Photorealists arrived at a look that reminds viewers of their own photographic practices or daily encounters, but is both distanced and heightened by the transfer to large-scale paintings. In addition, the parallel conventions of posing and display in Bechtle and McLean’s works indicate how the various cultures of American materialism were photographically captured in strikingly similar manners. The attitude and gestures of the men in McLean’s *Mr. Fairsocks* (1973) and Bechtle’s *'60 T-Bird* make them not too distant cousins in the tradition of American masculinity, despite their varying accoutrements and equine versus automotive possessions (figs. 41, 9). Both men are seen in profile, taking hold of their equally impressive modes of transportation; notably both wear signifiers of coolness (cowboy hat and boots, sunglasses), but refrain from flashy ornaments that would imply overt investments in self-presentation—their panache is based in the honed nonchalance of the Western American male.

Much like these modern riffs on masculinity, the renditions of the family snapshot in Bechtle’s *'61 Pontiac* (1968–69) and McLean’s *Sacramento Glider* (1973) conjure a clear sense of how traditional portraits and leisure pursuits are made contemporary by the casual, instantaneous framing of the snapshot (figs. 42, 33). For *'61 Pontiac*, Bechtle has composed a different kind of family portrait than those featured in the later *Fosters Freeze* paintings; the code of photography employed is more aligned with the longstanding traditions of frontal, formal

poses designed for a legible, honorable visual recording. Nonetheless, clear signs of haphazardness are recorded by the camera in: only one child makes direct eye contact with camera, while Bechtle seems to hold his son's head in place, as if to prevent him from tottering off at any moment.¹⁰⁹ Perhaps most telling are two apparently incidental facts: the artist's slightly raised right shoe and the deep shadows that disguise both mother and father's eyes from view. The former is again a signifier of photography's instantaneity, while the latter is both a record of Bechtle's propensity for capturing images in the bright midday Californian sun and the result of the camera's tendency to pronounce the tonal differences between light and dark. The artist also seems to have stressed the effects of photographic focus: while the lines of the car are sharply defined, both the family and the front lawn across the street are softly rendered, implying a shallow depth of field in the source image.

McLean's *Sacramento Glider* also finds its subjects squinting in the bright light, the open barn behind the three children a dark void impenetrable from the viewer's place in the sun (fig. 33). Again, though the trio is clearly posing, the relative slackness of their stances and their lack of smiles indicates the informality of the occasion—as noted, a pivotal shift in the tenor of McLean's source photographs. John L. Ward descriptions of Bechtle's works can be applied to both paintings: “The spontaneous, momentary character of the poses and especially the facial expressions, which seem to react to one another as well as to the photographer, are natural to the photographic transaction and very different from what a painter using models could have

¹⁰⁹ In fact, this is not precisely what is happening in the image, but Bechtle acknowledges the appearance. The photograph was taken to commemorate the old Pontiac station wagon pictured, which had just been replaced by a new Volvo. Bechtle recalls: “I just set the camera up on the porch balustrade... and put it on self-timer and got everybody to stand there, and then I ran and got in the photograph and I'm sort of holding my hand on my son's head. It looks like I'm trying to hold him in place. It was actually just to feel where I was in the image.” Bechtle quoted in Lynes and Weinberg, *Shared Intelligence*, 161.

achieved.”¹¹⁰ Furthermore, as Ward also points out, some of the awkwardness found in McLean’s human subjects can be attributed to being physically ill-suited to the environments in which the horses literally shine.¹¹¹

McLean explains that the process of obtaining source photographs for his paintings is in actuality an exercise in luck and diligence: “Out of a day’s work, you’re lucky if you have two or three images you want to work from. There are about five different parts of a horse’s anatomy that can be moving the wrong way. You can startle the horse when you run over to take the picture. There are so many variables.”¹¹² In his later works McLean also occasionally composites photographic sources, particularly when multiple living beings are involved: dogs or figures may come from different images than the horses. The paintings integrate these various components into a coherent whole, avoiding anything too obviously synthetic. For instance, in a work such as *Western Tableau with Rhodesian Ridgeback (Trails West)* (1993), it is difficult to tell that the complex arrangement of dog, horses, woman, and trailer yields from four different source photographs; only the title’s nod to the traditional practice of *tableau vivant* begins to disclose its staging (figs. 43, 44). Both Bechtle and McLean adapt the realities they initially record: McLean sometimes composing scenes that never quite were, while Bechtle edits out visual clutter he deems to be extraneous to the composition. Goings seems to prize fidelity to his sources a bit more, though on occasion he omits figures or sections of photographs that tread too closely to the

¹¹⁰ John L. Ward, *American Realist Painting, 1945 – 1980* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), 291.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 297.

¹¹² McLean quoted in Guida, 28. McLean reveals a number of personal tricks for getting the right shot, including being ready just as he approaches his subjects—the moment when the horse turns to survey the new visitor, before returning to more important occupations and their disinterest in yet another human surveyor becomes apparent. McLean, interview by author, April 27, 2010.

“Hopperesque notion of a lonely figure” or a sentimental “Rockwellian” encounter.¹¹³ Complete replication of their photographic source material is thus not Bechtle, McLean, or Goings’s goal. Rather, all three are devoted to the look of the snapshot, commanding its immediate and idiosyncratic manner of capturing human action and environments for their paintings.

Formally and thematically, these painters enact a double transgression, first by (nearly) replicating the photograph and subsequently by selecting the lowly, unassuming form of the snapshot. For the artists such source material offers not only highly illusionistic imagery but also the formal challenges presented by chance encounters; as Goings puts it, “I still don’t want to edit out those odd, fortuitous compositional things that happen.”¹¹⁴ For the audience, the challenge is twofold: one must digest the complexities of the natural environment as both social milieu and arrangement of formal values, decoding the figures and their setting as interactions of light and shadow, space, texture, and color, but also as trace representations of human activity and the attendant implications of such social spaces. The result is often a paradoxical sense of unsettled legibility: clear rendering distills a distinct sense of life lived in a particular time and place and accessible subjects bring the viewer close to the work, but the fused painting and photograph refuses to settle into a singular interpretation, maintaining the density of the everyday.

Placed-Based Painting and Coastal Dichotomies

To describe the Bay Area Photorealists simply as painters of West Coast subjects is not

¹¹³ Goings quoted in Chase, *Ralph Goings*, 56, 60. Likewise, lighting discrepancies between indoor and outdoor in his paintings of fast food restaurants and diners sometimes mandate substituting an alternate exterior image. Goings, interview by author, May 3, 2010.

¹¹⁴ Goings quoted in Chase, *Ralph Goings*, 60.

only an insufficient but sometimes inaccurate description.¹¹⁵ What is at stake in their work, rather, is how the artists have furthered the iconic traditions of location-based representation with photographic particularity and attentiveness to social relations. Though one could assert that several of the New York based Photorealists present a comparable offering, painters such as Richard Estes and Robert Cottingham are generally less interested in how bodies inhabit these urban spaces.¹¹⁶ While an East Coast/West Coast Photorealist binary oversimplifies the relationship, the New York works do frequently exhibit different aesthetic perspective—one that responds to physical specificities of the local urban environs and the demands of the well-developed art scene. Mona Jensen’s description of the New York-based painters catalogs some recurrent motifs and core strategies:

The photorealistic works connected with the New York environment are characterized by complex compositions which utilize pictorial space to the full extent as well as being extremely rich in detail. Mirroring and reflection are central to many of the works. In addition a very dense—almost fragmented—truncation of the motifs combined with a forcible jump in scale in the form of ‘blow-ups’ and ‘close-ups’ makes the pictures very dramatic and forceful.¹¹⁷

These painters’ propensity for fracturing, recombining, or enlarging the surrounding environment suggests an attempt to digest the enormity of the metropolis through a tried-and-true emphasis on details of surface, texture, and form.¹¹⁸ Such strategies are not completely foreign to the West

¹¹⁵ As noted, Goings departed from the state in the mid-1970s (though he has recently returned) and McLean was both using appropriated sources not necessarily native to his own environment early on and later traveling to take his own horse show photographs. Phyllis Linn, “Picture Perfect Photo Realist Richard McLean,” *Classic* (April/May 1976), 53.

¹¹⁶ First generation Photorealists based in New York include Audrey Flack, Ben Schonzeit, John Kacere, Ron Kleeman, Chuck Close, and Tom Blackwell. Charles Bell began his career in California, but moved to New York in 1967; likewise Cottingham is originally from New York, though he taught in Los Angeles for a brief period of time the late 1960s before returning to the East Coast. As the style has spread with subsequent generations, so has its geographical locales, but in the early days almost all the painters hailed from either the East or West Coast. See Meisel, *Photorealism*, for biographies of the first generation.

¹¹⁷ Mona Jensen, *This is America – Amerikanske Fotorealister/American Photorealists* (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus Kunstmuseum, 2001), 26.

¹¹⁸ Estes works, for instance, are supreme composites, often melding many photographs taken from various perspectives—unlike McLean’s limited composites which maintain a singular viewpoint—resulting in a finished

Coast painters, but the East Coast preoccupation with visual minutia and the playful conundrums presented by reflective surfaces, combined images, or representations rendered nearly abstract through extraction is markedly different from the sense of intimately connected places and people evoked by Bechtle, Goings, and McLean.

Perhaps Bechtle most accurately invokes the core difference between East and West Coast

Photorealisms:

I think there's a major difference between East and West Coast New Realism that has to do with the attitude towards subject matter. Most of the people out here have a relation to the subject matter that somehow puts the identity of the subject matter in the forefront. Where the rationale for a lot of the New York painters has to do more with information, a conceptualized rationale for why they are painting the thing they do.¹¹⁹

Bechtle proffers that this split focus is the result of the West Coast's freedom from the burdens of New York's intellectualized milieu and pressurized marketplace—a conclusion that seems quite logical.¹²⁰ But what might he mean by the “identity of the subject matter”? The

Photorealists are notorious for not wanting to pin down authorial interpretations too finely—as noted above, their works are designed to contain a number of interpretive possibilities. A simple answer, though, might suffice: no other Photorealists match Bechtle, McLean, and Goings's

efforts toward depicting human presence in everyday environments. Even in the works that lack figures, the objects represented are nothing so much as potent reminders of contemporary

activities and occupations; their spaces are those designed for and designed by bodies, registering

product that is more an evocation of a place than its direct imprint. An intriguing foil to Estes's wide-view, combination based works, Cottingham's paintings extract portions of the urban environment, rendering them in highly formalized compositions which almost border on abstraction; Cottingham also travels far and wide in urban America to obtain his source images. Jane Cottingham, “Techniques of Three Photorealists,” *American Artist* (February 1980), 62.

¹¹⁹ Bechtle quoted in an unpublished interview by Chase with Bechtle, Goings, McLean, and Paul Staiger, May 30, 1973, 33. Ralph Goings Papers, 1951–2004, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Reproduced with permission of Ralph Goings and Linda Chase. Photorealism was frequently referred to as “New Realism” during the 1960s and 70s, though the term also included other kinds of realism, such as the studio work of Philip Pearlstein. For more on realism terminology, see chapter two.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

essential qualities of gender, family, class, and social ties.¹²¹

Part of the politically significant work Bechtle, Goings, and McLean have done is to take apparently insignificant information pertaining to ordinary subjects and places and render it larger, more legible, and more sensuous. Udo Kultermann, writing on the “New Realist” movement during its heyday, articulates this value well: “The concerned artist, who reveals new patterns of behavior, teaches us to recognize reality, and even sharpens our perception of objects. It is not so much participation in political actions and protests, but rather his approach to the subject of inquiry that is important, since he seeks to establish the conditions for recognizing the general meaning of reality.”¹²² For Kultermann’s notion of the “general meaning of reality,” I would substitute the Lefebvrian category of the spatialized everyday. As the theorist suggested, “Why wouldn’t the concept of everydayness reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary?”—a sentiment Bechtle himself has directly echoed.¹²³ The three artists’ specific fusing of painting and photograph, merging elements of the snapshot, local subjects, and modernist formal strategies, distills a distinct sense of life lived in a particular place. The works are a subtle but nuanced reformulation of location-based representation, evidence of the ways the social and material cultures of the late twentieth century take visual and spatial form.

¹²¹ For example, Bechtle’s car paintings have been referred to as “portraits.” Paul Karlstrom suggests, “Bechtle... represents cars as extensions of individuals. Depicting himself, relatives, and friends beside their vehicles, as in ‘61 Pontiac, he is acknowledging the intimacy of the relationship.” Karlstrom, “Reflections on the Automobile in American Art,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 20, no. 2 (1980): 22. Class, of course, is an important factor in these works. As indicated above, the Bay Area Photorealists are very conscious of their own class positions; the sociogeographic elements of class depicted in their paintings are covered in chapter three.

¹²² Udo Kultermann, *New Realism* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1972), 22.

¹²³ Henri Lefebvre, “The Everyday and Everydayness,” in Steven Harris and Deborah Burke, eds., *Architecture of the Everyday* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), 35.

CHAPTER 2

Rethinking the Realist Revival

For any scholar who attempts to forge a history of realism, a linguistic and ideological minefield lays in wait. Despite its apparent semantic legibility, realism is an umbrella term, encompassing a myriad number of practices, philosophies, and aesthetic ideals—often in direct contention with one another. Even the related terminology housed under this umbrella is manifold and slippery. What is realism’s relationship to representation? Is realism synonymous with naturalism? Mimesis? Rendering or reckoning with reality or the real? The latter terms have become particularly contentious in the wake of postmodern thinking, though even before that particular paradigm shift, twentieth-century artists era nominated themselves realists utilizing approaches as variable as the modernist prescription of “truth to materials” to a range of engagements with the increasingly urbanized, technologically-integrated forms of contemporary life. Though historians have moved past a reductive teleology—i.e. one that posits an crescendo of emulation until modernism’s supposed staunch defeat of the aims of similitude—synthesizing the means and aims of twentieth-century realism remains a problematic task.

Perhaps foremost among the slippages of modern realism is the contest between materiality and representation. Would realism be defined by the appropriation of everyday matter or by presenting a coherent visual representation of the world? Further, how would one address the masses of reproduced imagery that in large part define contemporary culture? Twentieth-century artists drew from the realist well as both technique and subject matter, staking claims for

the aesthetic innovation and socio-cultural relevance of their work in a jumbled consort of approaches. Yet, despite the linguistic imprecision and proliferation of artistic practices, what is clear in hindsight is that realism remained not only a viable impulse throughout the twentieth century, but a path that offered a means for stylistic and technical invention while maintaining a grounded worldliness responsive to dramatic shifts in politics, culture, and lifestyle.

This chapter focuses on what is sometimes referred to as the “new realism” of the 1960s and 1970s, the moment when a variety of realist practices again appeared prominently on the scene.¹ Though many surveys of twentieth-century realism begin with the lineage of nineteenth-century French painting (and, for Americanists, the endemic nineteenth and early twentieth-century traditions), I mostly forego such comparisons in order to hone in on the context and values of the postwar moment. The discussion moves outward from the specific Photorealist case studies established in the first chapter, but holds their conceptual contents at its core. In order to assess what Photorealism might mean and have accomplished—both in its heyday and retrospective estimation—it is vital to ascertain what the style’s place was in this multitude of realisms. The many voices assembled here synthesize a scattered field and contextualize Photorealism within its own moment and the assessments of art history. Critical interests, biases, and shortcomings are central to this story, as Photorealism’s history is one mainly characterized by antipathy and neglect.

While critical lacunas loom large, Photorealism did not emerge in a vacuum; accordingly, this chapter begins with a brief overview of the succession of realist practices that led up to Photorealism, starting with *Nouveau Réalisme*, passing through Pop art and “studio realism” to Photorealism. These are not comprehensive histories of each realist iteration—such detailed

¹ The origins and use of “new realism” are discussed further below. While it often is used to refer to a specific subset of artists or artworks (i.e. French *Nouveau Réalisme*), I employ the term in its wider sense—i.e. to denote the wide variety of realist practices that appear in the postwar era.

studies can be located elsewhere—but rather a series of overlapping dialogues, which demonstrate how these various forms borrowed and differed from one another. Each of these groups interprets the critical mission of a realist practice in a distinct but not isolated manner. Their respective stylistic, material, and subject choices reveal not only particular aesthetic choices and responses to their social milieu, but also the more general fluidity of realist practices. Interviews and critical essays contain the most obvious traces of desires and prescriptions, but the legions of museum and gallery catalogs produced on realism during this era are also valuable clues to contemporary aspirations and reception. The latter documents, while not always composed in sufficiently complex terms, provide a sense of how curators and gallerists attempted to categorize and define new realist works and, in turn, what audiences received.

Having established the wider realist field during this period, the chapter subsequently focuses more tightly on the reaction to Photorealism. Photorealism is remembered in the main for two things: pushing the use of photographic qualities within painting to a new limit, and the vitriolic critical response this move engendered. Though modernism and realism were always in dialogue, critics often maintained a strong separation between the two categories, hence lingering allegiances to abstraction and the legacy of the abstraction-criticism alliance (i.e. the potentially insidious notion that art and critical interpretation should be symbiotic) often put Photorealism at a disadvantage. Likewise, the perception of realism as a conservative backlash appropriate to the Nixon era, is a central, if again mistaken, part of the style's reception.

The chapter concludes with a consideration of postmodern interpretations of Photorealism. These more recent readings of Photorealism constitute another layer in realism's palimpsestic interpretive history, one that has shifted the common view of both its visual strategies and perceptive effects. Though postmodernism is by now part of criticism's history as

opposed to its present, its reckoning with the real has a sizable legacy, and thus serves as an appropriate coda to this chapter's historiography. Ultimately, I argue the discourse surrounding sixties and seventies realism is defined by multiple factors, often in contention with one another. Both formal and social arguments play central roles, each using the realities of contemporary visual art to comment on the most salient aesthetic and political questions of the day. Photorealism frequently raises these arguments to a fever pitch, as critics decried its supposed excess of consumerist imagery and the mechanical illusionism evidenced in the postmodern appropriation of the style. Now three decades on from that moment of cultural theory, the time is ripe to sort through the nuances of this discourse.

Finally, a note on terminology. As indicated above, terminological confusion abounds in the field of realist studies. Even typographical choices are fraught with ideological suggestions. Rather than offering yet another in the long list of definitions, this chapter seeks to explore the fruitful territory of messy aesthetic boundaries, historical overlaps, and conceptual legacies. I use the word realism wherever critics or artists applied the term, and thus it will refer to a wide variety of practices over the course of the chapter. Photorealism, too, has weathered many labels, among them: new realism, super realism, hyperrealism, Photorealism, radical realism, post-Pop, sharp-focus realism, and so on. Because this dissertation's central case studies are those artists who use and emulate photographs in their paintings, I will continue to use the term Photorealism to refer to this work. The term is also capitalized to denote its historic place, rather than the permeated style that the contemporary use of "photorealism" suggests.²

² Louis Meisel claims to have coined the term in 1968; it first appeared in print in the catalog for the Whitney Museum of American Art's show, "Twenty-two Realists." Meisel and many others initially hyphenated the term (though curiously not in the book's title), but by the mid-eighties the hyphenation seems to have gone out of favor. Louis K. Meisel, *Photorealism* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1980), 12.

New Realisms

To say that realism re-emerged in the wake of abstraction is both true and false. Though its terms shifted, realism remained part of the aesthetic field throughout abstraction's rise to dominance. Many mid-century figurative painters took cues from modernism's formal rigor, paying greater attention to surface, materiality, and the pivotal dialectic between two and three-dimensional space. Likewise, certain Abstract Expressionists, Willem de Kooning chief among them, never wholly gave up figuration and consistently tested the boundaries between real and abstract. This latter work provided a pivotal model for subsequent generations attempting to unburden themselves of high-modernist mandates of medium purity.³ Such boundaries became increasingly fluid, as many artists in the late fifties and early sixties turned again to the external world as a primary source and left the prioritizing of interiority and representational austerity linked to abstraction mostly behind.

Postwar realism, or "new realism," as many observers termed this re-emergent impulse, took a multitude of forms. Even the label itself was applied to several groups and styles, implying a collective ferment of contemporary aesthetics, but also belying a range of conceptual and stylistic inclinations. Frederic Jameson's musings on the evolution of realism and its relationship to modernism are particularly relevant in this regard:

Each realism is also by definition new and aims at conquering a whole new area of content for its representation. Each wishes to annex what has not yet been represented, what has not yet ever been named or found its voice... This is to say not only that each new realism arises out of dissatisfaction with the limits of the realisms that preceded it, but also more fundamentally that realism itself in general shares precisely that dynamic of innovation we ascribed to modernism as its uniquely distinguishing feature.⁴

³ In fact, the latter position was not actually codified until the early 1960s, with Clement Greenberg's publication of "Modernist Painting" in 1960. See Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," republished in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 85-94.

⁴ Frederic Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), 123.

Though Jameson deems a master narrative that encompasses both modernism and realism inherently problematic—in his view the categories are fundamentally incompatible as aesthetic versus epistemological models, which, as indicated in the previous chapter’s discussion of Bay Area Photorealism, is not a distinction I support—his text offers crucial aid to deciphering the mid-century swirl of realist practices. He suggests, “the older technique or content must somehow subsist within the work as what is cancelled or overwritten, modified, inverted, or negated, in order for us to feel the force, in the present, of what is alleged to have once been an innovation.”⁵ This synchronic model avoids the pitfalls of linear progression; though this chapter follows realism’s passage through a succession of incarnations, many of these strands overlapped or were even simultaneous. Mid-century realist practices were particularly palimpsestic, engaging with and overwriting the work of both predecessors and contemporaries. Thus to start with Nouveau Réalisme is not to imply an aesthetic origin for the end point of Photorealism—as noted in chapter one the painters’ roots are frequently as much modernist as they are realist—but rather to mark a moment when critical attention to postwar realism began to grow. Nouveau Réalisme also offers a strategic entryway into several salient issues, such as what kind of subject matter and technique were seen as fit to revive realism for contemporary tastes and concerns.

This moment is also emblematic in that a variety of artistic threads became a cumulative force under the loose rubric of new realism. The new realism label was first applied in the postwar context by Pierre Restany, the French critic associated with a diverse group of European artists that included Yves Klein, Arman, César, Jean Tinguely, Niki de Saint Phalle, Daniel Spoerri, Christo, and François Dufrène.⁶ In the 1960 Nouveau Réaliste manifesto, Restany

⁵ Ibid., 128.

⁶ Louis Aragon and Fernand Léger used and debated the term in the 1930s. Their reflections on re-envisioning modernism and engaging with contemporary technological forms form interesting parallels with postwar discussions of new realism. See Louis Aragon, *Pour un réalisme socialiste* (Paris: Denoël et Steele, 1935); and Fernand Léger,

declares that easel painting “has had its day,” and proposes instead a new investigation of the “sociological” through focus on “The passionate adventure of the real perceived in itself and not through the prism of conceptual or imaginative transcription.”⁷ Restany subsequently expounds their cause for American audiences:

What is taking place at the moment is the birth of a new language, the elements of which are inspired by a new comprehension of nature. For the younger generation of today, “nature” is no longer that of Virgil, or Jean-Jacques Rousseau or Walt Whitman; it is neither sentimental nor bucolic, but industrial, urban and aggressive. Young artists have gradually absorbed this sociological reality, which is the context of their daily lives, and have begun to feel the necessity of attacking it head-on without having recourse to classic methods of sublimation. This gives rise to a whole series of individual experiments with one end in common: to make us see this particular reality with fresh eyes.⁸

Philosophical and material engagement with the matter of everyday life was not a new phenomenon, particularly in postwar France. Critics like Roland Barthes and Henri Lefebvre, aesthetic provocateurs like the Situationists, and a number of others with leftist inclinations engaged this approach with vigor. But, as Michèle Cone has noted, Restany did not share their avowed disapproval of American materialism. Rather, Restany focused on the relevancy of the Duchampian readymade for the postwar consumer era and engaged with works and artists on both sides of the Atlantic.⁹ In 1962 dealer Sidney Janis joined with Restany to mount a New York show of new realism:

City bred, the New Realist is a kind of urban folk artist. Living in New York, Paris, London, Rome, Stockholm, he finds his inspiration in urban culture. He is attracted to abundant everyday ideas and facts which he gathers, for example, from the street, the store counter, the amusement arcade or the home. Rediscovered by the artist and lifted out of its commonplace milieu, the daily object, unembellished and without ‘artistic’

Functions of Painting, ed. and trans. E. F. Fry (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973). Emma Barker provides a good historical overview. See Emma Barker, “Art in Paris in the 1930s,” in *Varieties of Modernism*, ed. Paul Wood (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 27-31.

⁷ Pierre Restany, “The New Realists,” in *Art and Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 725.

⁸ Restany, “The New Realists,” *Art in America* LI, no. 1 (February 1963): 102.

⁹ Michèle C. Cone, “Pierre Restany and the Nouveau Réalistes,” in “The French Fifties,” ed. Susan Weiner, special issue, *Yale French Studies* 98, (2000): 54.

pretensions is revealed and intensified and becomes through the awareness it evokes a new esthetic experience.¹⁰

Janis's gallery had been a central player in the promotion of Abstract Expressionism; with "New Realism" Janis linked multiple modes of making under the new designation "Factual artist."¹¹ Art historians often use the show's success to mark the end of New York's allegiance to abstraction and the ushering in of these new, polyform realist practices, Pop art chief among them.¹² In essence Janis presented Arman, Christo, Klein, Spoerri, and the other Nouveau Réalistes as predecessors to American Pop artists like Robert Indiana, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, James Rosenquist, Andy Warhol, and Tom Wesselmann.

Janis's introductory essay for the exhibition noted three dominant motifs uniting the international variety: a debt to Duchamp's readymade, the influence of mass media, and repetition—the latter not simply a formal device, but an "inevitable consequence of [the artist's] environment."¹³ These links are fitting, if the very broadest of elements among a highly diverse range of offerings; John Ashberry's essay for the show is perhaps even more accurate in nominating simply "the object" as the works' common thread.¹⁴ Note, for instance, the distance traversed between pieces such as Christo's *L'empaquetage* (1961) and Wayne Thiebaud's *Salads, Sandwiches & Deserts* (1962), both on view at the exhibition (figs. 45, 46).¹⁵ Christo's take on Western commercial packaging implies a sense of aesthetic subterfuge, refusing the viewer the pleasure of its contents by concealing their identity and function; its realism is

¹⁰ Sidney Janis, *New Realists* (New York: Sidney Janis Gallery, 1962), n.p.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Indeed, following the exhibition Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb, Philip Guston and Robert Motherwell all left the gallery, with only de Kooning remaining.

¹³ Janis, n.p.

¹⁴ John Ashberry, in *New Realists*, Sidney Janis, n.p.

¹⁵ The Janis catalog appears to misspell the title of Christo's work, labeling it "L'empaquelage." The French word for packaging is l'empaquetage; the title is listed as such on Christo and Jean Claude's (his collaborator) website. See "Early Works," <http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/early.shtml> (accessed March 27, 2011).

material and conceptual, rather than representational.¹⁶ Thiebaud's work, on the contrary, is chiefly concerned with display, enumerating the rows of pre-plated courses in a manner distinctly reminiscent of commercial food production. Though both illustrate material investment in the lumpy irregularities that connote their handmade origins and share some remnants of modernist visual vocabulary, the gap between the sculpture and the painting signals divergent approaches between realist materiality and representation. Despite Restany and Janis's international embrace, the range of work included in this seminal display of new realism is indicative of remaining rivalry between the Americans and the French. As Thomas Crow observes, relations between the two were still "colored by art-political struggles over the challenge of New York to the traditional dominance of Paris as the center and arbiter of advanced art."¹⁷ But this variety is also a harbinger of the emergent pluralities and range of historical references in contemporary realist practices. Ashberry rightly comments that the new realism was not, in fact, new or singular: its various iterations could be seen in both the present and past, and, moreover, across media.¹⁸ Again, as Jameson argues, realism is by definition a practice that engages in constant renewal; old realisms are not forgotten, but visibly overwritten.

A frequently cited, if perhaps simplistic, lineage posits that new realism in its American incarnation gradually molted into the streamlined form of Pop; historians have often spun that trajectory forward to the emergence of Photorealism. From this perspective, Pop, though

¹⁶ Man Ray's *L'Enigme d'Isidore Ducasse* (1920) is perhaps a precedent, though that work's contents are not a secret: the wrapped sewing machine is a reference to a famed phrase attributed to the nineteenth-century author named in the work's title.

¹⁷ Thomas Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties: American and European Art in the Era of Dissent* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 96-97. Indeed, the show was a brief moment of Euro-American alliance: Restany's text for the catalog was radically cut and the American press generally reacted much less positively to the European works in the show, leaving Restany feeling "cheated." See Julia Robinson on the nuances of European-American relations, "Before Attitudes Came Form—New Realisms: 1957-62," in *New Realisms: 1957-1962, Object Strategies Between Readymade and Spectacle* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), 23-39.

¹⁸ Ashberry's examples include nineteenth and twentieth-century literature (Apollinaire, Flaubert, Robbe-Grillet, and Sarraute), the historic avant-garde (Duchamp, Picasso, and the Dadaists), and contemporary European film (Resnais and Antonioni). Ashberry, n.p.

indebted to European practices for their wholehearted embrace of the common object, provides the real aesthetic rebellion in its overwhelming slickness and reliance on the mediated image; not only is the consumer market fodder for subject matter, but its visual syntax is appropriated and shrewdly transformed in the terms of painting and sculpture. This lineage, while not wholly false—nearly every Photorealist admits at least some debt to Pop Art—simplifies the multitude of realisms the 1960s produced. Part of the difficulty of reconstructing this moment is not only the numerous new realisms, but also the tendency of those engaged with American realist painting to mostly ignore its connections to the recent European tradition. Alvin Martin reflects on the likely origins of this critical oversight:

The spectacular re-emergence of realism as a vital force in contemporary art began almost unnoticed by modernist critics amidst the controversy surrounding pop art in the early 1960's... Both the critics, who regarded pop as a deviation from the modernist trajectory, and those who hailed it as a new means of injecting humanity and social issues back into art tended to see any form of aggressively realistic art as an aspect of pop.¹⁹

There were, as Martin also notes, personal and professional connections between some of the Pop artists and the realists—shared galleries or social circles. But, more than anything, relating the new painting to Pop seems to have been a matter of both pride and convenience: an American-dominated and dominant movement, it set (and still sets, to some degree) the bar for critics and scholars of American art.

The plurality of postwar realist practices reflects the fecundity of this vein for artists, but offered observers no simple way to diagram the current milieu. Willard Midgette, one of many painters working in this vein, lamented the lack of critical clarity and the tendency to define by default: “New Realism does not denote a group of painters linked by common attitudes (though sub-groups of this kind could easily be recognized if anyone were interested); it signifies an

¹⁹ Alvin Martin, “Modern Realism is Really Real Modernism: Contemporary Realism in Context,” in *Real, Really Real, Super Real: Directions in Contemporary Realism*, ed. Aubyn Kendall (San Antonio: San Antonio Museum Association, 1981), 19.

interval of attention by the art world. A ‘New Realist’ is simply one whose work was not widely known before the current interest in Realism.”²⁰ His appraisal of the art world, though smarmily delivered, contains an important grievance: the sense of a “one-size-fits-all” terminology tended to obscure variety and thus was potentially a hindrance to artists and viewer comprehension.

New Realism’s Critical Advocates

Though new realist work of all varieties has been the subject of numerous museum and gallery exhibitions, little writing has dealt with the trajectory of American realist painting in the sixties and seventies as a whole. John Ward’s *American Realist Painting 1945-1980* and Frank Goodyear’s *Contemporary American Realism Since 1960* are relative exceptions, though both suffer considerable methodological weaknesses.²¹ Goodyear’s survey is limited by overly simplified categorization according to subject matter—a format likely dictated by its role as a companion volume to an exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts—while Ward’s work reads more as lengthy sum of extended visual analyses rather than a critical synthesis. Ward and Goodyear’s texts are enfeebled by overly formalist and content-driven

²⁰ Walter Midgette quoted in Christine Lindey, *Superrealist Painting and Sculpture* (New York: William Morrow, 1980), 37.

²¹ See Frank Goodyear, *Contemporary American Realism Since 1960* (Boston: New York Graphic Society in association with the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1981); and John L. Ward, *American Realist Painting 1945-1980* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1989). Sam Hunter’s chapter on Pop art and New Realism in his *American Art of the Twentieth* benefits from being slightly less myopic, but his meditation on new realism is brief and tends to conflate disparate practices. See Sam Hunter, “Pop Art and New Realism” in *American Art of the 20th Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1973), 261-311. Though Ward devises a number of categories to decipher new realism’s multi-pronged reach and benefits from including a number of artists that are otherwise mostly overlooked, his categories never gel into a coherent whole; the reader can compare various strategies, but the particulars of how, for instance, the “post-existential painterly realists” relate to those who fall under “the significant subject treated seriously” rubric remains nebulous. The texts are useful as accessible surveys, and Ward’s visual analysis is impressively detailed and often insightful—as evidenced by his comments on the paintings of Bechtle and McLean included in chapter one. His reading of Photorealism is possibly more successful because of its somewhat greater stylistic unity; given the broad range of other new realist practices he fails to make an equally persuasive case.

approaches, respectively; indeed, these are the two major pitfalls of tackling the unwieldy topic of realist plurality.

Period texts from openly invested artists and historians like Sidney Tillim, Philip Pearlstein, Udo Kultermann, and Linda Nochlin are not only more pointed, but also often manage to successfully summarize collective impulses. Though they approached realism from a variety of perspectives, all were committed advocates, waging an uphill battle to revive realist painting in the critical arena, which still frequently adhered to abstract versus representational binaries. Their firm stakes in the debate also set them apart from other members of the commentariat tied up in the semantic or aesthetic muddle of realist proliferations. These tracts thus largely defined the terms and parameters of the realist discourse, providing a framework of stylistic and social concerns against which the Photorealist niche was often measured.

Tillim and Pearlstein, both realist painters, began writing defenses of realism in the early 1960s—several years prior to Nochlin and Kultermann, whose texts date from the late sixties and early seventies. Both Tillim and Pearlstein made pronounced rallying cries for the importance of new figurative practices; their writings form one half of the dialectic between observational and photography-based practices—an alternately supportive and contentious relationship. Pearlstein is well known as an early postwar realist painter who has engaged with the nude figure for many decades. His distinctive style employs sharp cropping of the body and stark rendering of human flesh; his allegiance to traditional processes—i.e. working from live models in his studio, a notable distinction among the many contemporaneous artists who employed appropriated mass media imagery of the nude (female) form—and strong sense of the formal principles of modernism yield a body of work that is at once aligned with historic and contemporary concerns. Pearlstein's assertions of his own interests and the aims and achievements of contemporary

realism made his voice an essential one of this era. Tillim, by contrast, is better known as a critic than a painter. Working for *Arts Magazine* in the late fifties and *Artforum* through the mid and later sixties, Tillim gained a reputation for his independent, often contrarian perspective. Though he wrote on a variety of topics and evinced a slightly unusual propensity for juxtaposing different historical periods and stylistic approaches, he is mostly remembered as an advocate for figurative painting.²²

Writing in the moment when modernism was becoming increasingly codified and abstract painting seemingly ever more “purified,” Tillim was eager to declare the decline of modernist abstraction, while Pearlstein focused on its tenacious hold over practicing artists. In 1962 Pearlstein wrote of the two “tyrannies” imposed upon contemporary artists, the “flat picture plane,” and the “roving point-of-view.”²³ Yet, he is far from dismissing their value; on the contrary, he confesses, “the battle with them is for me the most meaningful experience in painting the figure.”²⁴ His assertion of the importance of observation in realist painting is balanced by the clear legacy of modernist formalism. Most significantly in this context, Pearlstein condemns the tendency of abstract artists to lump all varieties of contemporary realism together as “photographic.”²⁵ The painter’s fond description of the revelations of observational work and sensitivity to the fluctuating properties of light and color indicate a substantially different perspective than the intense singularity of Photorealism’s snapshot-based language.

²² Katy Siegel, “Critical Realist,” *Artforum* 42, no. 1 (September 2003): 208; and Ken Johnson, “Sidney Tillim, 76, Art Critic and Historic Scene Painter,” *New York Times*, August 20, 2001.

²³ Pearlstein’s genealogy traces the former dictum to Gauguin, Seurat, and Cézanne, while the latter, he asserts, is the most venerable tradition in art, dating back to Roman and early Renaissance practices. Philip Pearlstein, “Figure Paintings Today Are Not Made in Heaven,” *Art News* 61, no. 3 (Summer 1962): 39.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Though he rebels against the more stringent strains of modernism, Pearlstein remains a formalist at heart, seeing the artist's "ultimate expression" as dependent on "control of technical means."²⁶

Tillim supports the same group of painters as Pearlstein—namely Gabriel Laderman, Alfred Leslie, Jack Beal, William Bailey, and Alex Katz—but is much less generous toward the modernist impulse. Writing a year after Pearlstein, he declares that current "European abstract painting is awful, while the American kind is but a shadow of its former self, a self not yet a generation in existence."²⁷ But abstraction is not Tillim's only target—rather, it is the entire American aesthetic tradition, which, in his view, has "either been doomed to provincialism—Venus as *Hausfrau*—or a cultural sibling-rivalry on an international scale."²⁸ Certainly Tillim was not the only one to describe the history of American art as determined by the polarities of cultural mimicry and insularity, but he is perhaps alone in charging that legacy as particularly problematic for the re-emerging realists. More often realist advocates point with pride to the legacy of Thomas Eakins, Winslow Homer, Edward Hopper, and other well-recognized figures in American realist painting. In Tillim's view painting subjects are direct corollaries of a particular culture, which, in the American case, have been "anti-artistic."²⁹ Despite this professed loathing of the American tradition, he prescribes for his fellow realists a lofty goal: to restore art's communal value by reconnecting with the external world, giving "art a sense of purpose in the modern world."³⁰ If Pearlstein advocated for a closure of realism's boundaries, anchoring it within the confines of observational practice and modernist formal values, Tillim sought nothing

²⁶ Pearlstein, "Whose Painting Is It Anyway?" *Arts Yearbook* 7 (1964): 131.

²⁷ Sidney Tillim, "Realism and 'The Problem'," *Arts Magazine*, September 1963, 48.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

less than a rescue of American culture—one that avoided the pitfalls of his long list of failed avant-gardes and contemporary misfires.

Tillim was unafraid to issue rebukes to artists, other critics, and even the very institutions that employed him. In his 1969 essay for the Milwaukee Art Center's *Aspects of a New Realism* exhibition, Tillim derides two thirds of the works included as either a regurgitation of the early twentieth-century avant-gardes or simply additional variants of Pop.³¹ The essay is in essence an agitated call to arms: particularly dismissive of Photorealist works, he urges his fellow realists to “come to grips with subject matter, and the requisite attitudes it requires, to break out of the grip of latent serialization.”³² While he reserves his most severe castigation for painters like Thiebaud, Bechtle, Estes, and Morely, even painters like Pearlstein and Leslie, who align more closely with his aesthetic perspective, do not escape unscathed. Ultimately though, he sees the latter group as marginally redeemed by their attempt to achieve a “new figurative art,” whereas the “new realists” (i.e. Pop variants or the Photorealists; terminological confusion abounds here) are circumscribed by Pop’s conceptual legacy: the refusal to believe in a “meaningful *pictorial* illusion.”³³ This last distinction ultimately centers on perceived gravitas: the new realisms not

³¹ Tillim, *Aspects of a New Realism: Two Critical Essays*, Sidney Tillim and William S. Wilson (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Art Center, 1969), n.p. Perhaps this undisguised criticism accounts for why the critical essays commissioned for the show were printed separately from the general catalog—not an unheard of practice, but considering the essays’ short length, seemingly unnecessary. John Lloyd Taylor, the Assistant Director of Exhibitions, concludes his introduction to the exhibition in the main catalog on a telling note: “Although there may be instances where we do not necessarily agree with their [Tillim and Wilson’s] appraisals of individual artists’ work, the exhibition’s value can only be enhanced by these essays which are indeed so important to the subject.” John Lloyd Taylor, *Aspects of a New Realism* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Arts Center, 1969), 7. Tillim’s essay was also published in *Artforum*: the text is verbatim but a broader title is substituted. See Sidney Tillim, “A Variety of Realisms,” *Artforum* 7 (Summer 1969): 42-47.

³² Tillim, *Aspects of a New Realism*, n.p.

³³ *Ibid.* Tillim generally uses Lawrence Alloway’s “post-Pop” label in place of Photorealism, but also occasionally uses new realism.

only duplicate past movements, but also fall prey to the surface appeals of a capitalist economy, serializing its vacant subjects.³⁴

In Tillim's *Artforum* article from the same year, "The Reception of Figurative Art: Notes on A General Misunderstanding," his fellow critics bear the brunt of his censure. Reflecting on the recent writing by Lawrence Alloway and Nochlin that had garnered much public attention, Tillim launches a personally inflected rebuttal:

It seems to me that a fundamental misunderstanding is involved when a Mel Ramos is considered more pertinent than a Philip Pearlstein, or when a Malcolm Morely is placed on a par with a Gabe Laderman. Representation is an impulse, not a style. A straightforward approach to representation, to art which quotes the Renaissance rather than comic books, is dismissed as academic, while the possibilities of a new narrative art are not even imagined. Instead sociology is substituted for literature, trends for history and topicality for quality. The past is denied in a role in the vision of the contemporary experience.³⁵

As the last line of this diatribe indicates, Tillim sees the main problem in contemporary criticism as stemming from its historical ignorance. In his view the historic traditions of figurative art—not American, which earned his opprobrium, but rather old master—seen through modern eyes, are fundamental to the best new work. Perhaps most radically, the critic ends by asserting that the new figurative art is not necessarily realism, but rather is "involved with some sort of new idealism."³⁶ Tillim's failure to articulate precisely what might successfully constitute a "new idealism" in the in the contemporary moment likely indicates the potential difficulty of such an endeavor within the current aesthetic and social climate.

Pearlstein's work, however, seems to have crystallized key conflicts for the critic. Tillim attributes the rancor that Pearlstein's nudes frequently elicited to American art's recent lack of

³⁴ Notably the figure is essential to winning Tillim's approval—despite his dismissal of realisms that recall earlier avant-garde moments, his own stance is in many ways a more regressive neo-humanist ideology.

³⁵ Tillim, "The Reception of Figurative Art: Notes on a General Misunderstanding," *Artforum* 7 (February 1969): 30.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

social impetus: “[art] has been almost completely occupied with form as content and style as the ultimate objective. All the modernist movements have been short-lived because they could not support for long a conflict between proposed social objectives and the esthetic imperatives upon which they had been superimposed.”³⁷ He finds a renewed “heroism” in Pearsstein’s oversized nudes, pushing beyond the limits of style—where he sees modernism as having dead-ended.³⁸ Pearlstein’s somewhat coldly rendered subjects may initially seem an odd repository for contemporary heroism; the psychological distance and substantial de-eroticization of such works as *Male and Female Nudes with Red and Purple Drape* (1968) is not unlike the balancing of objective vision and purposefully open signification found in Photorealist paintings or the ambiguity of many Pop subjects (fig. 47). But Pearlstein’s commitment to the fleshy dimensionality of the human body sets his work apart from the majority of Pop and Photorealism, both more preoccupied with the perceptual and cultural implications of taking two-dimensional source material as subject and style. Likewise, despite Tillim’s claims to the contrary, to champion Pearlstein is a defense of individual style: the artist’s nudes are always identifiable as the work of a singular hand—a marked contrast to contemporaneous realist explorations of mediation signified by hybrid practices.

If, by 1981, one expects this sense of defensiveness to have waned, weathering two decades of criticism seems to have only exacerbated the situation for realism’s proponents. For his contribution to the *Real, Really Real, Super Real* exhibition, Pearlstein mounts a case for realism as coequal to other contemporary movements, asserting that realists, “use our intellects

³⁷ Tillim, “Philip Pearlstein and the New Philistinism,” *Artforum* 4, no. 9 (May 1966): 22.

³⁸ Siegel, 208. Perhaps surprisingly, the critic admires the contemporary Minimalists for what he views as a parallel stylistic dismantling. In fact, *Artforum* editor Philip Leider saw Tillim and Michael Fried as the magazine’s two poles: Tillim intensely engaged with figuration and Fried known for his Greenbergian formalism and famed take-down of Minimalism’s “theatricality,” which appeared in the magazine a year later. See Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” *Artforum* 5 (June 1967): 12-23.

as much as our sensibilities to make self-conscious choices about technical procedures and subject matter equal to the kinds of choices made by their colleagues in minimalist, concept, situation, and other modes and that the meaning of their art is strongly conditioned by their procedures rather than the other way around.”³⁹ Likewise Nochlin, writing in the same catalog, still finds it necessary to provide a systematic decoding of contemporary realist pursuits. Using traditional genre categories to frame the artists’ simultaneous upholding and reformulation of the venerable realist legacy, she argues the artists stretch the boundaries of acceptable subject matter and technique. Though Nochlin acknowledges the criticism that some of these painters perhaps “avoid the more painful and demanding examination of the systems of power,” she concludes that such criticisms are unfair, the new realist tradition being “redeemed by its qualities of ambiguity, complexity, and tension in the face of modern reality.”⁴⁰

Nochlin’s earlier, well-known writing on realism in large part defined the terms of debate alongside Pearlstein and Tillim. In 1968 Nochlin organized *Realism Now* at Vassar College, a pivotal early survey of American new realism. Included were a number of well-established realists like Pearlstein, Leslie, and Katz, but also up-and-coming Photorealists like Bechtle and Estes. Nochlin’s introductory essay makes a forceful rebuttal against realism’s relegation to the “limbo of philistinism,” claiming that the novelty of the work “lies more in its connection with photography, with new directions in that most contemporary of all media, the film, or even with the advanced novel, than in its relation to traditional realist painting.”⁴¹ Her themes—ones many writers on Photorealism will later take up—include the centrality of contemporary subject matter, metonymic and synecdochal (as opposed to metaphoric) means, the preference for the

³⁹ Pearlstein, “A Concept of New Realism,” in *Real, Really Real, Super Real*, 40.

⁴⁰ Linda Nochlin, “The Flowering of American Realism,” in *Real, Really Real, Super Real*, 33.

⁴¹ Nochlin, *Realism Now* (Poughkeepsie: Vassar College Art Gallery, 1968), 8.

literal rather than the narrative, and, perhaps most importantly, the view of content and style as indivisible parts of a singular entity.⁴²

Though her perceptive take on the contemporary realist climate would become a model for later writers such as Linda Chase, Nochlin is likely better known for her seminal essay, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?”⁴³ These two pursuits, however, were not divorced. In the same year that her foundational feminist work appeared, she also published *Realism*. The latter text’s socio-historical approach shifted the discussion of nineteenth-century realism and prepared the ground for such scholars as T.J. Clark.⁴⁴ Nochlin is one of the few writers to consider the role of gender within realist pursuits. For instance, her essay for the *Real, Really Real, Super Real* includes an extended discussion of the work of Sylvia Sleigh, Audrey Flack, and Sylvia Plimack Mangold. Though these artists often choose subjects without “overtly feminine or feminist implications,” Nochlin attests to the potential socio-historic and political implications of their work: Mangold’s floor paintings painting at once recall Gustave Caillebotte’s *Floor Planers* (1875), the all-over surfaces of Abstract Expressionism, and postwar attention to the burdens of women’s domestic labor (figs. 48, 49).⁴⁵ Contextualizing these women within their contemporary moments and the greater historical trajectory of realism, Nochlin is perhaps the only one to acknowledge that women’s confinement within the realm of the everyday—and thus distinctly separate from the traditionally vaunted realms of history

⁴² Ibid., 8-14.

⁴³ Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” *Art News* 69 (January 1971): 22-39.

⁴⁴ Nochlin, *Realism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

⁴⁵ Nochlin, “The Flowering of American Realism,” 31-32. Published several years prior, “Some Women Realists” calls attention to these same contemporary female realist painters, in addition to precedents in the work of the nineteenth-century English genre painter Emily Osborn, the New Deal imagery of Lucienne Bloch and Florine Stettheimer, and the sexually charged works of Georgia O’Keefe. See Nochlin, “Some Women Realists,” *Arts Magazine*, February 1974, 46-51. Politics and the history of realist painting also come together in Nochlin’s essay “The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law II.” This text, more devoted to modernism’s critical dominance, is discussed below along with perspectives of W. J. T. Mitchell and Tom Wolfe.

painting—raises the pressing question of gender within the realist field, and productively complicates notions of realism in ways that many of her fellow advocates overlook.

Udo Kultermann's *New Realism* is not as perspicacious as Nochlin's work, though there is a parallel attentiveness to political implications.⁴⁶ In a very broad section on the "political aspects" of new realism, Kultermann states the obvious: the works are not political propaganda, nor do they even reflect a specific political perspective. Nonetheless, his assertion that the works' (literally) sharp perception of contemporary conditions have political value is, as noted in chapter one, a markedly bolder assertion than most critics were willing to make.⁴⁷ Moreover, his declarations are important indications of their historical context, one dominated by the violence of contemporary geopolitics: "It is the concepts and values gained by research and the art of precise observation which may determine the course of history, not weapons or armies, or the accumulation of sheer technical, military, or political power."⁴⁸ As a German historian viewing America through the lens of its aggressive, bravado-filled foreign policy, Kultermann seems relieved to find evidence of subtler national self-reflection.⁴⁹

Although these four voices cannot stand in for the entire critical field, they provide a sense of the range of positions advocating for new realist work. Various weighing the merits of

⁴⁶ Kultermann is likely a less familiar name but his perspective was well referenced during the era, and his voice remains fairly unique. His historiographic text *Geschichte der Kunstgeschichte. Der Weg einer Wissenschaft* is still considered a fundamental teaching text in Germany, though his work on realism seems to have fallen out of favor with both American and German audiences. See Udo Kultermann, *Geschichte der Kunstgeschichte. Der Weg einer Wissenschaft*, (Düsseldorf: Econ, 1966). Kultermann, who emigrated from Germany to the United States in the late sixties, published in both German and English. *New Realism* was originally published in German as *Radikaler Realismus*; it was translated the same year. See Kultermann, *Radikaler Realismus* (Tübingen: Ernst Wasmuth, 1972). Despite the early translation, no further editions were published and the text is rarely referenced in contemporary surveys. *New Realism* contains some basic errors in its description of style and technique. For example, Kultermann includes artists like Pearlstein in his discussion of photographic technique, though Pearlstein was widely known to have considered the Photorealist process a stylistic shortcut and never used photographic source material. Kultermann, *New Realism* (Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, 1972), 18-21. My thanks to Susanne Scharf and Gisela Parak for their perspective on Kultermann's German publications.

⁴⁷ Kultermann, *New Realism*, 22.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁹ Photorealism's European reception is discussed further in chapter four.

formal, iconographic, and social or political concerns, Pearlstein, Tillim, Nochlin, and Kultermann offer more purposefully charged perspectives in a sea of often murky critical writing.⁵⁰ Likewise, their shared willingness to define the prospect of realism as itself renewed and renewing provided essential counterpoints to the mass of voices which dismissed all figurative work as automatically retrogressive. Whether it be through inheriting the modernist legacy, reinventing ‘heroism’ for the contemporary social climate, engaging new forms of media and perception, or countering the violent rhetoric of American politics, these four envisioned lofty aspirations and implications for new realist practices.

Yet, it is precisely this grandeur of aims that seems to have been lost over time. This erasure is partly due to the generalized impact of postmodernism, with its tendency locate irony, simulation, or even psychoanalytic impulses in realist works—impulses that often deflate the correlation between the works and their contemporary context. But the loss of these critical aspirations is also likely attributable to their lack of univocality: no one powerful voice could stand in, as Clement Greenberg or Harold Rosenberg did with Abstract Expressionism, for the accumulated force of realism’s diversity. The plurality of these practices engendered differing views, allowing for one critic to define realism’s value as investigation of a new kind of figurative painting space, while another could focus on its essential connection to contemporary life. The problem of historical diversity persists today: while the art world often finds charge in current stylistic splintering, past “disorder” is often relegated to oblivion. Clearly a unified narrative is easier to recount, but in the case of postwar realism, rarely does such a singular or history exist to be retold.

⁵⁰ Notably the visual arts lacked a realist critical discourse comparable to that of literature—i.e. the highly influential works of Georg Lukács and Erich Auerbach, among others.

Cataloging Catalogs

Museum and gallery exhibition catalogs may not rank highly as critical documents, but such texts provide a significant clue to what kinds of realist art audiences were exposed to, and where curators and gallerists felt the field was heading. Not only did exhibitions introduce the public to new realist work, they also informed artists of unknown colleagues working in similar veins.⁵¹ Because the various post-abstraction realist threads rarely started as collective efforts or became coherent movements, these events—particularly the early museum exhibitions and gallery shows—provided opportunities for artistic exchange and occasional semblances of community. Likewise, as few comprehensive accounts of realism’s postwar resurgence have been written, they maintain their value as primary source material for both researchers interested in immersing themselves in the contemporary realist dialogue and viewers seeking out artworks that in many cases are infrequently reproduced.

Rather than enumerate the myriads of exhibitions catalogs, a brief overview and a few salient points about terminology, historical perspective, and critical positioning suffices. *Table 1* (see pages 265-67) is a sampling of catalogs from an array of institutions, which in turn offer a range of writing from critics, curators, gallerists, and artists.⁵² The publications date from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, a period selected because it offers the most concentrated attention to realist trends and coincides with Photorealism’s heyday.⁵³ While this list likely overlooks a few

⁵¹ See, for instance, Ralph Goings’s recollection of learning there were others working in the same Photorealist vein through the Milwaukee Art Center’s 1969 exhibition, *Aspects of a New Realism*. Oral history interview with Ralph Goings, conducted by Judith Olch Richards, September 10-11, 2009, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

⁵² Most of the catalogs were compiled using the Smithsonian Institution Libraries: the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the Hirshhorn Museum in particular count an impressive range of American art catalogs among their holdings. Additional sources were located through the University of Michigan and San José State University library systems and interlibrary loan resources.

⁵³ Though there are catalogs that date from before and after this period, the seventies (with some overhang in the adjacent decades) was the most fruitful decade for realist exhibitions. Foreign and strictly regional (i.e. studies of West Coast realism) catalogs are excluded; those materials are dealt with in chapters three and four. Gallery shows

sources (most are no longer in print, and many had very small publishing runs), it does provide a fairly thorough snapshot of the moment in realist collecting and exhibiting. Of the twenty-nine publications assembled here, the average number of artists included is thirty-four—weighted at the top and bottom by a few survey texts and small gallery shows. The exhibitions were mostly held in small to mid-size museums and galleries around the country, though a few were the products of larger cultural institutions in New York. The first four major shows—*Realism Now*, *Aspects of a New Realism*, *Twenty-Two Realists*, and *Sharp Focus Realism*—were pivotal points of introduction and were widely reviewed.

These texts are generally more moderate and conventional than the polemics of critics and the dense philosophical musings of theorists. Admittedly, their writing is mostly unremarkable. The majority contain only brief bits of text and image reproductions are often (at least to the contemporary eye) of low quality and frequently in reductive black-and-white. Yet, even a brief perusal of the publication data provides a sense of realist permutations populating the field. Titles indicate the way in which curators and gallerists attempted to label the work and again signal the semantic confusion surrounding realism. There are essentially two categories of titles: those that use temporal indicators, like “contemporary,” “now,” or “new,” and those which tend toward the superlative, using “super” or “really” to describe the work.⁵⁴ Both essentially serve the same function: to distinguish the current realism from that of realisms-past, fending off potential accusations of staid regurgitation by arguing that this work is newer and

are also less well represented, as publications were less frequently part of smaller scale productions and ephemera such as postcard announcements and small pamphlets are difficult to comprehensively catalog.

⁵⁴ The term “superreal” dates back to (at least) early twentieth-century modernism. Piet Mondrian published an article in 1930 titled, “L’art réaliste et l’art superréaliste: la morphoplastique et la neoplastique.” See Piet Mondrian, *The New Art—The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1986), 227-35. The term “hyperreal” mostly appears in French publications during this period (i.e. *hyperréaliste*), though after the translation of Jean Baudrillard’s seminal text *Simulacra and Simulations*, postmodern theorists across the Atlantic also adopted this label and it has been used retroactively to describe Photorealist painting and contemporary realist sculpture produced by such artists as John de Andrea and Duane Hanson.

“realer” than anything that came before.⁵⁵ Of course, as exhibitions designed to draw audiences and buyers, such strategies are hardly surprising. But their essays often contradict this hyperbole with more modulated narrative, tracing a line from late-nineteenth or early twentieth-century American realist painting to the present, in an effort to establish a reliable chronology of tradition and progress.

Though the catalog essays tend to be predictable and certain well-known artists appear in most all of the publications (generally Estes and Pearlstein), overall there is considerable variation in the art presented, reflecting the diversity of the contemporary realist field. These exhibitions and their accompanying images are also where realism and Photorealism came to mingle. While some make a pointed attempt to separate Photorealism from other figurative painting, oftentimes the styles are lumped together in ways that elide basic differences, such as the election to use or emulate photographs. Likewise, the inclusion of realist sculpture is variable, though it almost inevitably seems an afterthought, appended at the back of essays and image reproductions. Realist and “hyperrealist” sculpture generally lie outside the purview of this dissertation—issues of fabrication and viewer experience are quite distinct from those of Photorealist painting—but it is worth noting the struggle to find conceptual continuity across media. Hybridity is a particularly thorny issue for curators and writers: emerging from the height of medium specificity, these exhibitions simultaneously desire to praise destabilizations of medium and adhere to older, solidly established traditions of painting production such as the value of lifelike similitude or observational acuity. In this light, Photorealism suffers the most in these publications, as few seemed up to the task of addressing its complex fusion of painting and photography. Louis Meisel’s three Photorealist tomes provide what is essentially a collective

⁵⁵ The *Realist Revival* title is a slight exception in this sense.

catalog raisonné, but his widely cited definition for the style is mostly technical and market-driven, detailing processes and dates rather than philosophies and aims.⁵⁶

The problems these publications face are those of realism more generally: terminology, history, defining style versus movement or figuration versus materiality, and so on. Because new realism in all its variants was constituted by a diverse group of artists and practices and lacked a singular purpose or traditional manifesto, breakdowns by subject matter or process provided efficient—if unimaginative—shortcuts to categorical clarity. One might assume that a definition would help avoid these thorny issues, but the only consistent criteria for realism is generally some semblance to the exterior world—a common catalog proffering. This tendency toward a very general definition is appropriately loose to the diversity of the period, but most catalog contributions fail to consider how or why this impulse is expressed in a variety of ways during the same historical moment. Likewise, the necessity of accessibility often precludes including the engaging epistemological and ontological questions realism raises. Clearly catalogs were ill-suited to counter criticisms from those dubious about realism’s viability to begin with, but despite their sizable shortcomings, these publications constitute in large part the period history. They are pivotal, if almost always partial or lacking, traces of the era’s chaotic realist reckoning and are indicative of the sizable struggle to define and circumscribe the form.

The Backlash: Photorealism’s Detractors

Advocates of realism in the overlapping worlds of criticism, curatorial practice, and commercial galleries set forth cases for realism with a variety of arguments. Realism’s detractors were not necessarily uniformly aligned either, but their arguments can be distilled into a few

⁵⁶ Meisel, *Photorealism*, 13. The origins and aims of Meisel’s definition are discussed in chapter four.

clear subgroups: those who approve of realism as a historical style but reject the validity of its reappearance; those who approve of more traditional revivals, such as the studio based work of Pearlstein and Leslie but discounted photo-based or photo-like work; those who approve of only some Photorealists; and, finally, those who reject realism altogether.⁵⁷ Though their disparagements are somewhat predictable, the rhetoric critics utilize sheds light on the origins of anti-representational sentiment in both the art historical and larger socio-historical contexts.

It is likely unsurprising that Hilton Kramer, conservative writer and longtime chief art critic for *The New York Times*, describes the photo-based work of Chuck Close as part of “the lunatic fringe, struggling to revive the moribund pop movement, a realism that prides itself on mindlessness, on its ability to approximate the impersonal mechanism of the machine.”⁵⁸ A constant lamenter of the degradation of artistic culture after modernism, Kramer interprets Photorealism’s ascent as part of the decline in the “history of taste.”⁵⁹ Barbara Rose, best known for her take on Minimalism, is perhaps the only writer to rival Kramer in vehemently faulting public attraction to realism.⁶⁰ Rose decries the philistinism she believes the revived appreciation for realism signals. Writing for *New York Magazine*, she links the new painters to the populist appeals of Andrew Wyeth and Norman Rockwell, describing the work as academic, “a total capitulation to the law of supply and demand embracing the basest elements of American

⁵⁷ Richard Estes and Chuck Close are usually the “exceptional” cases.

⁵⁸ Hilton Kramer, “Stealing the Modernist Fire,” *New York Times*, December 26, 1971. Kramer reflects back on his opinion of Close in article for *The New York Observer* in 1998: though he feels the Photorealist pieces have lost their power of irritation, he is still displeased by the style, asserting “They have become part of the codified bad taste of our time.” Kramer, “Chuck Close’s MOMA Show? You Could Do a Lot Worse,” *The New York Observer*, March 8, 1998, <http://www.observer.com/node/40252> (accessed February 9, 2011). On Kramer’s conservatism see Anthony Julius, “Minister of Culture,” *New York Times*, December 31, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/31/books/review/Julius.t.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=hilton%20kramer&st=cse (accessed February 9, 2011).

⁵⁹ Kramer, “Stealing the Modernist Fire.”

⁶⁰ Barbara Rose, “ABC Art,” *Art in America* (October-November 1965): 57-69.

democratic taste for a narrative, picture story art.”⁶¹ Ultimately, she claims, “its success threatens the very survival of quality art.”⁶²

Few writers match Kramer and Rose’s verbal bombast, but many stake similar critical territory. As Katherine Hauser notes in her fairly comprehensive critical overview, most negative reviews launch their attacks by claiming that Photorealism is unoriginal—either in continuing a staid realist tradition or by literally copying photographs—or, using the painters’ own term, abhorrently “neutral.”⁶³ Some attempt to contextualize the style by seeing either its growth out of Pop’s subjects and modernist formalist concerns, or by suggesting parallels with contemporary impulses in Minimalism and Conceptualism, but for the most part Photorealism is seen as an aberrant impulse in an age of otherwise more provocative aesthetics.

These criticisms, though not surprising—originality and painterly conviction being two of the hallmarks of the still formidable modernist ideology—are remarkably thin upon reconsideration. Undoubtedly the Photorealist knowingly plays with the idea of photographic facsimile, but, as discussed in chapter one, the artists’ “copying” is in actuality an act of translation, generating photographic source material and subjecting it both to a variety of edits and the form and expressive tendencies of a different medium. The practice is based on a process of abstraction, replicating not the world itself but duplicating an image of the world—a method that allows for explicit conceptualization of how “unstructured” reality can become structured pictorial form. Nonetheless, before postmodernism fully stormed the scene, critics were often quite flabbergasted that these apparent copies were considered art. Foregoing the comforts of Pop’s apparently ironic distance or a Rauschenberg-style transformation, the Photorealist blowup

⁶¹ Rose, “Real, Realer, Realist,” *New York Magazine*, January 31, 1972, 50.

⁶² Rose, “Treacle and Trash,” *New York Magazine*, May 27, 1974, 80, 82.

⁶³ Katherine Hauser, “Something Happened: A Cultural History of Photorealism” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1996), 11-55.

of what appeared to be everyday snapshots was perceived as both an affront to artistic intellect and an infringement on photography's turf.

The latter territory was itself unstable ground: despite decades of advocacy by towering figures like Alfred Steiglitz and John Szarkowski, in addition to the resurgent use of myriad forms of photo-appropriation in the sixties and seventies, photography remained for many the lesser of the fine arts.⁶⁴ Likewise, if early twenty-first century viewers are visually accustomed to the parallel subject matter and saturated hues of seventies color photography, it is important to remember that Photorealism is both its historic and, in many ways, formal and iconographic predecessor. Moreover, when this work appeared, as with Szarkowski's famed show of William Eggleston's work at the Museum of Modern Art in 1976, it too was widely panned. Eggleston and his color-based contemporaries Stephen Shore and Joel Meyerowitz have subsequently been canonized, but at the time criticisms launched against their work were much like those waged against Photorealism: too much like advertising and thus not art. Hilton Kramer's famous appraisal of the Eggleston exhibition could just as well stand in for critiques of Photorealism: responding to Szarkowski's comment that the images were "perfect," Kramer scoffs, "'Perfect? Perfectly banal, perhaps. Perfectly boring, certainly.'"⁶⁵

Hence photography critics, defending a medium still vulnerable to accusations of mechanical inferiority, are often less than pleased by what they considered yet another territorial infringement from realm of painting. A.D. Coleman laments that collectors refuse to purchase

⁶⁴ For example, in 1974 *Newsweek* published an article entitled, "Is Photography Really Art?" Though the author vehemently defends photography and rails against the idea that photography needs to be legitimated by painting, his selected headline is indicative of the medium's still-precarious status. See Douglas Davis, "Is Photography Really Art?" *Newsweek*, October 21, 1974, 69-70.

⁶⁵ Kramer quoted in Philip Gfelter, "John Szarkowski, Curator of Photography, Dies at 81," *The New York Times*, July 9, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/09/arts/09szarkowski.html?_r=1 (accessed February 11, 2011). Contemporary audiences might also think of the large-scale color photographs of Jeff Wall, Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth, Rineke Dijkstra and others from the 1980s and 1990s. Of course this work also follows in the wake of Photorealism.

photographs because they didn't perceive them as "art," but are naively lured by the appeal of a "serious artist's" manual labor into spending vastly inflated sums on Photorealist copies of the same images. Coleman concludes, "The distinction between the photograph and the painting which Photo-Realism promulgates is grounded in a reactionary, antiquated elitism which holds that the painting's uniqueness as an object and consequent monetary value make it aesthetically superior to a photograph."⁶⁶ Robert Hughes, who published indictments of the style in both *Arts* and *Time*, finds the new paintings less radical hybrids than objects slavishly reliant on another medium. Hughes asserts Photorealism simply duplicates the mechanical uses of photography standard in nineteenth-century salon painting, evincing a "passive, omnivorous, and literal dependence on the photograph."⁶⁷

Hughes's rebuke of Photorealism in *Time*, like Kramer's writings for the *Times* or Rose's reviews for *New York*, brought these criticisms beyond the confines of the art world. In addition to the major hindrance of academicism, he claims the works are to be faulted not simply for mimicking mechanical reproduction, but for paying homage to mechanical subjects: "The average result is an almost unimaginably stupid and passive materialism."⁶⁸ It was not simply the mere act of "copying" which bothered critics, but that this particular strategy implied a lack of conceptual distance from the Photorealists' common, often industrially-produced subject matter. Yet, the artists were also often perceived as having too little connection to their subject matter—i.e. that the distance-providing layer of photography produced cold, detached images. This latter assessment is not without some truth: many of the artists openly stated their desire to disinvest

⁶⁶ A.D. Coleman, "From Today, Painting is Dead: A Requiem," *Light Readings: A Photography Critic's Writings, 1968-78* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 187. Max Kozloff and Paul Stitelman offer similar critiques in their contemporaneous reviews for *Artforum* and *Arts*. See Max Kozloff, "Reviews," *Artforum* (June 1974): 65; and Paul Stitelman, "New York Galleries," *Arts*, November 1973, 60.

⁶⁷ Robert Hughes, "An Omnivorous and Literal Dependence," *Arts*, June 1974, 26-27.

⁶⁸ Hughes, "The Realist as Corn God," *Time*, January 31, 1972, 50.

from the kind of personal or psychic connection heroized during modernism's apex. But critics often wanted to have it both ways, reading the paintings both as both slavish reifications of capitalist consumerism and aloof from their middle-class, everyday subjects, depending on the position of critical attack.

Robert Pincus-Witten, writing for *Artforum*, objects on the side of apparent neutrality, a quality he perceives as “abject bankruptcy.”⁶⁹ *Artforum* critics were generally censorious toward Photorealism; then in its heyday as a cultural arbiter, the publication was often associated with the more erudite practices of Minimalism and Conceptualism.⁷⁰ Though the publication was founded in San Francisco and subsequently based in Los Angeles before moving to New York, its writers, particularly Peter Plagens and Jeff Perrone, were frequently hostile towards West Coast realist painting.⁷¹ For the Bay Area Photorealists, these writers were harshly inclined toward their strategies and subjects. In *Sunshine Muse*, Plagens's classic work on Californian art, he offers the artists only a partial, condescending reprieve based on his perception of the lack of a venerable West Coast painting tradition:

The California variety of “radical” realism aspires to have it both ways—the quasi-defiant banality of Pop and the painstaking, fine-art finish of academic painting. That so much painting has regressed to this throws the question of viability of painting, indeed, of object art into further doubt. The West Coast hasn't had a sustained reverence for painting or a set of heroes to emulate, and it's all too understandable why West Coast painters settle for either a hesitant Process mode or the comfort of filling in.⁷²

Perrone likewise finds nothing but provincialist attitudes and junk on offer—work so deplorable he declares it beneath the effort required for censure: “The stuff is an easy mark but useless to condemn—punching jello with your fist can do damage but it's not worth the sticky hand. This

⁶⁹ Robert Pincus-Witten, “New York: 22 Realists,” *Artforum* (April 1970): 75.

⁷⁰ As noted above, even *Artforum*'s resident realist advocate, Sidney Tillim, staunchly disapproved of the Photorealist impulse.

⁷¹ Plagens was an associate editor for *Artforum* at the time, Perrone a staff reviewer.

⁷² Peter Plagens, *Sunshine Muse: Contemporary Art on the West Coast* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), 153.

hybrid photo-Realist/Impressionistic Pop breeds all kinds of glossy out-of-focus images that might as well be manufactured like billboards. Why go through all the trouble of *painting* them at this point in history?”⁷³ Again, the critic’s perception of artistic alignment with “automobiles, tackiness, and technology,” marked the Photorealists as insufficiently sophisticated.⁷⁴

Both Plagens and Perrone’s critiques fall in line with others’ indictments of the Photorealist method and subject, revealing a deep-seated bias against realism as the epitome of middle-class culture—i.e. the continuing assumption that realism’s only appeal is its easily perceived, transparent rendering and accessible representations of common subject matter. As Robert Hughes sneers, “[Photorealism] could only seem challenging to the historically uninstructed consciousness of a first-year art student or a neophyte collector from Teaneck, N.J.”⁷⁵ In Plagens and Perrone’s eyes, the issue is exacerbated on the West Coast by regional shortcomings in both the lack of a valuable painterly tradition to emulate and the apparent cultural hollowness associated with postwar Californian culture. For painters like Bechtle, Goings, and McLean, then, the cards were doubly stacked against them: already perceived as outside the center of avant-garde activity, their local milieu itself was frequently deemed unworthy of representation. As argued in chapter one, the Bay Area Photorealists are actually well attuned to West Coast aesthetic history—a history that cannily fluctuates between representation and abstraction and adapts modernist means to the local environment. Likewise, this cultural myopia on the part of critics ignores the profound socio-geographic transformations documented by West Coast artists. California could easily be pigeonholed as the pinnacle of

⁷³ Jeff Perrone, “‘California Realists,’ John Berggruen Gallery,” *Artforum* 13, no. 9 (May 1975): 83.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁷⁵ Hughes, “An Omnivorous and Literal Dependence,” 26.

superficial extremes, but its trends in postwar housing and economic and technological development were pivotal harbingers of national transformations.⁷⁶

Photorealism's Defenders

Following in the wake of Nochlin's early case on behalf of the realist revival, several critics, including Linda Chase, William Seitz, Alwynne Mackie, and Edward Lucie-Smith, argue for a more nuanced understanding of the Photorealist project.⁷⁷ Again, they stake out a variety of positions, but generally unite in asserting the style's formal innovations and social engagement. While some of this literature is quite perceptive—Seitz's essay, in particular, stands alongside Nochlin's as one of the most astute period accounts of Photorealist art, exhibitions, and criticism—they too have tended to recede as historical documents. Clearly a few voices were unlikely to fully quash the many attacks on Photorealism, but there were the additional determinant challenges of operating between the traditions of realisms past and the arrival of postmodernism. Like much of the catalog writing these critics often claim Photorealism to be a bold new process and a part of an approved American (or occasionally French) lineage—a bifurcated assessment that is not necessarily false, but the tendency to couch the style with the accepted terms of past nineteenth and early twentieth-century realisms often conflicts with the desire to posit it as truly avant-garde. Likewise, writing slightly before the most influential postmodern cultural theory appeared, the critics struggle to fully engage with the meaning of this term.

⁷⁶ These relationships between painting and demography are the subject of chapter three.

⁷⁷ There are scattered notes of positivity among gallery and museum reviews too, though these defenses are fewer and, by nature of their brief form, less substantial. Ivan Karp and Louis K. Meisel, who both showed Photorealist works extensively in their galleries, also wrote on behalf of the style, but, again, the writing is generally more explicatory than analytic.

Seitz, both a curator at the Museum of Modern Art during the sixties and one of the earliest supporters of Abstract Expressionism in the academic world, wrote “The Real and the Artificial: Painting of the New Environment” for *Art in America* in 1972.⁷⁸ His article appeared alongside the most complete compendium of Photorealist interviews to date.⁷⁹ In a special issue devoted to realism one might expect a more fawning piece, but Seitz strikes an unusually firm middle ground. His most severe criticism is reserved other curators and critics: in his view both fail to differentiate between various modes of new realism and pay sufficient attention to content. Accordingly, Seitz dedicates the bulk of his essay to meditations on the Photorealist currency between form and subject matter. His analysis of Goings’s *Airstream* (1970) is illustrative of the recurrent dialogue he establishes between the formal and social (fig. 50):

Isolated on a desert lot, this gleaming artifact of the sixties, it seems, is presented for examination as if in it were concentrated the value system of an entire culture. Objective depiction... is a razor edge, and interpretation is affected by the viewpoint and background of the spectator, both personal and social. It is also colored by both the objects and situation presented and the group or society which they reflect, as well as by standards of visualization, style and quality.⁸⁰

Consequently, Photorealist paintings are capable of distilling the larger social implications of the era: “We live in a period in which the real and the artificial, freedom and repression, truth and falsehood, morality and corruption, life, horror and death, have been absorbed into global and

⁷⁸ William C. Seitz, “The Real and the Artificial: Painting of the New Environment,” *Art in America* 60, no. 2 (November – December 1972): 58-72. A slightly revised version of this article appears in a collection of essays published posthumously. See Seitz, *Art in the Age of Aquarius, 1955-1970* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 185-200. While a graduate student at Princeton Seitz produced the first dissertation on Abstract Expressionism—the thesis became the subject of much internal controversy, resulting in a now well-known exchange between the department chair and Alfred Barr, Museum of Modern Art founder and Princeton alumnus. “Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers,” Museum of Modern Art Archives, <http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/EAD/Barrf> (accessed March 6, 2011).

⁷⁹ Two realist sculptors, John de Andrea and Duane Hanson, are also interviewed in the issue; the issue is still a go-to for primary source information on the Photorealists, though a number have since been interviewed for the Oral History Project at the Smithsonian Institution’s Archives of American Art.

⁸⁰ Seitz, “The Real and the Artificial: Painting of the New Environment,” 69.

economic political game plans.”⁸¹ According to the curator and critic, Photorealism encapsulates the contradictory nature of present reality, and thus incorporates a worldview parallel to that of many other accomplished contemporary artists—one “acutely expressive of modern life.”⁸² In recognizing the style’s fruitful aesthetic and iconographic ambiguities, Seitz articulates a broader perspective that more successfully conveys historical import than those arguments strictly tethered to traditional art historical lineages or progression.

Linda Chase, the most prolific writer on Photorealism, also hints at the larger issues raised by the style in series of articles published in the mid-seventies.⁸³ Chase aligns with Nochlin in seeing the work as both a reaction against modernism and the inheritor of the American realist tradition. Generally attentive to formal strategies, Chase enumerates the idiosyncrasies of individual painters and rebuts the criticism that all were simply iterations of the same simplistic aesthetic conceit. With successive publications she increasingly argues for a more pointed cultural interpretation of Photorealism, parallel to Seitz’s proto-postmodern musings but centered more on the issues of image form: “When the Photo Realist poses, with his adherence to photographic information the question, *what is real*, the question has a new poignancy... With stunning sleight of hand media gives us the illusion of reality while substituting itself and depriving reality of its potency.”⁸⁴ Yet, by the end of this 1976 piece Chase is back within the safe confines of craftsmanship, to stress the painters’ technical facility and the auratic originality they yield from reproduced sources.⁸⁵ She notes the clear tension between “our

⁸¹ Ibid., 72.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ In addition to the articles she penned during the height of media attention to Photorealism, Chase has also written numerous essays for Photorealist monographs and survey shows, including the Meisel compendiums, a catalog on John Salt, and a forthcoming work on Richard Estes. Linda Chase, e-mail to author, October 13, 2010.

⁸⁴ Chase, “Photo Realism: Post Modernist Illusion,” *Art International* XX, no. 3-4 (March-April 1976): 22.

⁸⁵ Chase borrows the concept of “aura” from Walter Benjamin’s influential essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” written in 1936 and published posthumously in 1955. See Walter Benjamin, “The Work

awareness of the effort and the apparent obliteration of the artist's hand," but shies away from the full implications of image deconstruction.⁸⁶ Likewise Lucie-Smith takes a similar tack, noting the artists' investigation of camera vision and, in the case of the realist sculptors, the desire to dissolve the barrier between representation and reality. But again, he does not approach the simulacral per se, and instead emphasizing the force of Photorealism's revolt and its distinguished push toward aesthetic amorality.⁸⁷ More complex takes on the nature of the real would have to wait for the postmodern turn in the late seventies and early eighties.

Lucie-Smith also wrote *Super Realism* in the late seventies. Though a more detailed and comprehensive account of Photorealism than the article-length pieces, few new ideas are put forward. He discusses the style's relationship to earlier American and European traditions, categorizing according to subject matter or genre, and parallel moves in sculpture—all very standard approaches common in museum catalogs.⁸⁸ A prolific British writer, Lucie-Smith's most significant contribution is greater attention to the international context—painters from the UK, Spain, France, and Italy are discussed in some detail—though this more encompassing view ultimately does little to distinguish the text from contemporaneous works. Mackie attempts a slightly different tack, offering counterarguments to common critiques. He contends the Photorealists are not interested in copying photographs but rather making paintings that resemble photographs, that the works are not "objective or unemotional," and that the painters are not reactionary but rather that their concerns are descended from twentieth-century abstraction and

of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 217-51.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 27.

⁸⁷ Edward Lucie-Smith, "The Neutral Style," *Art and Artists*, August 1975, 6-15.

⁸⁸ Lucie-Smith, *Super Realism* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1979).

earlier realist traditions.⁸⁹ These claims overlap with those made by Chase, Lucie-Smith, and Seitz, but differ in their disregard for the Photorealists' self-proclaimed aims of neutrality and objectivity. Mackie's defense, even more than those of his fellow advocates, endeavors to strengthen Photorealism's purchase by weighting it with traditional art historical values: descendance from revered traditions, attention to formal values, and socially or emotionally weighty subjects.

These few voices, with the exception of Seitz, are fairly unadventurous in the terms of their defense, and unable to counter the vast amount of negative criticism. Likewise, apart from Seitz, their perceived stature and the caché and cultural reach of their sites of publication were undoubtedly less than those of Kramer, Hughes, or the *Artforum* critics. While their formal and social analysis is often adept, their pleas for more subtle readings of Photorealism could not compete with the dramatic proclamations of cultural ineptitude put forth by the other side. Furthermore, despite valiant attempts to counter claims of philistinism and conceptual and aesthetic shortcuts, these writers do little to address some of the fundamental problems associated with the task of articulating this new realist moment. Lawrence Alloway, a British critic and member of the Independent Group best known for his coinage of "Pop" art, assesses the roots of this unpreparedness:

One of the difficulties in defining Realism is that it is not one movement but a diffuse and uncoordinated trend... part of the problem is that the art critics one reads are the ones accustomed to write on behalf of the new aspects of emergent groups: our rhetoric is shaped for the stances of discovery, welcome, and commitment, not description and comparison.⁹⁰

Though Alloway ignores instances of discovery and commitment in the realist resurgence, he correctly identifies the past as a part of the critical problem—whereas the history of modernism

⁸⁹ Alwynne Mackie, "New Realism and the Photographic Look," *American Art Review* (November 1978): 72-79, 132-34.

⁹⁰ Lawrence Alloway, "Notes on Realism," *Arts Magazine*, April 1970, 27.

was freshly minted, realism carried centuries of social and aesthetic baggage.⁹¹ Peter Schjeldahl—then a *New York Times* critic, now a *New Yorker* critic, generally equally supportive of realism in both forums—likewise sensed a problem of time with Photorealist criticism: he suggested its iconography was perhaps too new to have garnered the emotional resonance viewers of realist art were accustomed to seeking.⁹² Thus temporally Photorealism caught critics in a bind—they often lacked the language to articulate its new method of mediation, and likewise struggled not to be weighed down by past traditions. While the latter are undoubtedly relevant, one of Photorealism’s strengths is its supreme present-ness, communicating to the viewer the look and construction of the contemporary world.

New Works and Old Biases

As with the catalogs and curatorial efforts discussed above, these difficulties are endemic to the task of writing about realism; both multiple historical movements and a broader rubric of style, it is a category that refuses firmly defined boundaries and houses a seemingly innumerable variety of artistic practices. But the sixties and seventies also brought specific critical expectations related to both modernism and the divergent inheritors of its legacy. The stronghold of modernist criticism is well covered in numerous sources, but specific aspects of the legacy of the modernist art-criticism alignment are particularly relevant to the discussion of Photorealism—not only because of the latter’s negative press reception, but also the apparent failure of critics to forcefully and precisely articulate realism’s new role in the wake of abstraction. This modernist legacy likewise raises crucial issues of gendered rhetoric and stylistic plurality. In addition to the difficulties associated with expressing the realist-modernist

⁹¹ Ibid, 26.

⁹² Peter Schjeldahl, “Too Easy to Be Art?” *New York Times*, May 12, 1974. Schjeldahl was also a critic for *The Village Voice* in the 1980s and 1990s.

relationship, writers often struggled with the quickly-dating desire for heroic, masculine gestures. At the opposite end of the critical spectrum are observers disappointed by what they perceive as a retreat from 1960s radicalism to the conservative modes of the 1970s, or those simply confused and agitated by the increasing stylistic multiplicity of the contemporary art scene. These are in some ways a diverse array of biases and conundrums, but collectively they point to interrelatedness of social and aesthetic tensions in the context of their historical moment.

On the relationship between realism and modernism, Nochlin is again one of the first to identify the difficulties at hand. In a series of two articles published in 1973 titled “The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law,” Nochlin discusses the protracted bias against realism, which dates back to the early twentieth-century writings of Roger Fry and Clive Bell and continues into the present with Clement Greenberg’s immense influence.⁹³ She proffers that the original impulse toward a theory of art is itself anti-realist: the desire to elevate art necessitated separating the aesthetic from everyday experience—a central facet of realist practices.⁹⁴ Here, as with her earlier book-length study, Nochlin’s historical fluency is paramount; she notes several examples of modernist advocates reinterpreting historical instances of realism to suit their formalist values, such as Greenberg and Ronsenberg’s suggestion of parallels between medieval art and modernist abstraction.⁹⁵ Likewise, her succinct history of class biases associated with realism is relevant to contemporary discourse—recall, Kramer, Rose, and the *Artforum* critics’ rabid accusations of realist philistinism and Photorealism’s equivalence to middle-class kitsch.

⁹³ Nochlin, “The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law,” *Art in America* 61, no. 5 (September – October 1973): 54-61; and “The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law II,” *Art in America* 61, no. 6 (November – December 1973): 97-103.

⁹⁴ Nochlin, “The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law,” 57.

⁹⁵ Nochlin, “The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law II,” 99.

Nochlin again confronts the opposition on their own terms, noting that such criticized qualities as inclusivity are central parts of the realist strategy rather than naïve missteps.⁹⁶

Following in Nochlin's wake, novelist and New Journalism originator Tom Wolfe tackles the topic of modernist criticism in a more hyperbolic, accessible manner. Wolfe's main assertion in *The Painted Word* is expressed plainly: "Modern Art has become completely literary: the paintings and other works exist only to illustrate the text."⁹⁷ As W.J.T. Mitchell notes, Wolfe's analysis is cutting, if somewhat shallow; though his meta-critical take provides little beyond recognizing the fundamental irony of an artistic movement founded in part on the purging of "literary" impulses that becomes entirely dependent on the written word, Wolfe's work does offer a useful opening for considering critical bias and dependency.⁹⁸

In fact, it is a Hilton Kramer review of a contemporary realist exhibition that launches Wolfe's tirade:

I was *jerked alert* by the following: "Realism does not lack its partisans, but it does rather conspicuously lack a persuasive theory. And given the nature of our intellectual commerce with works of art, to lack a persuasive theory is to lack something crucial—the means by which our experience of individual works is joined to our understanding of the values they signify." . . . I read it again. It didn't say "something helpful" or "enriching" or even "extremely valuable." No, the word was *crucial*. In short: frankly, these days, without a theory to go with it, I can't see a painting.⁹⁹

Though the bulk of *The Painted Word* is devoted to the rise of modernism and the move this ignites toward reducing physical form while increasing theoretical dependence, Wolfe concludes his satirical tirade by returning to the current fad for realism. Considering Photorealism, which appears to have violated the laws of modernist formalism and inarguably provoked the ire of critics, Wolfe concludes that these artists are not truly reactionary. Citing their own formalist

⁹⁶ Nochlin, "The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law," 54.

⁹⁷ Tom Wolfe, *The Painted Word* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), 6. Emphasis original.

⁹⁸ W.J.T. Mitchell, "'Ut Pictura Theoria': Abstract Painting and the Repression of Language," *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (Winter 1989): 354-55.

⁹⁹ Wolfe, 4.

rhetoric, use of mediated images, and similarity to the hard-edge forms of post-painterly abstraction, Wolfe remarks: “The Photo-Realists are backsliders, yes; but not true heretics.”¹⁰⁰

In some respects Wolfe is right: there is much more overlap between modernist abstraction and Photorealist painting than most critics care to acknowledge. But the issue at stake is not measuring rebellion, rather the inability to break free from the old modes of interpretation. Mitchell pushes Wolfe’s idea forward, examining in short order the knowledge bases of modernist critics, the conundrum of how painting could shun representation but still maintain content, Greenberg’s skillful elision of this central contradiction of abstraction, and Alfred Barr’s earlier, accessible institutionalization of modernism—a feat which also relied on narrative explication. As he acknowledges, Mitchell is writing in a moment (1989) when postmodernism has seemingly put these issues to bed; he points to Jasper Johns’s work from the mid-fifties as the American death knell of abstraction’s supremacy:

It’s hard to imagine a more vulgar and direct set of statements combined with a more subtle commentary on the tradition that Johns grows out of and deconstructs. The amazing thing is how deaf even our best critics have been to these vulgarities, dismissing them as “gimmicks,” or neutralizing them as abstract types of “ordinariness”—as if this were the way the concrete always had to end up, by just being another mode of the abstract.”¹⁰¹

If supporting Johns work in the late eighties still seemed radical, his work is now sufficiently canonized to be seen by many as the tipping point that launched postwar art beyond purist abstraction—both conceptually and formally.¹⁰² Yet, Mitchell’s argument has resonance for Photorealism, a case in which critics were also deaf to the power of similarly concrete “vulgarities.” Mitchell’s historiographic approach yields a useful model: rather than eliding

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 117. Wolfe also concludes by predicting that viewers in the year 2000 will look back on the period of 1945-75 as an amusing anomaly, one when critical rhetoric dominated aesthetic production. In reality what followed—postmodernism—is generally even more theoretically conversant and reliant.

¹⁰¹ Mitchell, 371.

¹⁰² Thomas Crow, among others, also positions Johns’s work this way. See Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties*, 9, 15-22.

verbal-visual tensions through purely object-focused analysis, he reveals productive tensions in the apparently monolithic history of abstraction.¹⁰³

Realist criticism is likewise full of such telling fissures. In addition to the nearly universal struggle with modernism's powerful aesthetic commands, the social inflections and biases of such writing also weigh on realism's reception. Gender, in particular, is a recurrent issue. Against Nochlin's feminist sense of purpose concomitant with the rise of the women's movement in the sixties and seventies, other, mostly male critics, betray an occasionally chauvinist sense of expectations relating to painterly performance. As Ann Eden Gibson has documented in *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics*, the formal strategies of Abstract Expressionist painting—i.e. large, vigorous brushwork, standing in for spontaneity, originality, and force—were often read as masculine traits.¹⁰⁴ These biases carried over to the subsequent decades: both supporters and detractors found the subtle craft of the new, precise realism severely wanting in comparable bravado. For Hughes in "The Realist as Corn God," the only new realist painters beyond reproach are Pearlstein and Leslie, who share a "plain speech and relentless grip"; Pearlstein is quoted in the article as desiring to create "strong, aggressive paintings that would compete with the best of abstraction."¹⁰⁵ Hughes's conclusion, that these painters are the bearers of realism's ethical imperative, perpetuates the strand of American modernist thinking that saw abstract painting as part of an explicitly value-based, homegrown avant-garde. Curiously, Peter Schjeldahl utilizes the same rhetoric to differentiate among his preferred Photorealists. Discussing the posture of detachment adapted by these painters, he

¹⁰³ Mitchell, 367.

¹⁰⁴ Ann Eden Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven: Yale University, 1997).

¹⁰⁵ Hughes, "The Realist as Corn God," 55. The former quote is a particularly confusing description of their draftsmanship—but perhaps also another intriguing modernist collusion of the verbal and visual Mitchell unearthed. Pearlstein also makes his famed jab at Photorealism in the same article: using photography, he remarks, never occurred to him because he never had any difficulty drawing or painting; Leslie likewise relates his view of photographic source material as less trustworthy than first-hand observation.

remarks: "... if he [the Photorealist] chooses to answer with a 'no comment,' one had better get the sense, as one does from Estes, that his response springs from mental toughness. Most of the photorealists, with their cosmetically rendered motorcycles and neon signs, are just too damned cute."¹⁰⁶ Commitment to fine brushstrokes and precise details, as opposed to the bold strokes of much mid-century abstraction, rendered these painters weak in the minds of many critics. Quite possibly such perceptions fed into the Photorealists' penchant for stressing their own workman-like lifestyles in period interviews, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The gender bias evidenced here is a reminder that critics' tastes and interpretations are equally guided by contemporary context as by the mandates of tradition. In this sense it is fruitful to consider what was written about this period as a cumulative aesthetic moment. Though the first generation Photorealists inaugurated the style in the mid to late sixties, the market, galleries, and museums only took full notice in the seventies. Thus most all of the relevant commentary derives from the later decade; discussions of the era invariably revolve around comparisons with the unforgettable dramas of the previous one. If the 1960s were seen as years of burgeoning counterculture and social revolution, the 1970s were often thought of as their antithesis. The sixties came to a violent close: 1968 brought the My Lai massacre, the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy; in 1969 Woodstock's peaceful mass gathering was answered by the violence at Altamont. The early seventies were plagued by political and economic upheaval—the oil crisis, the resulting recession, and Watergate marked moments of calamity in 1973 and 1974, while Vietnam dragged on through 1975. More generally, the tenor

¹⁰⁶ Schjeldahl, "Realism—A Retreat to the Fundamentals?" *New York Times*, December 24, 1972.

of the nation was perceived to have changed, with Americans retreating from activism and communalism to private and individual concerns—what Wolfe designated the “Me decade.”¹⁰⁷

For art critics, the word frequently used to describe the seventies was “pluralism”: beginning in the sixties but increasing dramatically in the following decade, the art world appeared to have splintered, the sense of a dominant style or singular mainstream having vanished. Franz Schulze, writing at the close of the decade, perceives this heterogeneity as a weakness, a lack of definitive response to the dominant predecessor of modernism.¹⁰⁸ Likewise Robert Pincus-Witten sees the new, open field as lacking conventions and standards. Again, he takes the opportunity to lash out against realism:

On the one hand this latitude encourages the maintenance of a great and continuing modernist episode; on the other it has become a source of terror provoking, even among an art community which ought to know better, a staggeringly conservative backlash. In a certain sense, the resurgence of conservative painting and sculpture that marks so much of the past decade testifies to the sheer creative power of progressive arts during the period.¹⁰⁹

According to Pincus-Witten and others, the return to figuration signaled a resurgence of conservative values, a backing down from the avant-garde stances set forth in the fifties and sixties. Though he is critical of his past tendency toward Greenbergian interpretations and is conscious of once again trouncing on the realists, he refuses to see their work as anything other

¹⁰⁷ Wolfe, “The ‘Me’ Decade and the Third Great Awakening,” *New York Magazine*, August 23, 1976, 26-40.

¹⁰⁸ Franz Schulze, “The ‘70’s: A Bedeviling Complexity Marked By Noisy Extremes of Taste,” *Art News* (January 1980): 36-41. See also Mitchell Douglas Kahan on seventies pluralism, *American Paintings of the Sixties and Seventies* (Montgomery: Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, 1980).

¹⁰⁹ Pincus-Witten, “The Seventies,” in *A View of a Decade*, ed. Martin L. Friedman (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1977), 25. Hal Foster also interprets pluralism as implying a lack of standards: “art of many sorts is made to seem more or less equal—equally (un)important.” Hal Foster, “Against Pluralism,” in *Recordings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1985), 15. Robert Storr’s rebuttal of Foster’s argument is apt: in addition to lessening the stranglehold of modernist formalism, pluralism allowed the art of women, gays and lesbians, and people of color to become visible for the first time. Robert Storr, “A Man About Town,” in *Get There First, Decide Promptly: The Richard Brown Baker Collection of Postwar Art*, ed. Jennifer Farrel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 102-3.

than skill masquerading as content—driven either by ignorance or a willful disregard of modernism’s gains.¹¹⁰

Realism, as part of the representational impulse’s long history, is certainly easy to classify as “traditional,” or, for those who disapprove, “conservative.” The added context of a shift in American and Western European politics made this interpretation a particularly simple corollary. Toril Moi encapsulates the issue, noting that detractors often view realism as not only artistically and philosophically naïve but also politically conservative. The effect of this critique, Moi argues, is to “turn realism into an intrinsically reactionary and ahistorical form,” ignoring differences of period and the politics of individual works.¹¹¹ The Photorealists perhaps inadvertently supported these interpretations by refusing to provide commentary in or on their work: what they perceived as conceptually complex investigations of traditionally reviled or ignored—and thus utterly fruitful—subject matter, critics saw as myopic preoccupations with insignificant banalities, and thus part and parcel of the seventies’ political and ethical failures.

Re-reading the Real: Photorealism and Postmodernism

Part of realism’s intrigue is not only its flexibility of form, but also its capacity for ideological reinvention. For contemporary audiences familiar with the now vernacularized ideas of postmodernity, Photorealism is often associated with pastiche or the simulacrum.¹¹² Though critics of the early to mid-seventies often discuss the role of mediated imagery and a few hint at postmodernist implications, for the most part such interpretations are a product of the late

¹¹⁰ Pincus-Witten, 25.

¹¹¹ Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 24-25.

¹¹² Theorists have defined the simulacrum in a variety of ways; discussions of the views of Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and others follow below. In its simplest contemporary sense the simulacrum refers to a permeating state of simulation, i.e. one in which reality is replaced by its representation.

seventies, eighties, and early nineties. Not quite a retrospective evaluation—most of the first generation Photorealists were still painting at this point and subsequent generations had also taken up the style—this perspective is an accumulation of drives in late seventies and eighties cultural theory. Prior to this point Photorealism’s media layering was often taken as a sign of intellectualizing process—i.e. estranging oneself from the image so as to more explicitly conceptualize construction, thus moving away from older ideals of psychological and physical immediacy—or awareness of societal media saturation. Only later were these works seen as evidence of the loss of the distinction between the real and representation.

“Hyperreality” and “hyperrealism” are in some ways the chronological and terminological links between these two interpretations. Hyperrealism is often used interchangeably with Photorealism; it appeared with increasing frequency in the 1970s, tapping into the general, longstanding use of “hyper” as a prefix, indicating a quality beyond or above the ordinary degree.¹¹³ The sense of a superlative kind of image making clearly suited Photorealism, which, with photography’s assistance, raised the stakes of illusionistic rendering to new heights.¹¹⁴ Hyperreality also alludes to the atmosphere of fracturing and representational confusion that theorists Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and Jean Baudrillard articulate in discussions of the simulacral. For Deleuze, the inversion of real and copy signals an opportunity for dismantling traditional hierarchies, negating the privileged status of the unique that stems from the Platonic ideal; Foucault builds on this perspective in his ontological investigation of

¹¹³ As noted above, it is the French designation (*l’hyperréalisme*) for Photorealism. French theorists’ arguments on hyperreality are discussed in chapter four. The linguistic convention of using “hyper” as a prefix dates to the seventeenth century. “Hyper-, prefix,” *OED Online*, December 2012 (Oxford University Press) <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/90273?redirectedFrom=hyperreal> (accessed February 13, 2013).

¹¹⁴ As Louis Meisel observes, this trend continues with subsequent generations of Photorealists—digital photography and image software has facilitated the creation of even more detailed, precise paintings. Louis Meisel, interview by author, New York, NY, April 13, 2012.

surrealism.¹¹⁵ From Baudrillard's perspective, the situation is more fearful: the excess of the image ultimately usurps rather than supplements reality, destroying meaning and order in the process. Citing the examples of *verité* television and pornography, Baudrillard also observes the pleasure found in the "frisson of the real, or an aesthetics of the hyperreal. . . . Pleasure in the microscopic simulation that allows the real to pass into the hyperreal."¹¹⁶ Ultimately he sees this "hysterical" reproduction of the real as a grasping—and futile—desire for its restoration.¹¹⁷

But how, precisely, was Photorealism positioned within postmodernism? Inklings of the association began with Chase, Seitz, and Lucie-Smith, though their flirtations with postmodern theory never bore the full-blown sense of un-reality articulated by the French theorists. The latter kind of thinking is rooted in (revisionist) Marxism, seeking to grapple with the world of global or late-stage capitalism—in the simplest terms, a post-industrial society where the fluidity of exchange inexorably alters social and economic relations.¹¹⁸ For instance, Jean-Claude Lebensztejn ties the (perceived) kitschiness of certain strands of Photorealism to Marx's remark that periods of rapid transformation are marked by a collective sense of nostalgia. In his view, Photorealism's quotation of middle-class values centers around its hollow illusion: "The pivot of this duplicity is the equalizing of the sign to the object: or rather, to its surface: the faces of

¹¹⁵ See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, trans. James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); and Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," in *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1-42.

¹¹⁶ Baudrillard, 28.

¹¹⁷ Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations," in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 180. It should be noted, though, that Baudrillard does acknowledge some radical potentialities, as with trompe l'oeil painting's disruption of the spatial order. See Baudrillard, "The Trompe L'Oeil," *Calligram: New Essays in Art History from France*, ed. Norman Bryson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 53-62.

¹¹⁸ On Baudrillard's relationship to Marx, see Gail Day, *Dialectical Passions: Negations in Postwar Art Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 205-6. Day argues that Baudrillard fundamentally misinterprets Marx's understanding of "use value" as a naturalized category—a misunderstanding he revises in order to contend that use value is produced by the play of "exchange value." This allows Baudrillard to posit the world as increasingly determined by social abstraction and dematerialization—descriptors under which his theories of hyperreality and the simulacrum fall.

Chuck Close do not show the interior of the being, but the accidents of an epidermis, magnified to the scale of a lunar landscape.”¹¹⁹ Lebensztein generally oversimplifies the matter of class relations in Photorealism: purposeful mediation of subject matter does not necessarily indicate estrangement or cultural critique.¹²⁰ His discussion of surface qualities suggests a stronger link to the depthlessness of the simulacra, but ultimately his detour into the semiotics of the style’s replicative process spirals into a futile loop. Lebensztein misrepresents the style as artless, implying a reactionary quality parallel to the short-sighted criticisms discussed above: “By refusing to accentuate the signs of art, photoealism unleashed a floating signifier, detached from its own meaning in being there, and, as if split in turn into two instances, a signified of signifier... and a signifier of a signifier, communicating the putting aside.”¹²¹

These ideas followed in the wake of Deleuze’s writing on Warhol and Bacon and Foucault’s famed reassessment of Magritte; the same year Lebensztein published his essay, Baudrillard’s seminal work on the simulacrum appeared.¹²² Collectively, these theorists shifted art historical discourse, particularly in the pages of publications like *Artforum* and *October*. As Michael Camille notes, photography was a crucial term of reference for contemporary discussions of the simulacrum; the notion of the loss of originality in mechanical media stems from one of the most influential essays of the twentieth century, Walter Benjamin’s “The Work

¹¹⁹ Jean-Claude Lebensztein, “Photorealism, Kitsch, and Venturi,” trans. Kate Cooper, *SubStance* 10, no. 2, issue 31 (1981): 95.

¹²⁰ As indicated in chapter one, many of the artists not only consciously selected middle-class scenes and objects, but also maintained a middle-class lifestyle, working for decades as teachers and/or adhering to a very regimented 9-5 type work-schedule. Seitz observed, “[the Photorealists] lead, quiet, workmanlike, essentially middle class lives. An hour spent with one of them makes their alleged collusion in Madison Avenue-SoHo chicanery seem distant and absurd.” Seitz, “The Real and the Artificial: Painting of the New Environment,” 71.

¹²¹ Lebensztein, 100.

¹²² Though these works are contemporaneous with American Photorealist painting, they were generally not translated for a decade or so, and thus did not fully make their way into the English discourse until the late seventies and early eighties.

of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”¹²³ Rosalind Krauss picks up this thread in the early eighties, arguing for the simulacral resonances of much contemporary photography: “By exposing the multiplicity, the facticity, the repetition and stereotype at the heart of *every* aesthetic gesture, photography deconstructs the possibility of differentiating between the original and the copy, the first idea and its slavish imitators.”¹²⁴

The eighties are now often remembered as a moment when photography and theory appeared to work in sync, fueling a discourse articulated by Krauss and other supporters of the “Pictures” generation.¹²⁵ If photography in the mid-eighties seemed the ideal medium to evoke postmodern concerns, this association was also cast back retrospectively on Photorealist painting. The most influential claim, in this regard, comes in Fredric Jameson’s widely read work, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.”¹²⁶ Originally published as an essay in the *New Left Review* in 1984, Jameson’s seminal piece considers postmodernity through

¹²³ Michael Camille, “Simulacrum,” in *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 34.

¹²⁴ Krauss enumerates now canonical examples, such as Cindy Sherman’s work, but also points to the slippage between real and copy in the practices of vaunted modernists like Irving Penn; though Sherman’s work is an act of criticism while Penn’s is an old-school move for artistic legitimation, both, Krauss wagers, might be leveled by the possibility that criticism itself could become irrelevant to the field of photography. She draws this inference from the French television program *Une Minute Pour Une Image*, in which a single photograph was projected on the screen, accompanied by a voice-over commentary. The program’s format thus not only invites the projection of a fantasy narrative, but, moreover, encourages decontextualization by isolating the image. Krauss’s concerns are concomitant with photography’s ascent into the museum and gallery space—potentially the pinnacle of such isolation. Her concerns are not irrelevant today, but certainly have been replaced by the more pressing issues that accompany the surfeit of images circulating in the digital era. Rosalind Krauss, “A Note on Photography and the Simulacral,” *October* 31 (Winter, 1984): 59, 68.

¹²⁵ See, for instance, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “Playing in the Fields of the Image,” “Photography After Art Photography,” and “Living With Contradictions: Critical Practices in the Age of Supply-Side Aesthetics” in *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 86-148; Douglas Crimp, “Pictures,” *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 75-88; Crimp, “Photographs at the End of Modernism,” and “The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism,” in *On the Museum’s Ruins* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 2-31, 108-25; Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Modernism,” *October* 12 (Spring 1980): 67-86; and Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism, Part 2,” *October* 13 (Summer, 1980): 58-80.

¹²⁶ Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” *New Left Review* I, no. 146 (July – August 1984): 53-92.

an array of cultural examples, including architecture, painting, and literature.¹²⁷ From an aesthetic perspective, the essential elements of his argument are by now well-rehearsed: the postmodern era replaces parody with pastiche, yields a “crisis of historicity,” and breaks down the signifying chain, resulting in a loss of reality. It is in this last component that Photorealism comes into play. Discussing a poem by Bob Perelman composed of captions invented for a found photobook—an absent referent—Jameson asserts:

There is here a striking parallel to the dynamics of so-called photorealism, which looked like a return to representation and figuration after the long hegemony of the aesthetics of abstraction, until it became clear that its objects were not to be found in the “real world” either, but were themselves photographs of that real world, this last now transformed into images, of which the “realism” of the photorealist painting is now the simulacrum.¹²⁸

Initially the corollary seems simple: there is no real to be discovered in Photorealism, only an endless loop of referentiality, as subject and representation merge into indecipherability. Yet, Jameson’s phrasing is slightly misleading in implying there was an initial sense of unadulterated “return to representation and figuration.” In fact Photorealism was rarely perceived as a straightforward resurgence of realism—the works were always read as above all photographic, and thus distinctly contemporary in their investigations of perception and illusion.

In Jameson’s view the general shift of postmodernism produces conditions in which the real can no longer be taken at face value. While his observations often aptly reflect the cultural moment of their writing, Photorealist painting generally fails to function as the kind of Möbius strip he describes. For instance, his references to the “hallucinatory splendor” of Photorealist cityscapes and automobile wrecks—undoubtedly allusions to the works of Estes and Salt,

¹²⁷ Perhaps most famous is Jameson’s discussion of Los Angeles and its Bonaventure Hotel (which he misspells the “Bonaventura”). For a rebuttal to Jameson’s take on downtown Los Angeles, see Mike Davis, “Urban Renaissance and the Spirit of Postmodernism,” *New Left Review* I, no.151 (May – June 1985): 106-13. Edward Soja and others have also taken up Los Angeles as the quintessential postmodernist space. See Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 190-248.

¹²⁸ Jameson, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” 75.

respectively—fall short when one attempts to apply those descriptors to the paintings. There is perhaps some truth to Jameson’s contention that Estes’s fixation on the visual and spatial paradoxes of reflection and transparency can mask contemporary urban deterioration, but the fluid sheen of these illusions is a misleading implication of how the paintings appear in reproduction.¹²⁹ Close examination of works such as *Downtown* (1978) reveals a persistent painterliness; because these detailed passages of visual information are so dense and individual objects so small, they cohere better when photographic reproduction adds yet another layer of mediation (figs. 51, 52).¹³⁰ Likewise, Salt’s paintings may make decay more visually appealing, though that broad charge can be levied against many works of art. Salt’s process of creating individual stencils to airbrush each element isolates forms and emphasizes their chromatic composition (fig. 53).¹³¹ This approach is perhaps the most labor-intensive method of making a Photorealist painting, and instills a clear sense of craft visible on the canvas. Gail Day accurately synthesizes these kinds of oversights common in Jameson’s argument: “making homologies... tends to be a particularly selective activity, and it is worth noting the types of features that are typically privileged in cultural theory: abstraction (never concreteness), amateriality (rarely materiality), futurity (less so past or surviving forms), speed and fragmentation, or, with some notable exception’s, capital’s autonomy (not labor’s).”¹³² Photorealism, a form that operates across these dualities—it stresses both the material and immaterial, labor and its effacement, and

¹²⁹ Jameson also glosses the “derealization” of Duane Hanson’s sculptures; the latter claim, because it deals with the phenomenological experience of sculpture, is distinct from the two-dimensional forms covered in this dissertation. Ibid., 76.

¹³⁰ Generally Estes is less interested precisely reproducing the illusions of the photograph: he does not project a slide image for direct transfer to the canvas and also makes paintings using multiple photographs composited into a single composition. See Chase, Nancy Foote, and Ted McBurnett, “The Photo-Realists: 12 Interviews,” *Art in America* 60, no. 6 (November—December, 1972), 79; John Canaday and John Arthur, *Richard Estes: The Urban Landscape* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1978), 31, 38-39.

¹³¹ As a result, Salt produces very few paintings; one work can take up to a year to produce. On Salt’s process, see Chase, *John Salt: The Complete Works* (London: Plus One in association with Philip Wilson, 2007), 85-93.

¹³² Day, 228.

old and new forms of image construction—is consequently flattened by Jameson’s argument, as he only attends to the style’s qualities of mediation.

Hal Foster, as Day also notes, is conscious of Jameson’s shortcomings. The most well-known figure in art history to comment on Photorealism in recent years—notably over a decade after Jameson—Foster relies on a Lacanian model, countering some of Jameson’s claims. For Foster, surrealism is the subversive term of the twentieth century: unlike abstraction, it does not avoid the question of resemblance, but rather manipulates its conventions and thus undermines the authority of the real.¹³³ Something roughly parallel, if less productively radical, is attributed to Photorealism in Foster’s *The Return of the Real*: “sometimes its illusionism is so excessive as to appear anxious—anxious to cover up a *troumatic* real—but this anxiety cannot help but indicate this real as well.”¹³⁴ Foster’s portmanteau is a play on Lacan’s notion of the traumatic—the encounter with the real, the “thing that resists the symbolic, that is not a signifier at all”—combined with the French word for hole or gap, alluding to image making practices where the real manages to break through.¹³⁵

Foster enumerates three ways Photorealism attempts to seal the real behind appearances: by representing apparent reality as a coded sign, as with Malcolm Morely’s early paintings, which explicitly frame their photographic sources; by reproducing it as a “fluid *surface*,” as accomplished by Audrey Flack and Don Eddy’s reliance on airbrush techniques; or by representing it as a “visual *conundrum*,” articulated by a plethora of reflections and refractions, as in Estes’s work. Foster seems partial to the third path, which, in his view, strains the pictorial structure to the point of implosion, such that the audience “may feel under the gaze, looked at

¹³³ See Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993).

¹³⁴ Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 138.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

from many sides.”¹³⁶ This reciprocal gaze connects back to Lacan’s schema, in which vision also emanates from the object, thus overturning the old sense of the privileged subject—rendered most famously in Albrecht Dürer’s sixteenth-century woodcut, *Draftsman Drawing a Reclining Nude* (fig. 54).¹³⁷

Ultimately though, Foster concludes that the disruption in Photorealism’s surface of signs is inadvertent, and thus effects only a small disturbance of capitalist spectacle. Shifting to examples of appropriation art and images of the abject, the impact of representational painting feels anemic by comparison. By the end of the chapter, he has established two historical currents: the initial move toward simulacral intensities and ahistorical pastiches of the 1980s, and the subsequent move in the 1990s toward the melancholic; “on the one hand an ecstasy in the imagined breakdown of the image-screen and/or the symbolic order; on the other hand a horror at this fantasmatic event followed by a despair about it.”¹³⁸ This oscillation, Foster wagers, is in part a product of particular socioeconomic conditions—the continuing AIDS epidemic, the destroyed welfare state, among other crises of the eighties and nineties—resulting in a strange unification of deconstructive analysis and identity politics under the dominant rubric of trauma.

Forging into the depths of psychoanalytic theory, it occasionally feels as though one has traveled a long way from actual paintings. Though Foster pays heed to various visual strategies, they are ultimately subservient to a larger cultural discourse. *Return of the Real* pushes the operations of Photorealism to an extreme limit, so that the paintings eventually buckle under the

¹³⁶ Ibid., 141-2.

¹³⁷ In postmodern criticism Dürer’s etching is often used as a stand in for the ideological claims of perspective, in which this highly constructed representational schema was made to seem an objective, “natural” view of the world. The gender politics of the image are also of central interest to recent critics. See, for instance, Victor Burgin, “Geometry and Abjection,” in *The Cultural Politics of Postmodernism*, ed. John Tagg (London: Routledge, 1989), 15; W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 37; and Lynda Nead, *Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality*, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 11.

¹³⁸ Foster, *The Return of the Real*, 165.

weight of their own illusionist aspirations; the endgame of simulation thus becomes self-destruction. It is perhaps not surprising then that Photorealism's defenders generally maintain more solidly traditional ground. Chase, who occasionally employs the postmodernist label in her writing in the 1970s, returns to the term for her essay in the most recent Meisel catalog, *Photorealism at the Millennium*. In her view the style is postmodern in that it rejects the terms of modernism and the Platonic ideal; she reiterates that the work is a "copy of a copy," but never ventures into the potentially troubling territory established by Baudrillard, Jameson, or Foster.¹³⁹ In maintaining her position as an advocate, Chase cannot wade into the negative implications of their analysis—i.e. that Photorealism is part of the troubling decline of global capitalism, a realm where the slippery exchange of signs devalues the social and political potential of realist aspirations. There is a palpable tension within these kinds of defenses: the desire to see the work as both the product of innovative artistic talents and as evidence of the undermining of the notion of image originality. In some ways this description applies to much art of the 1980s, though that era is now sufficiently canonized so that the friction between a questioning of authorship and the tendency to reconstruct history as a sequence of important names seems mostly a moot point. Perhaps it is because Photorealism has received comparatively little scholarly attention that these issues are decidedly less resolved.

This is not to imply that Chase and her contingent are necessarily wrong. One wonders, in a more basic way, if the postmodern critics ever spent much time examining Photorealist works in the flesh. While some of the painters produce a particularly slick surface—especially

¹³⁹ Chase, "The Not-So-Innocent Eye: Photorealism in Context," in *Photorealism at the Millennium*, Meisel and Chase (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), 14-16. In the preceding volume Meisel reflects on the overheated eighties art market, dismissing the value of artists like Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat: "...by the beginning of the new century (only a decade away), if any of the works by these artists have found their way into museum collections—and there will be very few indeed—they are sure to confuse discriminating viewers." His alienation from the central trends in the contemporary art market is revealing, especially considering Photorealism was in almost precisely the same position a decade prior. Meisel, *Photorealism Since 1980* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993), 15.

Foster's examples Flack and Eddy—the vast majority retain some sense of painterliness. The characteristically thin surface of Photorealist paintings are in actuality founded on a palimpsestic kind of construction: first the choice of a site or scene and its photographic documentation, followed by image selection, slide projection, pencil drawing, (perhaps an) underpainting, and final rendering—the latter usually made with reference to a print of the source photograph. In the finished product both media exist on roughly coequal terms—the photographic structure is clearly evident, but paint cannot literally become photograph. Moreover, many of the Photorealists modify their source material with formal adaptations to strengthen compositions, add painterly touches of loose facture or small abstract passages, or often clarify the original photograph. The positioning of Photorealism as simulacral is in some sense predicated on effacement of such painterly choices and evidence of materiality: in this world images float free, unanchored by reference, omnivorously devouring the flesh of reality. Even in Foster's hall of mirrors, where the real kicks back as a traumatic break in the image screen, the basic premise is superfluity of illusion. The oft-observed irony of illusion is that it is the product of painstaking labor—even in a world of technologically fueled aesthetics, simulation is not achieved without a vast amount of processing energy.¹⁴⁰ This knowledge, too, cannot be extrapolated from the viewing experience. Thus only in theory can Photorealist painting's image operations ever become fully postmodern.

A number of practices in this era rethink, complicate, and (frequently) deemphasize material engagement. Yet, these experiments do not simply signal a collective step toward dematerialization or the wholly postmodern, but rather are evidence of artists redefining commitment to and the terms of both subject and process. Photorealism does not question

¹⁴⁰ Nor, in this sense, does the first generation of Photorealists “outsource” their labor, as later generations have done. The latter category includes Marilyn Minter, Jeff Koons, and Damien Hirst. Of course, most of the Photorealists have not reached comparable levels of market success, but the difference in process is still notable.

objecthood on the same level as other hybrid, conceptual, or ephemeral practices, but it does destabilize medium enough to generate a newly productive dialectic between painting and photography, and thus more broadly, seeing and making. Looking back, Photorealism sits precisely on the boundary of modernism and postmodernism, borrowing freely from well-established modernist traditions while anticipating some of the more radical departures of postmodernism. Being perched halfway between modes of making and thinking has clearly muddled the critical waters: as the sediments of yesterday's vitriol settle, there is still no consensus as to how we might interpret the style's image operations or value its iconography.

This chapter has traced the multipronged critical history of realism during the sixties, seventies, and eighties; realism flowed widely and variably during these decades, and consequently the surrounding critical discourse will never be easy to distill or synthesize. Rather, it is essential to maintain sight of its fluctuations and complexities, and to understand Photorealism's role within these debates. In many ways the style was the perfect template for a range of arguments, not only because its producers generally refrained from commentary and thus left a sizable opening for diverse interpretations, but also because its subjects and methods of fabrication both rely on accessible elements of contemporary culture. Photorealism was a test case for a wide variety of aesthetic perspectives; the criticism produced in response to the style reflects vital traces of period interests, hopes, and biases, both social and aesthetic.

It is perhaps tempting to look Photorealist works merely for their formal skill and conceptual challenge—to counter criticisms of kitsch and conservatism by pointing to the style's canny fusion of two media that have tugged at each other's territory for two centuries. But a greater challenge lies in assessing Photorealism's social context and relevance, particularly as its contemporary source material ages and coats the works' contents with nostalgia. In the following

chapter I turn to one such central issue of the era: the shifts and exchange between urban and suburban form, as viewed through the lens the Bay Area Photorealists' extended meditations on the West Coast environment. It thus returns to an investigation of how realism evolved in specific geographic, economic, and cultural climates, but also builds on insights provided (purposefully and inadvertently) by both realism's advocates and detractors.

CHAPTER 3

Cities, Suburbs, and Peripheries:

Photorealism and the Reshaping of the Postwar Environment

The San Francisco Bay Area is often considered historically and culturally anomalous: episodes and incidents like the Gold Rush, earthquakes, and numerous countercultural movements appear to set it apart from the rest of the country. In fact, the region is both iconic and archetypal; a sprinkling of remarkable events and unique geography should not prevent one from seeing the mainstream on the coastal edge. Here, as with other “Sunbelt” centers, the postwar era has largely been defined by decentralization, shrinking manufacturing, and the growth of technology and service based industries.¹ Fierce battles over urban renewal, highway construction, and gentrification in city centers are representative of similar fights across America. Likewise, the so-called standardization of the built environment persists in the Bay Area as elsewhere. Thus, while San Francisco stands at the root of the region’s image and legacy, to think of this dense portion of Northern California in the traditional form of magnetic

¹ “Sunbelt” refers to postwar centers of growth in the South and West; the term, originally used in the Army and Airforce during the 1940s, was revived by Kevin Philips in the late sixties to articulate the broad pro-growth, pro-defense, and pro-family sentiments that united these areas. See Kevin Philips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1969). The term is often used in contrast to the shrinking industrial centers of the eastern seaboard and the Midwest—the so-called “Rustbelt”—and is more academic than colloquial. San Francisco is generally not thought of as part of this phenomenon, but its (now larger) neighbor to the south, San José, frequently is; I would argue much of the Bay Area does in fact correlate with such pivotal Sunbelt trends as engineering/technology-driven economies, decentered growth, and low taxation. While I use the term with less specific political connotations, the pro-business, conservative alliances many scholars have argued for as defining factors certainly bear merit here. See, for instance, Michelle Nickerson and Darren Dochuk, eds., *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Place, Space, and Region* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); and Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism: Phoenix and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

city center and dispersed suburbs belies pivotal demographic shifts in postwar American growth. The Golden Gate may still stand as the touristic icon of the Bay Area, but the region's evolving population, industries, and economies have complicated the older model of periphery and core.

This sense of being at once the center and the edge applies equally to the area's visual arts scene. San Francisco, rich with its own tradition of artists' colonies, bohemian culture, and a vigorous modernist community, led the West Coast for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but was generally thought of as lesser counterpart to New York.² In recent decades Los Angeles has surpassed San Francisco in its cultural reach, fostering innovative practices tied to the contemporary global economy seemingly far better than its northern neighbor. And yet, San Francisco has remained an artistic center, its hilly topography and ocean-bounded geography providing natural fodder for continual meditations on the urban picturesque. Likewise, the city's diverse but cohesive ethnic, cultural, and identity-based communities and longstanding liberalism are still thought of as quintessential elements of a creative core. Even as the South Bay dominates as a technological hub, the rise of San Francisco's "Multimedia Gulch" in the mid-1990s and current prestige of many SoMa area companies are reminders of the city's continuing draw for inventive entrepreneurs.³

This chapter focuses on the Bay Area itself as aesthetic subject. Having established the conditions for a new kind of realist energy and intermedial practice in the first and second chapters, here I consider how the Bay Area Photorealists respond to their physical environment.

² For a reconsideration of the center and periphery model in regards to modernism, see Richard Cándida Smith, "The Elusive Quest of the Moderns," in *On the Edge of America: California Modernist Art, 1900-1950*, ed. Paul Karlstrom (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 21-38.

³ SoMa refers to the area south of Market Street on the eastern side of the city. The area has undergone intense gentrification over the past several decades (see note 95). Current tech residents include Yelp, Zynga, AirBnB, Dropbox, Klout, Simple Star, TechnoRati, ThoughtWorks, Pulse, Trulia, CNet, New Relic, Eventbrite, and Dolby. Google, Adobe, Quantcast, and Ubisoft, among others, have branches in the area. Several venture capital firms have also established SoMa offices.

What kinds of spaces and places do Bechtle, McLean, and Goings choose to represent? What does Northern California offer, not only in terms of lineage, training, and community, but also as raw “data” for a style with a supreme inclination towards the factual and the precise? As Eva Respini has observed, photography and the American West came of age simultaneously, providing a documentary accompaniment to geographic exploration and exploitation, and a recorded image to project potent ideals of national identity.⁴ Photorealism in the Bay Area both draws on and reformulates this legacy, while concurrently negotiating the traditions of American modernist and local figurative painting.

Bechtle, Goings, and McLean’s sustained attention to the everyday reflects the cultural impact of transformations in the built environment and postwar lifestyles. They paint the city, suburbs, and rural fringes not simply to record ordinary lives and architectural structures, but to explore how a hybrid artistic process can yield new visual understandings of changing spatial alignments in the American landscape. I argue their works are in large part about the conflation of traditional social and geographic boundaries: the purely residential in the urban, the industrial in the bucolic, the imported pastoral in the both the suburb and the city. Their method relies on the specificity of both time and locale to stand in for the generic and widespread, binding concrete particulars with broader changes in the nation’s middle-class, everyday life. This chapter attempts to ascertain how their artworks reflect both the shifting American environment and the aesthetic forms that evolve in order to enable us to perceive those shifts.

For purposes of organizational clarity, the sections that follow roughly sort works according to categories of suburban, urban, and rural. But each category purposefully bleeds into the next, stressing fluidities rather than divisions. The order is also generally chronological in

⁴ Eva Respini, *Into the Sunset: Photography’s Image of the American West* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 10.

order to trace the demographic and social shifts of the past few decades as reflected in the perspectives and subjects the artists have chosen. Many of the artworks described in chapter one reappear here. For instance, having established the formal influences of West Coast modernism (particularly Diebenkorn) in Bechtle and McLean's early work, this chapter looks at how those structural and compositional devices aid perception of the built environment. Finally, the chapter also seeks to contextualize these works with parallel visual projects, the fictional worlds of literature and film, and the interpretive lenses of urban studies. These additional sources of information, theory, and cultural reflection provide a fuller sense of how the Bay Area Photorealists' social geographies fit within the context and perceptions of their time.

Suburban Growth and Critiques

A central inspiration for my consideration of western Photorealist landscapes is Bechtle's own ruminations on the word "suburb." Though suburbia was ubiquitous—by 1970 more Americans lived in suburbs than cities or rural areas—it is a difficult phenomenon to define.⁵ Both a concept and a place, suburbia is not monolithic, but rather a historical process bound up dialectically with the poles of urban and rural sites. In an interview with curator Michael Auping from 2004, Bechtle remarked:

I suppose 'suburb' is a kind of generic that covers a good deal of ground. In my case, some of the images are close to the city. Some are a bit farther out... You could probably say I'm trying to locate them myself. It's where a lot of people live—somewhere between the city and somewhere else. I guess it's the suburbs. I'm not sure I know exactly what the suburbs are.⁶

⁵ Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820–2000* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003), 10.

⁶ Robert Bechtle quoted in Michael Auping, *30 Years: Interviews and Outtakes* (Fort Worth, Texas: Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, 2007), 31.

The suburban indeterminacy Bechtle articulates initially sounds strange—the word’s clear etymology and pop culture usage seem to constitute a well-defined type of built environment. But what Bechtle alludes to is much more than semantic confusion. Indeed, suburbia is one of the most fraught terms in cultural and architectural discourse, a battle forcefully played out in urban studies and American literature over the past several decades.

America’s suburban roots date back to the origins of U.S. cities, when borderlands operated as alternatives to growing urban density for the wealthy.⁷ Increasingly populated and subject to sophisticated planning, American suburbs exploded with the post-war boom. Responding to the severe housing shortage driving the market, the Federal Housing Administration and the Veterans Affairs backed loans for the construction of ten million homes between 1946 and 1953; federal income tax deductions on mortgage interest and property taxes, corporate tax deductions for “greenfield” commercial real estate, and federal funding for new highways also aided growth.⁸

The postwar era brought affordable homes to many Americans, but its concomitant cultural shifts were subject almost immediately to critique. Robert Beuka, in his comprehensive reflections on suburban literature, relates this reaction:

At the height of suburban development and expansion, a series of sociological works emerged that castigated the new suburbanites, their landscapes, and their ways of living. Such influential texts as David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), William H. Whyte’s *The Organization Man* (1956), Paul Goodman’s *Growing Up Absurd* (1960), and Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) read the suburbs as, respectively, a hotbed of conformity; an emasculating, corporate environment; a breeding ground for misdirected and disaffected youths; and a psychologically disabling prison for women.⁹

⁷ Hayden, 21-44.

⁸ Hayden, *A Field Guide to Sprawl* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 10.

⁹ Robert Beuka, *SuburbiaNation: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 6. In fact, even earlier critiques exist: Lewis Mumford spoke out against suburbia several decades prior. See Lewis Mumford, “The Wilderness of Suburbia,” *New Republic*, September 7, 1921, 44-45. For an overview of period critiques of suburbia, see John Archer, “The Place We Love to Hate: The

Suburbia has oft been viewed as an idyllic sham, its verdant lawns and apparently identical single-family homes disguising social inequities and cultural shortcomings. Indeed, during the 1950s and 1960s highway planning destroyed many urban neighborhoods of color, while mortgage insurance programs often excluded women and ethnic minorities.¹⁰ Thus the de facto image of suburbia as a racially exclusive, chauvinistic terrain has real economic and historical roots.

Much of the earlier criticism though, particularly in literature and film, centered on the pressures of conformity. For many observers the uniformity of the built environment and the advertising culture that promoted the suburban lifestyle signaled a vicious attack on the values of individualism and personal liberty. This vacuous oasis, coupled with Cold War fears of Communism and nuclear proliferation, could also become an epicenter of jingoistic sentiments. In 1956, John Keats published *The Crack in the Picture Window*, a scathing take on the “fresh-air slums we’re building around the edge of America’s cities... developments conceived in error, nurtured by greed, corroding in everything they touch.”¹¹ In the decade that followed writers such as John Cheever, John Updike, Richard Yates, and Phillip K. Dick contributed more nuanced accounts of suburban malaise, but their works still tend toward critique.¹² In the

Critics Confront Suburbia, 1920-1960,” in *Constructions of Home: Interdisciplinary Studies in Architecture, Law, and Literature*, ed. Klaus Stierstorfer (New York: AMS Press, 2010), 45-82.

¹⁰ Beuka, 11. For a study of the urban ramifications of highway building see Eric Avila, “The Sutured City: Tales of Progress and Disaster in the Freeway Metropolis,” in *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 185-223.

¹¹ John Keats, *The Crack in the Picture Window* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956), 7.

¹² John Updike, *Rabbit Angstrom: A Tetralogy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), originally published as *Rabbit, Run* (1960), *Rabbit Redux* (1971), *Rabbit Is Rich* (1981), and *Rabbit at Rest* (1990); Richard Yates, *Revolutionary Road* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1961); John Cheever, “The Swimmer,” in *The Stories of John Cheever* (New York: Library of America, 2009), 726-744, originally published in *The New Yorker*, July 18, 1964; and Philip K. Dick, *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike* (Willimantic: Mark V. Ziesing, 1984). Though Dick is best known for his science fiction, several early realist works deal with the suburban milieu. *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike* depicts life in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Marin County—in the novel a zone between urban

narratives of Updike's *Rabbit* tetralogy, Yates's *Revolutionary Road*, Cheever's short story "The Swimmer," and Dick's *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike*, characters chafe at the boundaries of suburban life and the pressures of class conformity, often resulting in crises of existential proportions: incessant marital rows, abortions, and even death abound.¹³ These writers' perspectives on suburbia were not uniform, nor are the stories simplistic caricatures. Undoubtedly though, a generation of writers in the late fifties and early sixties described an overwhelming sense of social angst in relation to Americans' mass migration to the suburbs.

When Bechtle, McLean, and Goings turned their attention to these residential spaces in the 1960s and 1970s, the Bay Area was increasingly saturated with the suburban. San Francisco, a peninsular city, lacked the space for the new, cheap development demanded in the wake of World War II.¹⁴ Oakland, for many years the region's second city to the east, had already undergone rapid expansion during the shipbuilding frenzy of World War II. Oakland's postwar history, like that of other cities with shrinking industry and immense racial disparities, was plagued by housing shortages and segregation, poverty, failed attempts at urban renewal, and population uprisings.¹⁵ Accordingly, building suburbia in the Bay Area predominantly meant

and rural, where contests over the land, its history, and social expectations develop into a fierce communal hysteria. Dick completed the novel in 1960, but it was rejected by publishers and only appeared posthumously in 1984.

¹³ For further critical analysis of this suburban literature, see Beuka, *SuburbiaNation*. Beuka argues, for instance, that Updike's *Rabbit* narrative "posits the suburbs as an emasculating sphere," while Cheever's work generates "a vision of postwar suburban life governed by an unforgiving social structure based on distinctions of class and taste." Beuka, 17.

¹⁴ Though it should be noted that the city has been slightly expanded over the course of its history. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the city progressively filled a number of shoreline areas to create more habitable space. See, for instance, Rebecca Solnit, "Third Street Phantom Coast," in *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 74-75.

¹⁵ On the growth of Oakland during the World War II, see Marilyn S. Johnson, *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); on Oakland's postwar decline, see Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003). Portions of Oakland, however, are quite suburban. Bechtle pictures some of these neighborhoods in works discussed below.

relocation to the north and south of San Francisco—areas which promised white families low taxes, new homes, and, perhaps above all, space.

The Santa Clara Valley, with its warm, sunny climate and flat terrain, was particularly attractive to developers and new residents. Within a generation this fertile farmland—once referred to as “The Valley of the Heart’s Delight”—was converted from orchards to a sprawling mass of new housing and industry. Initial growth was largely fueled by the culture of technology incubated at Stanford University, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s Ames Research Center, and the Lockheed aerospace corporation, and later taken up by Hewlett Packard, Apple, Google, Yahoo, and the legions of other corporate giants and startups now populating “Silicon Valley.”¹⁶ Though the area is currently the main engine of advancements in personal technology, the foundations for the tech industry were laid by massive government investment in military technology during the Cold War era. David Beers, in his memoir of one such “blue sky” development, notes that this development was part of a national trend:

It was the state commanding... that not only technology but *places* come into being. Blue sky metropolises, nurtured by federal dollars, would be commanded to rise out of orange groves and prairies and deserts and other former boondocks to industrial America... The money would tend to flow to the places the military liked, and this often meant places wide open, remote, and quite far from the stodgy East.¹⁷

Southern Alameda country also grew tremendously in the postwar years, spawning such newly minted cities as Hayward, Fremont, and Union City. Linked by the Nimitz Freeway, almost all of the corridor’s available land was incorporated into existing or new cities between 1945 and 1958. As Robert O. Self notes in his postwar history of the East Bay, this land rush was

¹⁶ Charles Wollenberg, *Golden Gate Metropolis: Perspectives on Bay Area History* (Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, 1985), 258.

¹⁷ David Beers, *Blue Sky Dream: A Memoir of America’s Fall From Grace* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1996), 30. Beers also notes that there are direct familial links between the Valley’s first generation of aerospace engineers and the tech generation that followed, though the two generations hold differing work and familial values. Beers, 139-60.

remarkable even within the context of rapidly expanding California.¹⁸ Industry grew here too, most notably with General Motors and Ford's relocation of their assembly plants, from Oakland to Fremont and Richmond to Milpitas, respectively. Like Silicon Valley, Southern Alameda County was envisioned as a place of both work and residence, but never designed as a centralized, dense hub. Instead the area remained a conglomeration of Garden City descendants, encouraging green space and controls on development.¹⁹ The region would also become a hub of support for perhaps the most influential statute passed in California's postwar history, Proposition 13. Commonly referred to as the "taxpayer's revolt," this 1978 law severely limited property taxes, thus reducing the fiscal burden of suburban homeowners. Though the movement was a response to real increases for individual taxpayers, it was also fueled by a larger attack on government programs which helped support the economically disadvantaged mainly residing in urban areas.²⁰

The Napa, Contra Costa, and Sonoma counties to the north experienced expansion similar to the south counties, though ultimately did not become as populous.²¹ Photographers Dorothea Lange and Pirkle Jones documented the effects of this transformation in 1956 and 1957,

¹⁸ San Lorenzo and Castro Valley, small communities with no industry, were the only ones to resist incorporation. (Castro Valley is where Richard McLean now resides.) Self, 123.

¹⁹ Ebenezer Howard developed the Garden City model at the turn of the twentieth century in the United Kingdom. The model encouraged self-sufficient, contained communities surrounded by "greenbelts." See Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-Morrow* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965).

²⁰ Self, 316-27.

²¹ Generally the north counties have retained more agricultural land and protected natural areas, due in part to the "open space" movement, which won preservation areas such as the Point Reyes National Seashore in Marin, and stronger advocates for "slow growth." The city of San Francisco also made earlier attempts to stem expansion by refusing to approve new highway construction in the northern and western districts of the city in the late 1950s and 1960s. But here as in other cities, successful resistance to bulldozing and freedom from intrusive commuter traffic was generally a privilege of the well off: while the north and west remain freeway-less, construction proceeded in San Francisco's southeastern, industrial districts. The area's Embarcadero Freeway was torn down after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, following decades of persistent opposition. Wollenberg, 268. San Francisco's current mayor, Ed Lee, has recently proposed tearing down the portions of Interstate 280 to aid neighborhood growth and facilitate the building of high-speed rail connections downtown. See Phillip Matier and Andrew Ross, "Ed Lee talks of tearing down end of I-280," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 20, 2013, <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/matier-ross/article/Ed-Lee-talks-of-tearing-down-end-of-I-280-4209883.php> (accessed February 21, 2013).

capturing the conversion of the agricultural Berryessa Valley to a reservoir, built to meet growing water and power demands.²² Yet their series, *Death of a Valley*, is not simply images of pristine land destroyed to make way for further housing development: Lange and Jones's photographs also capture the abandonment of the Valley's central town, Monticello (fig. 55). Here the cycle of conversion indicates the palimpsestic nature of land use, as one form of development is plowed over in preparation for the next. Lange and Jones wistfully reflect on this transition in the *Aperture* issue devoted to the series: "It was a place of settled homes and deep loam soil. It was a place of cattle and horses, of pears and grapes, alfalfa and grain. It had never known a crop failure... And the valley held generations in its palm."²³

Development on the San Francisco peninsula in San Mateo County has also been immortalized in suburban history, though in a different form and tone. Folk singer Malvina Reynolds's iconic song "Little Boxes" was inspired by the Westlake development in Daly City, just south of San Francisco (fig. 56).²⁴ Reynolds's satiric vision of suburbia as standardized "little boxes" made out of "ticky-tacky" has remained a part of popular culture for decades, employed as quick signal of loathsome postwar conformity in a multitude of contexts.²⁵ Written in 1962 and made famous by Pete Seeger's rendition in 1963, Reynolds's acerbic take on suburban development was prescient: the musician's daughter recalls that when prompted to

²² Lange first asked Ansel Adams to work with her on the project but he turned her down; an earlier collaboration for *Life* on Mormon towns endured many stumbling blocks with the community, and Adams disliked the way Lange worked in the field and as editor. Thus Lange sought out Adams's assistant, Pirkle Jones. The later project was also originally intended as a photo essay for *Life*, but because of coverage of the recent flooding in the South, the magazine decided it had too many articles on water. Ultimately the photographs were exhibited at the San Francisco Museum of Art and published in a special issue of the photography magazine *Aperture*. Karin Becker Ohrn, *Dorothea Lange and the Documentary Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 169-95.

²³ Dorothea Lange and Pirkle Jones, "Death of a Valley," *Aperture* VIII, No. 3 (1960): 128.

²⁴ Wollenberg, 263.

²⁵ Most recently Reynolds's song was used as the theme song for the Showtime series *Weeds*.

return to the spot of her original inspiration for a magazine piece, “she couldn’t find those houses because so many more had been built around them that the hillsides were totally covered.”²⁶

Though the elements of suburban critiques shifted somewhat over time, sentiments surrounding growth were highly always charged. When Bechtle, McLean, and Goings turned their attention to their surrounding environment in the sixties and seventies, these demographic changes were reshaping the landscape. Not only did suburban growth permeate the region, but its local rise also paralleled national demographic trends of decreasing density and coincided with fierce debates on the value of such communities. Thus to repeat the commonplace that Photorealists “painted the banal” is only partially true: recall the critical slander hurled their way for the perceived aesthetic slumming involved in rendering the goods and lives of the middle class. Choosing to depict elements of suburbia with clarity rather than irony was its own kind of rebuke to general art world and urban elitism.

Picturing the New Grid: The Suburban Visual Context

Visual documents are essential to defining suburbia’s place in American culture; such images have held much currency in commercial, journalistic, and academic forums, and are frequently enlisted to serve a variety of ideals or proscriptions. Three suburban observers—William Garnett, Dan Graham, and Bill Owens—have been particularly important in communicating such ideologies of placemaking. Though their styles and agendas vary, they share an understanding of macro environmental formations and are similarly invested in interrogating the cultural implications of new suburban environments. Their work elucidates the visual languages developed around suburbia and thus provides a foundation for understanding

²⁶ Showtime, “Artist Spotlight,” <http://www.sho.com/site/weeds/music.sho> (accessed September 17, 2011).

Photorealist interpretations of parallel spaces and themes. Garnett's formal choices, Graham's attention to transitional environments, and Owens's conveyance of the intimate and idiosyncratic illuminate central social, spatial, and aesthetic ideologies embedded within the apparently blank slate of suburbia's spaces.

Of the three Bay Area Photorealists, Bechtle's focus is the most classically suburban, though, as discussed below, there are important overlaps in Goings's and McLean's work. Bechtle's images, particularly early works made in the East Bay, are intensely consumed with the visual properties of residential spaces, and share traits with Garnett, Graham, and Owens's suburban investigations. Criticisms of Photorealism often ignore this link with the larger aesthetic conversation on suburbia, instead connecting the perceived lowbrow nature of its subjects with the "unchallenging accessibility" of their realist means. While these three artists were likely not a direct influence on Bechtle, putting the works in dialogue provides a fuller sense of how particular visual strategies evolved and their greater cultural import.²⁷

William Garnett's aerial photographs of the Lakewood development in Southern California have frequently been employed as illustrations of the suburban grid. His images picture the development from start to finish, as D.J. Waldie describes in his 1996 memoir, *Holy Land*:

In 1949, three developers bought 3,500 acres of Southern California farmland. They planned to build something that was not exactly a city.

In 1950, before the work of roughing the foundations and pouring concrete began, the three men hired a young photographer with a single-engine plane to document their achievement from the air.

The photographer flew when the foundations of the first houses were poured. He flew again when the framing was done and later, when the roofers were nearly finished. He

²⁷ Bechtle has said that he paid very little attention to contemporary photography during this period. See Jonathan Weinberg, "Photographic Guilt: The Painter and the Camera," in *Robert Bechtle: A Retrospective*, Janet Bishop (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2005), 55.

flew over the shell of the shopping center that explains this and many other Californian suburbs.

The three developers were pleased with the results. The black-and-white photographs show immense abstractions on ground the color of the full moon.

Some of the photographs appeared in *Fortune* and other magazines. The developers bound enlargements in a handsome presentation book.

The photographs celebrate house frames precise as cells in a hive and stucco walls fragile as an unearthed bone.

Seen from above, the grid is beautiful and terrible.²⁸

Typical of Waldie's sparsely poetic prose, this passage captures much of the history and affective power of Garnett's photographs (figs. 57, 58). The pictures were a commercial commission used in magazine spreads and the developer's promotional literature, but also became fodder for suburban excoriations like Ansel Adams and Nancy Newhall's *This is the American Earth* and Peter Blake's *God's Own Junkyard* (1964).²⁹ In the former, Newhall's text opposite Garnett's Lakewood photographs reads:

Hell we are building here on earth.

Headlong, heedless we rush

—to pour into air and water poisons and pollutions until dense choking palls of smog lie over cities and rivers run black and foul

—to blast down the hills, bulldoze the trees, scrape bare the fields to build predestined slums; until city encroaches on suburb, suburb on country, industry on all, and city joins city, jamming the shores, filling valleys, stretching across the plains³⁰

²⁸ D.J. Waldie, *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1996), 4-5.

²⁹ See Ansel Adams and Nancy Newhall, *This is the American Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1960), 36-38; and Peter Blake, *God's Own Junkyard* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 104-05. Blake's second edition of *God's Own Junkyard* responds to the many artists and architects who had begun to use such vernacular environments in their own work, acknowledging, "Judging by the kinds of photographs I began to take after the emergence of the pop-garde, it is clear that I had become less and less interested in established, certified, and acknowledged 'Grade A' architecture, and more and more interested in the potentials of junk, both physical and visual." One of the illustrations accompanying this revised introduction is Richard Estes's painting *Helene's Florist*, of which Blake says: "Richard Estes' stunning photo-realist painting of a florist shop and a barber shop, done in 1971, is a wonderfully ironic and surreal comment on one of America's decaying Main Streets, and on the American scene as a whole." While Estes's work is intended as neither ironic nor surreal, the later embrace of Photorealist environments is notable. Peter Blake, *God's Own Junkyard* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), 19, 21.

³⁰ *Ibid.* Notably this book is the first of the Sierra Club books that combined nature writing and nature photography.

In comparison to Waldie's recent, nuanced reflections, Newhall's writing suffers from the overwrought feel of a period jeremiad, but nonetheless the specifics of the sentiments expressed here are telling. The borderless perspective of Garnett's images tapped into the fear that this residential fabric would eventually blanket the entire land, effacing the boundaries (and thus distinctions) between city, suburb, and country.

As Cécile Whiting observes, bird's eye views of the Los Angeles region were increasingly common in the 1950s and 60s, due in part to a rise in use of helicopters.³¹ Garnett was in fact an impressive multitasker, piloting his own Cessna as he photographed out the window.³² But beyond the sense of a new and daring vantage point, Garnett imbued his subjects with resonance through specific compositional strategies. Whiting notes that the Lakewood images' power yields in part from their sense of limitlessness, a lack of horizon generating incomprehensible breadth.³³ The formalism of Garnett's work is its defining quality: patterning and the play of flatness versus depth or light versus dark both vie with and enhance the photographs' geographical contents—an approach that resonates with the Photorealists' use of the formalist terms gleaned from their exposure to Californian modernism. Garnett often photographed Lakewood early in the morning to catch the sun's angled light, creating an

³¹ Cécile Whiting, *Pop LA: Art and the City in the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 97.

³² Philip Geffer, "William Garnett, 89, Aerial Photographic Artist, Dies," *New York Times*, September 9, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/09/obituaries/09garnett.html> (accessed September 21, 2011).

³³ Whiting, "The Sublime and the Banal," (lecture, The Landscape in American Art, 1940-2000 conference, National Gallery of Art Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, Washington, D.C., February 25, 2011). Ultimately, Whiting contends Garnett's strategies are part of a contemporary Californian reimagining of the sublime, elevating elements of the banal to a tradition once reserved for vast, pristine landscapes, though it is important to note that Garnett subsequently moved away from documenting potentially dispiriting human imprints toward organic patterns in the natural landscape. Garnett said of his work in the mid-1950s, "I came to the conclusion that I can't really make much of a change in society's attitude towards land use by just showing them what's wrong. I've come to the conclusion you have to show them what's right and inspire them." William Garnett, "Environmental Impact," http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom_resources/curricula/landscapes/lesson05.html (accessed September 21, 2011).

additional, sharp pattern of geometric shadows, much as Bechtle, Goings, and McLean have frequently drawn on the West Coast's strong light to define environmental forms.³⁴ Ultimately the Lakewood photographs yield a sense of macro order and pattern imperceptible from the ground level; they aestheticize the massive impact of human development but also provide an order of comprehension important to both contemporary critiques and boosterism.

Like Garnett's aerial photographs, Bechtle's paintings have a streamlined sense of architectural elegance, balancing light and shadow to great effect. Recall that Bechtle has a tendency to exclude select details, such as the diagonal shadows and utility lines jutting across the source image for *'60 T-Bird* (1967-68, figs. 9, 10). These subtle omissions act as a form of distillation, focusing attention on the geometric regularities of the built environment—both within singular structures and repeated across entire residential blocks. In a drawing from the year prior also titled *'60 T-Bird* (1966), Bechtle used the same image of his subject (his brother with his Ford Thunderbird) in a different setting. In contrast to the regular punctuation of windows, vents, and shrubbery in the painting, the drawing uses a central column of plant fronds and Californian pop-modernist architectural detail to build a classical pyramid composition (fig. 59). A watercolor of the same iconic vehicle from 1973 combines the effects of the two earlier works, holding the horizontal stretch of the white building and the height of the lone palm tree in a spatial counterbalance (fig. 60). Viewed sequentially, these various juxtapositions of car and façade generate a sense of rhythmic repetition. Like Garnett, Bechtle uses light and dark—here large expanses of white stucco and pavement—and geometric flows to unite architectural forms and indicate the fluidities of the locales. The ultimate connotations of the artists' works may differ—the tighter, frontal focus of Bechtle's views versus Garnett's aerial expanses present

³⁴ Garnett, "Lakewood, California," <http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=256209> (accessed September 21, 2011).

different kinds of demographic information—but both operate on similar principles of clarifying visual and spatial perception of ordinary residential patterns.

Dan Graham has also dealt extensively in standardized architecture; while Garnett's images are a customary accompaniment to sociological and urban studies tracts, Graham's "Homes For America" is perhaps the most widely referenced suburban piece in the art historical canon (fig. 61). Published as an illustrated article in *Arts Magazine* in 1966, the work provocatively mixes conceptual and formal elements. Its text and layout evoke a sociological study or parody of lifestyle magazines like *Better Homes and Gardens*, detailing such elements as housing layout permutations, the decline of architectural craft, and land use costs. The piece also connotes more exclusively art world concerns: its photographs of identical row houses, as many have noted, bear a striking resemblance to contemporary Minimalist sculpture.³⁵ Indeed, the entire project can be read as a kind of mock-art criticism, taking aim at modernist elitism by employing common subject matter and dryly-humorous written analysis.³⁶ But if Graham's photographs make suburban houses resemble Minimalist sculptures, the inverse is also true. "Homes for America" indicates not only that contemporary sculpture was heavily indebted to industrial fabrication methods, but that life itself in the suburbs, supposedly so distant from the urban grind, was built on the assembly-line production techniques that hastened the nation's transition from rural to urban.

This confluence of the urban and suburban is one of the most provocative aspects of Graham's architectural works. For instance, *Alteration to a Suburban House* (1978) replaces a

³⁵ Randy Kennedy, "A Round Peg," *New York Times*, June 25, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/28/arts/design/28kenn.html> (accessed December 1, 2011).

³⁶ It should be noted that Graham's piece was substantially changed from its original layout for the *Art News* publication. The text was given priority and most of the images were edited out. For more on Graham's assault on high art values, see Christopher Knight, "Color Him Anti-Establishment," *The Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 2009 <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/feb/20/entertainment/et-dan-graham20> (accessed September 22, 2011).

tract house's façade with plate glass and inserts a mirror into the domestic space. This alteration generates a construction akin to urban, commercial locales and directly engages inhabitants and passersby in the network of spectatorship (fig. 62). Mark Pimlott argues the work "marks the nightmarish presence of the corporate city in the suburban idyll... In this schema, private space is projected onto public space and public space is forced into a relationship with space normally considered private."³⁷ In Graham's documentations and re-imaginings of suburbia the spectator recognizes familiar spaces refracted through the rigors of Conceptualism and distortions of hybrid urban-suburban forms: both lay bare the logic of suburban fabrication, and in doing so encourage the viewer to question the seeming transparency and benign nature of these new idylls.³⁸

Parallels with Graham's work may seem improbable, as Photorealism shares little of Conceptualism's propensity for dry humor or linguistic engagement. And yet, there is something of a "conceptual" bent to Photorealist practice: as explored in chapter two, the style's realism is not one of transparency, but rather the extrapolation and layering of media—the paintings' photographic look both enhances and confounds their status as simple, direct representations of reality. Likewise, as Kathan Brown observes, Photorealism shares with Conceptualism a propensity for "workmanlike" plainness, making subject choice the main avenue of expression.³⁹

³⁷ Mark Pimlott, "Dan Graham and Architecture," in *Dan Graham: Architecture*, Dan Graham (London: Camden Arts Centre, 1997), 49.

³⁸ Similar to the famed glass houses designed by Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson, Graham's work generates questions of visibility and the politics of everyday life, though the public history of the former sites centers more on the gendered and sexual identities of their inhabitants, while their secluded locales speak to the utopian ideals of modernism. On the gendered and sexual politics of Van der Rohe's house for Edith Farnsworth and Johnson's own glass house, see Alice T. Friedman, "People Who Live in Glass Houses: Edith Farnsworth, Mies van der Rohe, and Philip Johnson," in *Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 126-59. It should also be noted that, as a model, Graham's work does not share the inhabited histories of the Farnsworth and Johnson houses, though many of Graham's pavilion works do allow viewers to physically engage with similar issues of architectural space, vision, and visibility.

³⁹ Kathan Brown is the founder of Crown Point Press; Bechtle has collaborated with the press on print editions for many years. Kathan Brown, *Why Draw a Landscape?* (San Francisco: Crown Point Press, 1999), 43. Bechtle has

Graham and Bechtle also share an interest in the patterning and underlying structures of suburbia: Bechtle's often-depopulated images encourage a similar form of projection as Graham's engagement with the network of spectatorship. By emptying out the foreground or center space of the canvas, Bechtle offers the viewer room to enter its space. One can imagine living in Bechtle's neighborhoods in the same way Graham encourages the viewer to become enmeshed in his deconstructed and reformulated domestic spaces, entering through "neutralized" forms of presentation. Both forms of identification rely on sparseness of means—for Bechtle, an effect achieved through subtle compositional reductions, and for Graham through allusions to Minimalism or the stripped down structure of an architectural model or pavilion installation.

Bill Owens addresses the private/public interface of suburbia in a much different manner. The most pure documentarian of the group, Owens compiled his iconic photobook, *Suburbia*, while working as a staff photographer for a local Northern California newspaper, *The Livermore Independent*. His status as insider—he lived in the East Bay community he shot—and the year-long time period devoted to creating the project, produce a much different form of suburban meditation, one filled with the intimate details and idiosyncratic lifestyles that emerge from within the domestic space. Though *Suburbia* was a substantial success, selling more than 50,000 copies and reprinted in three internationally distributed editions, the book has been frequently misread as both an ironic indictment of white middle-class values and a paean to such mainstream domesticity.⁴⁰ In fact, Owens considers his work a part of the larger tradition of visual anthropology: he took up photography as a member of the Peace Corps and was later

also occasionally been linked to Ed Ruscha's brand of Pop-Conceptualism, particularly the nondescript architecture of early photo books like *Some Los Angeles Apartments*, *Real Estate Opportunities*, *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations*, *Thirty-Four Parking Lots in Los Angeles*, and *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*. See, for instance, Scott Burton, *The Realist Revival* (New York: American Federation of the Arts, 1972), n.p.

⁴⁰ Claudia Zanfi, *Bill Owens: Photographs 1967-2007* (Bologna: Damiani, 2007), 212.

influenced by John Collier at San Francisco State University.⁴¹ Though it is difficult to summarize the book's extensive community cataloging, Owens's overarching aim is clear: against the commonplace view of suburbia as a monolithic, dull, and conformist existence, his photographs illuminate its subtly variegated contents.

Suburbia's documentation of social roles includes not only the expected studies of family and gender dynamics, but also elements of class and racial politics, and sexuality and violence in the everyday. Likewise, spatial locales are not merely defined by the de rigueur lawn, kitchen, or living room, but also macro and micro views, offering a sense of both the significant detail found in still life studies of pantry cabinets and the large-scale comprehension provided by an aerial view of a prototypical cul-de-sac. Perhaps most important is Owens's integration of text: the majority of photographs are accompanied by a short caption, usually provided by the subjects. Their reflections range from the humorously stereotypical to the poignant and unexpected. Often the text spins the image in an unexpected manner, such as the woman who claims to "believe in women's liberation" and asserts that "Staying at home with and taking care of the kids doesn't help," but is nonetheless pictured sitting on the couch in her robe, bottle feeding her infant while her toddler sprawls out next to her (fig. 63).⁴² These competing visual and verbal messages enrich our understanding of the subjects, generating a more complex image of suburbia and recognizing in its inhabitants acute self-awareness of their domestic circumstances.

Owens's *Suburbia* is pivotal to the context of Bay Area Photorealism for being both geographically contiguous with many of Bechtle, McLean, and Goings's subjects and the most

⁴¹ Robert Hirsch, "Bill Owens: Photographing the Suburban Soul," *Fotofile* 49 (May 2008): 7. Collier worked for the Farm Security Administration and the Office of War Information under Roy Stryker, who led government's documentary photography efforts. Collier documented American Indian communities in the Southwest extensively; he taught Anthropology at San Francisco State University from the early sixties to the early eighties. See John Collier, *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967).

⁴² Bill Owens, *Suburbia* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1973), n.p.

widely-circulated local take on suburbia. *Suburbia* is also a similarly sustained project—a year spent in the life of the East Bay suburbs—a dedication parallel not only to the time spent on each Photorealist canvas, but also Bechtle’s long-term investigation of similar spaces. Bechtle and Owens’s works also share key formal strategies. In formulating a style of portraiture appropriate to the suburbs, both rely on the conventions of family snapshot photography, devising subtle alterations appropriate to the needs of large-scale painting and large-format photography. Both artists retain the direct, casual frontality of vernacular imagery—a form that benefits from being clearly posed but, in their hands, rarely staid or artificial. Owens clarifies his scenes by using large format cameras, wide-angle lenses, and off-camera (bounce strobe) flash, while Bechtle renders a variety of light-based or de-cluttering adjustments, depending on the composition.⁴³

Juxtaposing Bechtle’s ‘61 *Pontiac* (1968) with a similar image from Owens’s *Suburbia*, the formal and iconographic parallels are clear (figs. 42, 64). Though the mood of the subjects is different—the *Suburbia* family is exuberant in way that Bechtle’s figures almost never are—photograph and painting share a push-pull of ideal and reality. In the Owens’s photograph the discord between expectations and aspirations is again provided by the text: “This isn’t what we really want, the tract house, the super car, etc... But as long as we are wound up in this high speed environment, we will probably never get out of it! We don’t need the super car to be happy; we really want a small place in the country where you can breathe the air.”⁴⁴ In Bechtle’s ‘61 *Pontiac* the air is similarly thick with emotional indecision: eyes cast in shadow from the bright midday sun obscure the family’s sentiments, while slight movements register the discomfort of posing for a photograph. What should be a happy occasion—Bechtle has noted the

⁴³ Bill Owens, *Documentary Photography: A Personal View* (Danbury, NH: Addison House, Publishers, 1978), 34-35. The photographs for suburbia were taken with “large format, hand-held cameras: a Pentax 6 x 7, 2 ¼ x 2 ¾... and a Brooks Veriwide 2 ¼ x 3 ¼, which was used for most of the indoor shots.” Owens, *Suburbia*, n.p.

⁴⁴ Owens, *Suburbia*, n.p.

image is commemorative, the family Pontiac having just been replaced with a new Volvo—hardly reads as a clear image of material fulfillment.⁴⁵ For both painter and photographer the snapshot is the foundation for such layered meditations: its particular brand of commonplace realism vouches for the authenticity of the scene, upon which paint or text provide further revelations. Neither Bechtle nor Owens positions their snapshot imagery as self-obvious or transparent—their compilations, juxtapositions, and alterations demonstrate just the opposite. Rather, they select and manipulate this format in part because of its own place within the suburban milieu. The snapshot-look allows the viewer to participate in their investigations without being immediately subject to the burden of overt ideology, an essential tactic when seeking to reintroduce openness and nuance to the loaded topic of suburbia.

Bechtle and Owens also share personal integration with their subjects. Both attempt to record a world they are part of while maintaining some form of distance. As Owens writes in the pithy introduction to *Suburbia*: “This book is about my friends and the world I live in... To me nothing seemed familiar, yet everything was very, very familiar.”⁴⁶ Familiarity and estrangement are the central dialectic of these suburban images. Just as Garnett offers macro-comprehension through the formal elegance of aerial views and Graham provides a deconstructed or reformulated kind of space as conceptual fodder, Bechtle and Owens use the most intimate of materials—snapshot photography and their own familial lives—to constitute a widely accessible and interpretively flexible suburban practice. Bechtle’s *'61 Pontiac* is a portrait of his own family; its genesis as a large-scale, three panel view stems from the Thunderbird works discussed above. These “family cars in front of family houses” are a continuous exploration of the same

⁴⁵ Bechtle quoted in “The Devil’s Bargain,” *Shared Intelligence: American Painting and the Photograph*, Barbara Buhler Lynes and Jonathan Weinberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 161.

⁴⁶ Owens, *Suburbia*, n.p.

motif, mixing autobiographical and compositional impulses.⁴⁷ Likewise, Owens's image of the "super car" family in *Suburbia* is matched by a shot of his own family. Amidst a yearbook-like montage of portraits of couples and families, Bill and his wife Janet appear posing in front of their Volkswagen Beetle (fig.65). Though the Owens's are marked as outsiders by their hippie-ish dress and choice of vehicle, their contented smiles and the curve of the cul-de-sac-extending behind them imply a nascent integration into the suburban environment. Perhaps they too, like the "super car" family, desire a more pristine, rural life, but certainly Owens's inclusion of this image in *Suburbia* is meant to denote his own family's present immersion. Ultimately, as Linda Chase argues in the case of Photorealism, it is not essential that the audience know the particulars of these intimate relationships, but, by the same token, "once we know them they become a subtle denial of the artist as romantic hero who is somehow outside of and removed from the everyday world."⁴⁸

Cars and the Sunbelt: Beyond the Contained Grid

Considering these significant influences in the visual field, it becomes clear that Bechtle was not operating in completely uncharted territory. His paintings are a part of a trend in the art world that parallels and interprets postwar demographic transformations. Yet the works also offer something new—a different, hybrid aesthetic form to engage familiar subjects. Part of the import of Bechtle's contributions is the persistence and fluidity of his suburban vision. Contrary to many critical and fictional works that define the suburb as a supremely contained space, Bechtle sees the suburban as nebulous, if also a ubiquitous and broadly relatable form of

⁴⁷ Bechtle quoted in "The Devil's Bargain," 161.

⁴⁸ Linda Chase, "Photo Realism: Post-Modernist Illusionism," *Art International* XX, no. 3-4 (March – April 1976): 16.

domesticity. As reflected in his paintings, along with those of Goings and McLean, the suburbs are a fluid space.

This sense of suburban proliferation is conveyed by the scope of Bechtle's work. Many of the Photorealists are recognized as (and often derided for) being iconographically persistent, with few subject hopping. What is significant in Bechtle's case is his recognition of similar residential locales in diverse towns and cities. Bechtle paints parallel spaces all over the Bay Area and occasionally the greater expanse of California. (N.B.: See website images and data visualizations: <http://lumpkins.org/bechtle/>. "Bechtle Slide Show" catalogs the artist's painting locations over time; "Bechtle Picture Mapper" offers geographical data and comparisons between select artworks and contemporary site photographs.) Berkeley, Oakland, Alameda, Albany, Watsonville, Miles City, San Francisco, and Santa Barbara have all served as subjects for analogous scenes. The works mark the artist's movements between various towns and cities, providing subtle variations on recurring themes. The net result is repetition that is not replication, Bechtle's extended engagement with similar motifs offering up chances for formal exploration, honing in on various configurations of architectural patterning and coastal light, and adapting the contents of each source photograph to the demands of painting.

Bechtle grew up in Alameda, a city with peculiar geography that holds a socio-historic weight akin to that of San Francisco. Formerly a peninsula branching off of Oakland, Alameda became an island when the Tidal Canal was built in 1901. Physical separation from its East Bay neighbor resulted marked economic and racial distinctions, as the island became a haven for white-collar homeowners.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Alameda is not wholly comprised of middle-class residential areas: World War II spurred the building of the Alameda Works Shipyard and the

⁴⁹ Johnson, 28-29.

Alameda Naval Air Station, making the city one of the most important naval and shipbuilding centers on the West Coast. Bechtle reflects on the resulting internal class divisions:

It's one of those things where there's the east end of town and the west end of town. The west end is the wrong side of town, it's the wrong side of the tracks. It's near the naval base and there are a lot of transient people who live there, and there's the east side which is more settled and middle class. Then there's a section in the center of Alameda where the old houses are, the big old Victorians and brown shingled places, and lots of trees. To this day it's still called the "Gold Coast" and that's where the wealthier folks live.⁵⁰

Yet, Bechtle, like Goings and McLean, generally avoids extremes in subject matters. Thus neither the shipyards nor the renowned Victorians appear in Bechtle's images of Alameda. Paintings such as *Foster's Freeze, Alameda* (1970) and *Alameda Gran Torino* (1974) and *Alameda Chrysler* (1981) picture fragments of the city that are resolutely middle class (figs. 38, 66, 67). Likewise, these motifs are not particular to Bechtle's images of this city: his family in a fast food restaurant, a car parked in a driveway, and a family member posing in front of their vehicle are subjects which recur frequently throughout his oeuvre.

These artworks also allow the viewer to track and contemplate physical and social associations in a range of suburban environments. In Bechtle's pictures of Oakland, Berkeley, or San Francisco there is continuity rather than rupture.⁵¹ Works like *California Gardens—Oakland Houses* (1975), *San Francisco Cadillac* (1975), and *Berkeley Stucco* (1977) feel completely of a piece, exploring the absorptive textures of California stucco and play of bright light and shadows across its surfaces (figs. 68, 69, 14).⁵² Stucco, of course, is a common sight in warm climates—

⁵⁰ Oral history interview with Robert Alan Bechtle, conducted by Paul Karlstrom, Berkeley, CA, September 13, 1978 – February 1, 1980, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Bechtle, AAA interview, September 13, 1978 – February 1, 1980).

⁵¹ Bechtle and his family moved to Berkeley in 1965 and remained there until 1979. Bishop, 186-92.

⁵² Bechtle describes his formal interest in stucco as such: "I kind of like the starkness of the stucco houses that are built right out to the edge of the sidewalk, or, you know, in the case of, say, Berkeley or Alameda, there is a little patch of lawn out there, but where there is a certain sparseness to the garden, if there is one. So it really—the painting really becomes about the play of light on the stucco surfaces. I mean, that is why I like the stucco houses. You know, it is not just because they are charming." Oral history interview with Robert Alan Bechtle, conducted by

its naturally insulating properties help keep interiors cool—and thus the images do not belie location completely. But they do evidence a continuity of living spaces among cities often considered quite disparate. San Francisco appears entirely residential, while neither of the other works engages the kind of radicalism often associated with these locales during the 1960s and 1970s. Here there are no evident traces of Berkeley’s Free Speech Movement or Oakland’s Black Panther Party, but rather the environs of what has often been pejoratively described as the “silent middle.”

One obvious link between many of these works is the central presence of automobiles. Bechtle was known predominantly known as the “car Photorealist” during the early years of his career. The car’s status as a kind of portraiture is frequently central to his images’ tone and construction. The vehicles are often an extension of the family or the house, a mainstay of middle-class life integrated through the familiar arrangements of snapshot-like compositions. Beyond engaging the tropes of vernacular imagery, cars play a role in the paintings’ formal aspirations and social implications. They function as both counterpoints and complements to the architectural spaces and, in Bechtle’s words, signifiers of “domesticity on wheels.”⁵³ In paintings like *Kona Kai* (1967) or *Date Palms* (1971), the vehicles reinforce the lateral or diagonal thrust of the composition, while in *'56 Chrysler* (1965) or *'57 Ford* (1966) the palette of car and homes strikes a subtle balance, the pastel-hued vehicles finding subtle echoes in the soft tones of stucco housing (figs. 8, 70, 71, 72). The car and home are seamless in the sense of belonging to the same cultural milieu; cars also visually regulate patterning of street forms, blocks of housing, and other central elements of suburban space. Bechtle’s innumerable car paintings are equally about the surrounding locales as they are about the hulking mid-century

Judith Olch Richards, San Francisco, CA, February 8-9 2010, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Bechtle, AAA interview, February 8-9, 2010).

⁵³ Bechtle quoted in Auping, 33.

machines at their center: palette, perspective, and composition integrate the vehicles and their locations, registering automobiles' role in defining spatial perspective and physically connecting the disparate events of daily life.

But what of their symbolic import? Though environmental immersion is paramount, equally vital are the kinds of cars Bechtle selects. Brands and styles may function as varied formal challenges, but they also signify a great deal about the milieu he paints. Bechtle occasionally chooses a classic “show car,” like his brother’s Thunderbird (fig. 9), but most are resolutely middle class, never out of place in their well-manicured but unpretentious neighborhoods, populated with rows of similar, mid-size single family homes. Particularly in his early works, the artist sought “American cars with middle class pedigrees: ‘woodie’ station wagons, Chryslers, and Fords,” and avoided anything too luxurious or exotic.⁵⁴ The models Bechtle represents are often many years old, as with *'56 Chrysler*, painted in 1965, or *'57 Ford*, painted in 1966—even the eponymous *'60 T-Bird* is seven years old by the time of its rendering (figs. 71, 72). Their age indicates longstanding ownership or use, but is not so great as to imply a nostalgic patina.⁵⁵

The fact that Bechtle’s cars are static and generally without drivers—rarely do we perceive the posed family portraits as implying an impending journey—increases their status as both sculptural machines and markers of American lifestyles.⁵⁶ Cars imply access to mobility,

⁵⁴ Bechtle, telephone interview with author, June 22, 2010.

⁵⁵ Bechtle, unsurprisingly, is aware of and intrigued by the nostalgia that these images now elicit. *Ibid.* On a more practical note, the West Coast is less frequently exposed to the severe weather and thus lacks the road salt of wintry climates. Consequently cars in California tend rust less and age better, and can stay on the road for longer than their East Coast or Midwest counterparts. This fact may contribute to the frequent appearance of slightly dated models in Bechtle’s paintings discussed above.

⁵⁶ *Agua Caliente Nova* (1975) and *Hawaii Malibu: Max at Kilauea* (1974) are two exceptions. Both picture the family on vacation. The former is discussed at length below.

both in the sense of class and geography, but Bechtle almost never pictures motion in his work.⁵⁷ Though he is reliant on photography—a medium that often thrives on instantaneity—as source material, he maintains that importing motion into painting would be disingenuous.⁵⁸ Despite this insistent physical stillness, cars play something of a transitional, conceptually mobile role in Bechtle’s works: they are the link between the private space of the home, and the public space of the street. Though they are bulky, discreet objects, their integration in the environment not only provides unified compositions, but also indicates the ways in which twentieth-century travel generates an important kind of nether world: neither inside nor outside, the car bridges the space of the domestic and the communal.

This particular marriage of consumer culture and fine art was not unique to the Photorealism. Contemporaneous with their rise in postwar consumer culture, artists working in a range of styles and media drew upon the automobile as a complex symbol of modern economic, physical, and social mobility. This particularly fertile site of visual experimentation often defied or distorted advertising’s precisely calculated idealism, and reconfigured the car as a site of sexuality, violence, exaggerated surfaces and sculptural experimentation, or a lens to view the emerging world of highway culture and increasingly standardized American landscapes.⁵⁹ Cars were especially pivotal in the Californian scene, where a temperate, Mediterranean climate and an expansive, varied terrain fostered a great mythology of the open road.⁶⁰ In Los Angeles, the

⁵⁷ The watercolor *AC Transit* is an exception; Bechtle describes it as a one-off. The artist comments that there is “something about time and the static quality painting has that trying to make too much of an issue of things in motion sets up a false premise; [it’s] something you can do in photography but not in painting.” Bechtle, interview by author, June 22, 2010.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ The best period reflection on automobile appeal remains Roland Barthes’s 1957 essay, “The New Citroën.” See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 88-90.

⁶⁰ For instance, in Southern California, British architectural critic Reyner Banham exuberantly referred to Los Angeles’s “autotopia,” a freeway system that he asserted had become “a complete way of life.” Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 195.

sixties and seventies brought investigations of the automobile's iconic imagery and roadside culture (Ed Ruscha), explorations of the saturated surfaces of custom car culture (Billy Al Bengston and Judy Chicago), along with darker plays on "deviant" behavior and consumer worship (Ed Kienholz and Chris Burden). Again, Cécile Whiting observes the Southern California scene: "The car, essential for traversing long distances in the sprawling city, emerged as something more in works of art: a fetish object—its allure predicated on gleaming chrome surfaces—and a prosthetic device to augment vision."⁶¹

Bechtle is clearly alert to the fetishisms of automobile display: the stationary positions in which we admire these vehicles—particularly in the case of the outsized, shapely mid-century American sedans—showcase their sculptural beauty and fusing of form and function.⁶² But unlike most of his contemporaries interested in car culture, including several Photorealists, Bechtle does not use the car as lens or surface. Photorealists Ron Kleeman, Don Eddy, and Richard Estes are particularly entranced by the reflective properties of car finishes and windows.⁶³ Bechtle's works do not seek transfix the viewer by looking through or at the car's transparent and high-sheen components, but instead utilize it as a mechanical gestalt with social and environmental resonances.

Cars, of course, are the essential complement to suburban architecture. If cities are the condensed domain of public transportation, the place where collective travel is both a necessity and a convenience, the suburb encourages atomized movement, the freedom to move about in one's own vehicle of choice. This division is in actuality not a clear binary—as discussed below, Bechtle's city paintings highlight the substantial overlap—but historically highway construction

⁶¹ Whiting, *Pop L.A.*, 83.

⁶² Bechtle's play with the automobile as a kind of sculptural subject is even further enhanced in his recent images of covered cars, which recall artworks concealed in drop cloths for protection and/or transport.

⁶³ Photorealist John Salt's cars are perhaps a closer match, but, whereas Bechtle (and Goings, as discussed below) is drawn to the cars of daily use, Salt's vehicles are monuments to consumerist waste and mechanical atrophy.

and increased car travel were reciprocal foundations of suburban growth. Thus the car and the suburb are firmly married in public consciousness, but perhaps forgotten are the parallel critiques of car culture. Following his widely-read attack on the suburbs, *A Crack in the Picture Window*, John Keats wrote *The Insolent Chariots*, which prognosticated a quick end to American dependence on cars—a prediction that proved false, of course, but the tenor of Keats’s language serves as a potent reminder that the suburbs and the automobile were often considered twin evils of postwar growth.⁶⁴ The West Coast has a particularly fraught history with the automobile: it is central to travel in the physically expansive state but also a constant burden, as the ever-growing populous produces continually clogged roadways and their attendant negative effects on lifestyles and environmental health. Public recognition of pollution from motor vehicle emissions originated in Southern California in the 1950s, aided in part by Garnett’s aerial photographs of the smoggy Los Angeles basin (fig. 73).⁶⁵ California was the first state to enact legislation to reduce car emissions, with the federal government following suit two years later.⁶⁶ Less than a decade later the country endured its first oil crisis when Middle Eastern OPEC nations stopped exports to the West as retaliation for supporting Israel in the Yom Kippur War.⁶⁷ Though the crisis was resolved in six months, higher oil prices remained and smaller import cars became a fixture on the market. The struggle of the American car industry is now a well-told part of our economic history, especially in light of Detroit manufacturers’ recent crises. While these current difficulties do not color Bechtle’s car paintings from the 1960s and 70s—or if they do, only

⁶⁴ John Keats, *The Insolent Chariots* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1958).

⁶⁵ The 1949 Garnett photograph was later published in Adams and Newhall’s *This is the American Earth*, opposite a grid of Garnett’s Lakewood photographs. See Adams and Newhall, 36.

⁶⁶ Beginning in 1963, all cars sold in California were required to have a new ventilation system that reduced hydrocarbon discharge. The federal government enacted similar regulations with the 1965 Motor Vehicle Pollution and Control Act. James J. Flink, *The Car Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1975), 222-23.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 228-29. (OPEC is the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.)

retrospectively—it is important to acknowledge that the age of the automobile was always inflected with bits of bruising economic and environmental impact.

Thus again, Bechtle’s choice of a seemingly banal subject is in fact freighted with heavy cultural debate. That the artist uses cars in the majority of his paintings speaks not only to lifestyle continuity across environments, but also simple proliferation. Automotive saturation implies house and local neighborhood cannot exist without cars. Bechtle is not necessarily after such bleak overtones, but is clearly aware that automobiles are not only an essential element of framing his residential landscapes, but also an engaging point for cultural reckoning.

Photorealism is often surprisingly abstruse, not only because its seeming transparency belies rigorous construction, but also because its subjects are both widely resonant and interpretively flexible. The automobile comes with copious baggage, but Bechtle’s car paintings work to maintain an openness of signification, providing fodder for cultural meditation while avoiding narrow commentary.

Goings, too, made a number of car paintings early on, though he generally preferred trucks to Bechtle’s station wagons and sedans. He came to this first Photorealist subject matter by happenstance, driving around one day looking for something suitable to paint for a themed group show on “Views of Sacramento.” Initially struck by one particularly spiffy refurbished truck, Goings soon noticed that the vehicles were ubiquitous in his home town: “It’s the kind of thing you don’t notice, you don’t pay any attention to because there are so many of them.”⁶⁸ Following this initial burst of inspiration, trucks occupied the artist for several years, disappearing from his works only when he moved from the West Coast. Though Goings was spurred by the slick appearance of the customized truck, it was ultimately not his chosen subject:

⁶⁸ Goings, interview by author, Santa Cruz, CA, May 3, 2010.

his are working vehicles, often labeled with advertisements for their owners' businesses— heating and plumbing, construction, auto repair, and the occasional delivery truck or big rig— and well worn from use. They are native to an environment that includes elements of the rural or small town: chain stores abound, but also the local signage of small shops and wooded peripheries surrounding parking lots. Goings's preoccupation with the vehicles does not simply amount to a typological study of the American preference for large vehicles; as the artist reflects, the paintings "are basically landscapes; they're about the trucks and where they're parked."⁶⁹

Before weighing the larger environmental implications of Sacramento as a painting subject, two works that form important parallels and foils to Bechtle's suburban car paintings merit discussion. These are Goings's *Moby Dick* (1971) and *Airstream* (1970). Placing them alongside Bechtle's works reveals not only analogous formal strategies but also unexpected contiguities of geographic location. *Moby Dick*, despite its un-Bechtle-like literary title, shares a number of formal and subject elements with Bechtle's early works (fig. 74). Compare it, for instance, with the strikingly similar motif of '67Chrysler (fig. 7). Goings's painting indicates more spatial recession than Bechtle's relatively flattened house-and-car-frontal view and is also more chromatically diverse, but both engage a distinct sense of the residential through nearly identical compositional schema and interplay of automotive and architectural elements. Here Goings foregoes the intensely variegated pavement surfaces used in other paintings for a nearly smooth, dark gray roadway. Likewise, sky and lawn are mostly uniform in *Moby Dick*, recalling the horizontal-banding effect of many of Bechtle's early compositions. Both works also hinge on two parallel centers of interest: the contours and proportions of the car and truck—both the

⁶⁹ Ibid.

elongated form of the Chrysler and the rumpled, rounded shape of the old truck are quite striking—and the play of light and shadow against the architectural façades.

These correspondences might lead the viewer to believe the depicted sites are in close physical proximity. The environments though, are subtly distinct: Bechtle’s lawns are almost always verdant and plants densely foliated, whereas *Moby Dick* presents a yellowed lawn and bare trees—elements that yield a sense of slightly blemished austerity resonant with the aging truck. *Moby Dick*’s seasonal clues may appear to indicate late fall or early winter in a colder climate than California, but the painting is in fact of Las Vegas.⁷⁰ If this suburban scene is somewhat unexpected in light of the city’s reputation for outré commercial architecture on its central strip of casinos and hotels—the architecture so influentially documented by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown, and Steven Izenour in *Learning From Las Vegas* at nearly precisely the same moment this painting was made—it is in fact accurately reflective of Las Vegas’s demographic history.⁷¹ California saw the nation’s highest percentage of population growth from 1900-1950; Nevada holds that title for the latter half of the century.⁷² Moreover, the city’s growth was not solely due to its status as a mecca for debauchery. Las Vegas shares with the Bay Area a history of Cold War growth stemming from the defense industry. The Nevada atomic testing site, located about 65 miles north of the city, attracted many scientists and staff from the Manhattan Project during the 1940s.⁷³ During the 1950s, atmospheric tests were

⁷⁰ Goings, interview by author, May 3, 2010.

⁷¹ Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972). The authors revised and retitled the book in 1977; new editions are titled *Learning From Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977). The book, of course, is more than just a study of Las Vegas—it is one of the most influential rejections of modernist architecture and many consider its embrace of vernacular symbolism and cultural pastiche a pivotal harbinger of postmodernism.

⁷² Nevada’s population increased by more than 1,100 percent during the period. U.S. Census Bureau, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century*, Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, Census 2000 Special Reports, Series CENSR-4 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002), 31.

⁷³ Department of Energy, *United States Nuclear Tests: July 1945 through September 1992*, December 2000 http://www.nv.doe.gov/library/publications/historical/DOENV_209_REV15.pdf (accessed December 19, 2011).

frequently visible from the city—detonation schedules were published and became regular viewing events (figs. 75, 76). This strange coincidence of nuclear physics experimentation and the flashy gambling industry does not appear in Goings's Las Vegas painting, as the Photorealists purposefully avoided such dramatic staging. Instead, the banal by-products of such theatrical phenomena are on display: the residential areas that housed the influx of workers fueling these diverse economies of postwar growth.

Airstream, perhaps Goings's most well-known work, also depicts the Las Vegas area (fig. 50).⁷⁴ Here the site is seemingly far beyond the urban and suburban rings, but in actuality the transition from central business district to residential areas and mountainous landscape is a rapid succession.⁷⁵ The painting itself gives a very specific hint of its location: tucked behind the Airstream is a sign that reads 4339 Tonopah Highway, the old name for Route 599, which cuts northwest through the city toward the town of Tonopah.⁷⁶ Today, Rancho 95 Trailer Park still occupies the area, though the desert landscape featured in Goings' painting has been replaced with the telltale signs of growth—increased roadways, chain stores, new housing, and non-native landscaping (fig. 77). The power lines that dot the horizon and the three other Airstream trailers parked behind the painting's featured vehicle hint at the substantial development to come.

Moby Dick and *Airstream* capture the ways in which the Sunbelt was a new epicenter of growth. *Airstream* also features one of the most iconic subjects in American design history.

Wally Byam developed the Airstream trailer in the late 1920s, but it was not until after wartime

For a contemporary account of atomic test detonation, see Hugh Baillie, "TV Audience Views Atomic Bomb Test for First Time," *Las Vegas Sun*, April 22, 1952, <http://www.lasvegassun.com/news/1952/apr/22/tv-audience-views-atomic-bomb-test-first-time/> (accessed December 19, 2011).

⁷⁴ Goings, interview by author, May 3, 2010.

⁷⁵ Goings also made a painting of the Las Vegas Airport (*Las Vegas Airport*, 1970). The strip itself mainly resides outside of Las Vegas proper, on land belonging to surrounding, unincorporated communities. The Spring and Muddy Mountains form distinct borders to the west and east.

⁷⁶ A 1966 Airstream manual reveals that "95 Trailer Sales," the only authorized Airstream service center in Nevada, was located here. Airstream, Inc., *Airstream Trailer Manual, Model: 1966 Overlander Twin, 26 Feet*, http://www.tompatterson.com/VAC/Bulletins/1966_STREAM%20Manual.pdf (accessed October 27, 2011).

aluminum shortages subsided and the interstate highway system flourished that the trailers and “recreational vehicles” became common sites on American roadways.⁷⁷ The painting thus reflects both postwar leisure pursuits and new sites of growth and modes of mobility. Goings is occasionally more attracted to a lustrous subject than Bechtle, but *Airstream* is not simply a tribute to the bullet-shaped vehicle’s surface and design. Carefully juxtaposing the curved aluminum surface with the tonally-muted, flat, and craggy Mojave landscape, the painting’s integration of machine and environment parallels Bechtle’s pursuits in the Bay Area and Goings’s own Sacramento pickup trucks—here on the edge of a rapidly growing Southwestern city.

Bechtle in fact echoes Goings’s motif in a rather unusual painting from 1975, *Agua Caliente Nova* (fig. 78). The painting was funded by a project for the U.S. Department of the Interior, which provided forty-five painters with two thousand dollars and travel funds to document the American landscape in celebration of the country’s bicentennial.⁷⁸ Bechtle and his family journeyed to Palm Springs; he ultimately selected an image of his family at the top of Palm Canyon, part of the Agua Caliente Reservation, for the project.⁷⁹ Bechtle, like Goings, leaves a subtle hint of his unusual locale: his daughter wears a tank top with a Palm Springs logo printed across the chest. Though these locations perhaps appear more exotic, neither *Agua Caliente Nova* nor *Airstream* abandons links to suburbia. Bechtle uses the familiar trope of a family vacation snapshot, bridging the gap between this striking mountainous landscape and his flat East Bay residences, while Goings hones in on a mode of travel that promised the leisure and

⁷⁷ Bryan Burkhart and David Hunt, *Airstream: History of the Land Yacht* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2000), 20; and Airstream, Inc., “Company History,” <http://www.airstream.com/company/history/> (accessed October 26, 2011); and Jim Morrison, “Commemorating 100 Years of the RV,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, August 25, 2010, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/Commemorating-100-Years-of-the-RV.html> (accessed October 27, 2011).

⁷⁸ Bishop, 24.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

portability of home life. Thus the suburb flows out from its boundaries, both literally, in terms of the rapid geographic expansion in areas like Las Vegas, and ideologically, as a part of the ideals carried by American families on the move. Unlike the critical voices of the era, this extension of postwar middle-class lifestyles is not presented as an insidious pandemic but rather as relatable instances of visual interest: the suburbs may produce similar forms across the country, but this resemblance does not necessarily mandate cookie-cutter replication of form and development.

Peripheries: The Urban-Rural Edge

In examining Bechtle's and Goings's suburban landscapes the discussion moves quickly to the outer reaches of these environments—the world of edge development and leisure travel, places where the natural and manmade overlap. Dolores Hayden's comprehensive study of suburbia describes how older, denser suburbs have mutated into forms she dubs “edge nodes” and “rural fringes.”⁸⁰ The development of such spaces has again relied on governmental support, not only in the federally sponsored expansion of the highway system, but also with changes to the Internal Revenue Code, which allowed for “accelerated depreciation” of property within seven years. The latter legislation provides an incentive for purchasing and building new properties, making it possible for property owners to write off the value of erecting commercial strips on the outskirts of centralized areas—zones which are often expected to only attract patrons for a short period of time before the surrounding area either expands or contracts.⁸¹

It is easy to simply label such areas sprawl, but they also produce fruitful opportunities for sociological study of landscapes in formation and visual friction ripe for aesthetic investigation. They are where one can see, often more clearly than in cities' dense (or frequently

⁸⁰ Hayden, *Building Suburbia*, 154-200.

⁸¹ The Federal Highway Act was enacted in 1944; the tax code changes were passed by Congress in 1954, shortening the former forty-year depreciation period to seven. *Ibid.*, 162-63.

effaced) historical layering or suburbs' nearly instant appearance, economic, cultural, and political desires exercised on still-forming places. Bechtle has occasionally depicted such open spaces, as with *Agua Caliente Nova*, but Goings and McLean are far more firmly anchored in these environments. Locational specificity is harder to track in their works, but the artists are consistently invested in exploring these spaces; like Bechtle they live and travel in such domains.⁸² The subjects McLean and Goings extract from these locations—fast food restaurants, trucks, diners, cattle, and horse shows—are ordinary, easy to dismiss as either disfigurements of open space or quaint traces of Americana. Yet the resultant artworks are neither environmental indictments nor simplistic artifacts of patriotism and nostalgia. The works are infused with the atmosphere and trappings of contemporary people and places, pinpointing the charged overlap of the traditional rural west and its current commercial, industrial, and architectural suffusions. The rural is difficult to define, as it is often assumed to indicate only pristine landscapes—a kind of natural and ideological reserve. As with Dorothea Lange and Pirkle Jones's photographs of the Berryessa Valley, these Photorealist works indicate blurring and sedimentation, environments never purely one thing or another.

If in Bechtle's work one sees suburbia spilling out across the Northern Californian landscape, Goings's Sacramento spaces evidence another kind of continuity, that of the rural and urban coming together. His Sacramento locations exhibit spaciousness and residues of the natural environment, but also a preponderance of pavement, strip malls, and chain restaurants. Indicative of changing residential patterns, the capital of the nation's most populous state is not uniformly dense or concentric rings of urban and suburban, instead patchily incorporating

⁸² Both McLean and Goings are much less likely to use place names for titles, although that has changed to some degree in recent years, as with McLean's I-5 series and Goings's upstate New York paintings from the 1980s and 1990s.

elements of the rural and urban.⁸³ Goings himself has remarked upon the surprisingly small town character of the northern area of Sacramento where his family resided; it was, though the state capital, a city with palpable traces of the provincial.⁸⁴

Goings's early works, as noted, are almost always centered on trucks, itself a subject indicative of the transition between "country" and "town." *Plumbing Heating Truck* (1969) is just such a mixture of environmental components (fig. 79). The title truck, old and weathered, is parked in an unremarkable parking lot; a cursory glance might lead one to conclude that the vehicle's battered body is the only center of interest. But as the eye travels to the periphery of the image, revealing spatial elements come into play. Cars and common businesses, the latter advertising check cashing and auto parts, give way to a scrubby open lot and a dark green wooded border. Nothing about this locale is unusual; on the contrary, clearly it was chosen for its pure everydayness, an index of common work routines and their spatial paths. Yet, by the same token, the image is a study in environmental layering. Pavement yields to traces of woodland, just as the aged truck loosely conjures Sacramento's past, before the separate town of North Sacramento was annexed by the city proper. Following the 1964 incorporation new major freeways bypassed the area's central business district, leading to considerable economic decline.⁸⁵ *Plumbing Heating Truck* conjures this juxtaposition of past and present by framing a distant Volkswagen Beetle—a much more current car, strongly associated with contemporary youth culture—through the window of the old pickup.

⁸³ California overtook New York as the nation's most populous state in the 1970 census; it has remained the most populous state. U.S. Census Bureau, 28.

⁸⁴ Goings, interview by author, May 3, 2010.

⁸⁵ North Sacramento was annexed by Sacramento in 1964; freeway construction in the 1960s bypassed business districts on Marysville, Rio Linda, and Del Paso Boulevards, leading to considerable economic decline. On the area's history, see V. Ehrenreich-Risner, *North Sacramento* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2010), 25-32.

A similar mix of elements appears in *Dairy Queen Interior* (1972, fig. 80). As the painting's title indicates, the artist has migrated indoors, but his interest lies in the fluidity of inside and outside common in much Californian architecture.⁸⁶ Plate glass windows and doors allow sizable portions of the exterior to commingle with the interior, creating luminous, visually expansive spaces—even in such ordinary places as the pictured chain restaurant. *Dairy Queen Interior* includes both window reflections of an open wooded lot across the street and clear views of the adjacent parking lot, the latter tightly filled with a parked truck and auto service station. These alternating rectangular panels are at first somewhat difficult to discern, making disparate spaces seem continuous. But, in fact, such slight visual trickery is pivotal, revealing not only painting and photography's joint ability to unite diverse planes of information, but also the physical juncture of open space and developed land.⁸⁷ Goings's environmental conjoinings are subtle, often occurring at the periphery of the canvas. Just as one might view a transition in the landscape in everyday life, the artists draws the viewer in through familiar spaces and objects, pointing toward elements of socio-geographic change.

McLean tackles the friction of developed and rural head on, choosing a subject loaded with historical freight. The artist simultaneously gestures toward this vast legacy and reworks it anew, injecting the present-day but never losing sight of the ideology packed into equine traditions.⁸⁸ Horse imagery, of course, dates back to humankind's earliest representation impulses and appears prominently in nearly every period since. A wide variety of traditions have

⁸⁶ Goings, interview by author, May 3, 2010.

⁸⁷ Goings continues to explore similar spaces in the rural small towns of upstate New York after moving to the area in 1974, though there the interior becomes much more prominent, because, as the artist explains, "... the environments are different and the light is different—it's not as consistently intense and crisp as in California... They just didn't look right, so I didn't do any fast-food places at all, any exteriors." Goings quoted in Chase, *Ralph Goings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988), 39.

⁸⁸ In reference to the historical weight of his subjects, McLean points to a line from D.H. Lawrence: "...Man has lost the horse. Now man is lost." McLean, interview by author, Castro Valley, CA, November 16, 2011.

charted the animal's assistance in humanity's greatest occupations: migration, conquest, war, labor, and leisure. In America, aided by such artists as Frederic Remington and Hollywood cinematic traditions, the horse became solidly identified with the frontier and its subsequent settlement. McLean's *Rustler Charger* (1971) cannily implies the continuance of such bucolic fantasies with abundant western paraphernalia, but also speaks to the commodification of these practices, cultural appropriation, and alterations to the open American landscape (fig. 81). Traces of American Indian culture like feathered hats and trophies and the Appaloosa horse are incorporated into the spectacle of modern commercial horse shows, incongruously located in a banal landscape of ordinary sheds, fences, and scattered debris.

Though the cultural milieu of a horse show may seem physically and symbolically distant from Bechtle's suburban homes or Goings' pickup truck and fast food-filled parking lots, they are revealed to be part of a demographic continuum, sprawling out across the landscape and harnessing its diverse spaces for common desires of habitation. In McLean's work the rural is pulled in multiple directions, evidencing both imprints of the suburban and the urban at different points during his career. As noted in chapter one, earlier paintings based on appropriated horse magazine photographs frequently exude a stagey quality, exploiting the sources' contrived pageantry. But they also often provide unexpected bits of environmental context, as with the palm trees and hotel strip behind the women of *Wishing Well Bridge* (1972, fig. 82). The women's multi-hued garb and ribbon sashes are revealed to be the product of a thoroughly denatured ceremony—no horses, nor anything resembling a traditional horse environment are anywhere in sight. *Dializ* (1971), by contrast, does include its equine subject, but here the setting is strikingly suburban (fig. 83). The featured couple, donning leisure clothes, proudly parades their horse on the lush lawn, framed by the white siding and flowerbed of the adjacent building.

The couple's demeanor and the tidy setting suggest horse ownership has become akin to a household pet or a prized new automobile—an iteration of American suburbia that injects the iconographic traditions of English equestrian painting into the cowboy culture of the American West. *Dializ* subtly connotes such cross-cultural and spatial lineages: allowing the traditions of aristocratic equine painting to seep into a portrait of middle-class Americans, the work also loosely conjures the English Garden City as a predecessor to the American suburb.⁸⁹

These spatial crosscurrents are even more pronounced in *Diamond Tinker and Jet Chex* (1976-77, fig. 84). Here McLean, now making his own source photographs, places his subjects at the urban edge.⁹⁰ Two women, mounted atop their horses, are exuberantly dressed for the occasion in matching red and yellow shirts and hats. Their bright attire is striking, but so is the location: the patch of turf on which the horse and riders stand is dirt, fringed with weeds and situated next to a calm riverbed—a seemingly undeveloped space. Yet, upon closer examination the calm river to their rear in fact appears to be a concrete culvert bordered by a large, corporate-looking building, a hotel, gas station, and traces of new development on the opposite bank (fig. 85). The women, both in appearance and physical position, are located at the intersection of the rural and the urban, a place where distinct economies of labor and leisure meet.

In McLean's more recent works, bits of the urban or industrial-rural frequently appear, though his subjects and tenor have shifted. McLean's transition from horse to landscape evolved organically: traveling over the years to horse shows in Santa Barbara, Sacramento, and all points in-between, he took pictures en route, acquiring a large catalog of landscape photographs. This

⁸⁹ See again Howard, *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*. Jane Jacobs's classic indictment of American urban planning and renewal, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, describes Howard as setting in motion "powerful city destroying ideas"—separating its functions rather than integrating them and defining ideal housing in small-town or suburban terms. See Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), 17-20.

⁹⁰ This change in process came about while McLean was working on *Sacramento Glider* in 1973. See chapter one.

archive ultimately led to the *I-5* series, begun about a decade ago. The series documents places along the Interstate 5 freeway between the winding, mountainous portion of the Tejon Pass just above Los Angeles known as the “Grapevine,” up through the heart of the Central Valley.⁹¹ The locations McLean selects are both specific and quintessential “highway landscapes”—rural spots marked by human intervention, but lacking the consistent development of an edge city or a suburb. In works such as *Gustine Junction* (200) and *Toward Delano* (2008), the rural and industrial meet, generating not suburbia but rather open spaces with spotty elements of urbanism (figs. 86, 87).

McLean’s landscapes are at once informed by very old traditions—ranching, farming, natural resource extraction—and recently acquired industry. His frequent use of a long, rectangular format opens up the horizon and distills the environment into bands of sky and earth. Dirt roads, utility lines, and distant buildings seam together the terrestrial and atmospheric, leading the viewer’s eye through the scruffy landscape to thin bands of development (fig. 88). Though the details are concrete and the paintings still resolutely photographic, landmarks are often viewed at a distance, eliciting a sense of common, drive-by familiarity. Documenting these seemingly insignificant locations, McLean highlights both the undervalued and the transient—not only is one likely forget these places as they flash by on a road trip, they have a resounding quality of geographic precariousness, liable upon return visits to have become either more fallow or developed.⁹²

⁹¹ These works also stem in part from his images of horses at pasture from the 1980s. McLean, interviews by author, April 28, 2010 and November 16, 2011.

⁹² Such shrinkage and expansion, of course, is dependent on the variables of economic growth, government or industry-fueled development, and activism and or legislation to protect open spaces. Though these factors are somewhat predictable for knowing analysts and insiders, the overall network of causes is complex enough that it is difficult for ordinary observers to predict future human impact on a particular location.

City Views: Re-envisioning the Center

Unlike Goings and McLean's rural edges, San Francisco is a place saturated with an extensive representational history. Bechtle is the only one of the Bay Area trio to have painted the city proper, but his urban images are strongly linked to his suburban works, and depict areas of the city that are residential rather than commercial or landmark-centered.⁹³ Cars still appear in most every artwork, though the compositions are often expanded laterally, making the vehicles an element of the larger landscape. Foregoing downtowns or other hubs of urban commerce and tourist destinations, the artist tends to spaces strikingly akin to those he painted in the East Bay—quiet neighborhoods filled with row houses and mostly empty streets. San Francisco's famously hilly streets shift the depicted topography, but the way Bechtle addresses these vertiginous inclines is consistent with his overarching disinclination toward the overtly dramatic in favor of the subtle spatiality of the everyday.

Potrero Hill, Bechtle's own neighborhood, and the Sunset district, for many years his place of work, are the dominant settings.⁹⁴ Like the artist's paintings of Alameda, Berkeley, and Oakland, these areas look quietly middle class. Though economic growth from the banking and technology industries over the past several decades has led to intense gentrification in the city, the Sunset's peripheral location has kept housing costs in the neighborhood somewhat lower.⁹⁵ If Potrero Hill's appearance still retains some industrial roots, it is likely because of the adjacent area known as the "Dogpatch," for many years the center of San Francisco's manufacturing and

⁹³ Bechtle maintains both interests simultaneously, still frequently returning to Alameda and other East Bay subjects. For instance, a recent solo exhibition was nearly equally split between images of the city and the East Bay. See Bechtle, *Robert Bechtle: Watercolors and Drawings* (San Francisco: Gallery Paule Anglim, 2010).

⁹⁴ Bechtle moved to San Francisco in 1980; his first residence was on Connecticut Street in the Potrero Hill neighborhood, an area he has remained in since. He now lives on De Haro Street. Bishop, 192.

⁹⁵ On San Francisco's long battle over gentrification, see Chester Hartman, *City for Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and Rebecca Solnit and Susan Schwartzberg, *Hollow City: The Siege of San Francisco and the Crisis of American Urbanism* (London: Verso, 2000).

shipping economies.⁹⁶ Originally separated from the city proper by Mission Bay, the area became increasingly populous with the connective addition of the Long Bridge and the subsequent filling of the Bay. In the early twentieth century the low-lying Dogpatch became a shipping center, while residential areas spread up and west over the hill.⁹⁷

Bechtle has painted numerous parts of Potrero Hill's residences, though one intersection in particular, at Arkansas and Twentieth Streets, has consistently held his attention. The artist explains its appeal:

These are houses that were all built at the same time, so there is a kind of uniformity to them that I find, you know, sort of fascinating. The places I have photographed in the neighborhood tend to be places where that sort of thing exists. You know, there are lots of places in the neighborhood where the houses are all from various times and styles plopped right next to each other. And I always avoid those.⁹⁸

As he indicates, the regularity of this built environment encourages explorations of composition, light, color, and medium.⁹⁹ There is also, as Bechtle's comments suggest, an architectural "snapshot" effect, as the locale captures a singular moment of the neighborhood's development. Eschewing San Francisco's famed Victorians or neighborhoods with eclectic conglomerations of architectural styles, the artist instead chooses blocks that exude visual and chronological "uniformity"—a quality with strong suburban resonance.

⁹⁶ Peter Linenthal, Abigail Johnston, and the Potrero Hill Archives Project, *San Francisco's Potrero Hill* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), 24-5, 40, 44-45. Recently even the Dogpatch has seen considerable development, attracting an influx of new businesses and large housing complexes. See, for instance, Andrea Kosky, "The Dogpatch, an old industrial enclave, hums with fresh energy and commercial influx" *San Francisco Examiner* June 3, 2012

<http://www.sfexaminer.com/local/development/2012/06/dogpatch-old-industrial-enclave-hums-fresh-energy-and-commercial-influx> (accessed June 5, 2012).

⁹⁷ The Dogpatch was home to giants Union Iron Works and Bethlehem Shipbuilding Company, among others. *Ibid.*, 40, 44-45. Four public housing developments were also constructed during and after World War II on the southern side of the hill. Like many other ill-conceived public housing projects, their layouts inhibited integration with the surrounding neighborhood and they have become a source of consistent tension. Potrero Annex and Terrace still remain, though both are slated for demolition and will be replaced with mixed-income housing under the current "Rebuild Potrero" plan. See "Rebuild Potrero," <http://www.rebuildpotrero.com/the-project/overview.php> (accessed February 23, 2013).

⁹⁸ Bechtle, AAA interview, February 8-9, 2010.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

This consistency in turn serves as a springboard for formal experimentation. In the case of the Arkansas and Twentieth location, Bechtle has made at least sixteen works depicting this corner over the course of three decades.¹⁰⁰ Many of these works are re-envisionings of the same source photograph, such as the oil painting, watercolor, and charcoal works all titled *Potrero Stroller—Crossing Arkansas Street* (1988, 1989, 1989; figs. 89, 90, 91). (N.B.: See website for “[20th and Arkansas Case Study](#),” which compares the various iterations of *Potrero Stroller* and also superimposes the works on present-day site photographs.) Notably the paper works are not preparatory—the oil was made first—but rather new riffs on the same source image. As the medium shifts, so does the composition: the more intimate scale of the watercolor and drawing are echoed in a cropping of the original painting, tightening in on the pedestrian though maintaining the focal length of the source photograph. Collectively, the multiform arrangements yield a distinctly spatio-temporal effect. Just as the works’ cropping implies the pedestrian’s movement and the row houses’ ascent continue out of frame, the repeated re-staging of this moment is an index of routine, everyday journeys. Likewise, the red car pictured reappears in precisely the same spot in *Potrero Intersection—20th and Arkansas* (1990): the perspective has shifted to the left, providing something akin to a preceding film still in a camera-pan view of the neighborhood (fig. 92). The still-frame staging is symbiotic with the Potrero environment, its steep, hilly terrain guiding the eye out above (or below, depending on one’s orientation) its current location and thus setting one’s vision into motion.¹⁰¹ Bechtle’s strategies of excision,

¹⁰⁰ As not all of the most recent works are cataloged it is difficult to ascertain the current number, but, in all likelihood, the number has increased. Bechtle has noted that he walks this area most every day. Jesse Hamlin, “Power Lines, Cars and Patterned Pants—40 Years of Painting the Everyday,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 10, 2005 http://articles.sfgate.com/2005-02-10/entertainment/17358746_1_robert-bechtle-gallery-paule-anglim-pieces (accessed November 4, 2011).

¹⁰¹ This particular site has also encouraged some of Bechtle’s most imaginative departures from reality: in the early 2000s he began adapting several daytime source photographs into night scenes. He initially attempted to capture these images with the camera, but was not able to achieve the effect he desired and thus improvised the lighting. Glen Helfand, “San Francisco: Robert Bechtle, Gallery Paule Anglim,” *Artforum* 41, no. 5 (January 2003): 142.

repetition, and overlap generate compositions that are at once sufficient as stand-alone images but also cumulatively profound as continuous portions of a larger environment.

One further element is fundamental to these works, and indeed most of Bechtle's city images. This is the view up the hill. As noted, the Potrero neighborhood, like much of San Francisco, is a supremely hilly terrain. The city's picturesque quality is due not only to its peninsular views of the Pacific and San Francisco Bay, but also because its inclines regularly afford dramatic perspectives. Artists have utilized these views throughout the city's history; like the formative suburban photographs considered above, the works are evidence not only of specific aesthetic approaches, but also images imbued with specific historical perspectives and spatial ideologies.

San Francisco's topography granted early western settlers a ready-made form of illustrative mapping: standing on any number of hills, one could render a sizable portion of the city below, and thus easily convey its economic and residential growth.¹⁰² This tradition reached its apex in the late 1870s, when photographer Eadweard Muybridge made 360-degree panoramas from the top of Nob Hill (fig. 93). The marvel of these images rests not simply on the famous innovator's ability to assemble a mammoth, continuous view of the city—by this moment at least fifty such photographic views had been produced—but the technological-geographic alliance they represent.¹⁰³ The city offered up both wealthy patrons and a physical terrain ripe for such

Though the more dramatic lighting may seem to imply a departure in tone for the artist, the results are not melodramatic chiaroscuro nocturnes but rather modern impressions of architecture under the variable conditions of natural and artificial light: they do not obfuscate the environment, but rather exhibit the perceptual fluctuation and thus aesthetic flexibility of a single, ordinary place. See again web case studies for comparisons of the nighttime works: <http://www.legomorph.com/bechtle/casestudy.htm>.

¹⁰² For a representative sampling of such images, see Sally B. Woodbridge, *San Francisco in Maps and Views* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2006).

¹⁰³ David Harris, *Eadweard Muybridge and the Photographic Panorama of San Francisco, 1850-1880* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 37, 47. The panorama actually originates in painting, an eighteenth-century invention first executed by the Irish artist Robert Barker. These elaborate contraptions were conceived and built to heighten the illusion of painting into a complete, embodied experience. Immersive illusionism is not something photographic

proto-cinematic recording. The photographs, in turn, are both documents of civic boosterism and vivid descriptions of a continually expanding and rebuilding city.¹⁰⁴ As David Harris argues, these two functions are inextricably linked: not only did Muybridge's Nob Hill perspective offer a totalizing, immersed urban view, the locale was also home to the opulent mansions of California's political and industrial tycoons, including railroad magnates Leland Stanford and Mark Hopkins. Stanford was Muybridge's foremost patron: Stanford funded the photographer's foundational motion studies, and commissioned sweeping views of the city from his new home. Likewise, Muybridge's panoramas were made from a privileged point of access at the Hopkins residence.¹⁰⁵

Muybridge's photographs bring the viewer beyond everyday, embodied experience to a new form of technologically and culturally-advantaged vision. This first fully-circumferential image of the city implies an all-seeing, mobile vision; even to absorb the entire set of prints requires physically traversing their large linear expanse, a process which amplifies the already dramatic hilltop view. This tradition finds its legacy, not surprisingly, in many cinematic representations of San Francisco. If Muybridge's panoramas are the acme of a powerful photographic archetype, Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) is the city's filmic equivalent. As the title indicates, acrophobia is the central motif; the film's spatial thematics are largely structured by the city's vertiginous inclines. Repeated shots of Scottie, the protagonist played by Jimmy Stewart, descending over San Francisco's steep hills help establish *Vertigo*'s journey of psychic

albums could achieve; a more direct parallel is stereoscopic imagery. Muybridge in fact made a stereoscopic panorama from Rincon Point prior to his experiments on Nob Hill, though both its smaller form and reduced 180-degree perspective have resulted in less historical impact than the grand 360-degree prints. On the history of panoramic painting, see Ralph Hyde, *Panoromania! The Art and Entertainment of the "All-Embracing" View* (London: Trefoil Publications, 1988).

¹⁰⁴ Not only was San Francisco rapidly expanding, the nineteenth century was also an era of rampant urban fires, causing frequent rebuilding. The largest came a few decades after Muybridge's photographs were taken, with the 1906 earthquake.

¹⁰⁵ Harris, 44, 48.

decline (fig. 94). Numerous films follow suit in using San Francisco's swift, curving slopes as dramatic propellants: think Steve McQueen hurling through the streets in *Bullitt's* (1968) famed car chase or the rooftop shots of Clint Eastwood and his serial killer nemesis looming over the city in *Dirty Harry* (1971, fig. 95).

Both later films, in fact, picture Potrero Hill. The neighborhood is part of *Bullitt's* central car chase; the cinematography and stunt staging cannily utilize the visual trickery of repeated inclines, allowing the cars to bob in and out of sight throughout the pursuit.¹⁰⁶ The hillcrests also render the vehicles airborne, creating rollercoaster-like views through the front windshield and generating the voyeuristic pleasure of mechanical buoyancy as part and parcel of death-defying stunt driving. If some of Bechtle's images of Potrero Hill bear an uncanny resemblance to still frames of *Bullitt*, as with the artist's 1994 watercolor *Twentieth and Mississippi II* and an image of Frank Bullitt's Ford Mustang at Twentieth and Kansas—the sites are just several blocks apart—the parallel is ultimately deceiving (figs. 96, 97). For nearly every film still of the cars framed by the pavement incline is countered with a vertiginous view down the hill, or, in the case of the Twentieth and Kansas sequence, a shot which juxtaposes ascending and descending views through the pursued's rear view mirror (fig. 98).

This difference of up versus down is what separates virtually all of Bechtle's work from the vast majority of San Franciscan imagery. The artist avoids using the city's inclines as panoramic or privileged perspectives, instead constantly turning the viewer's attention toward

¹⁰⁶ Clint Eastwood's Harry Callahan character in *Dirty Harry* is from Potrero Hill; a doctor dressing his wounds tells Harry, "We Potrero Hill boys gotta stick together." The film's second murder also takes place in the district. For a full compendium of *Bullitt's* San Francisco locations, see <http://www.rjsmith.com/bullitt-locations.html> (accessed December 6, 2011); for a Google map image of all the neighborhoods stitched together in the chase scene see, Keith Barry, "Bullitt Doesn't Look So Slick On Google Maps," <http://www.wired.com/autopia/2009/08/bullitt-google-map/> (accessed December 6, 2011). These films' geography and visual motifs continue to influence a wide variety of artists. For example, Chip Lord has also made a video work, *Movie Map* (2003), which splices together the car chase scenes of *Vertigo* and *Bullitt*, while Chris Marker's film *Sans Soleil* (1983) revisits the locations where *Vertigo* was shot. Marker's seminal work, *La Jetée* (1962), also makes reference to *Vertigo*.

the ascending slope. Consider, for instance, the works depicting Arkansas and Twentieth Streets discussed above. Those who have never visited the neighborhood may be surprised to learn that the view in the opposite direction is a fairly spectacular slice of downtown San Francisco (fig. 99). It may seem disingenuous not to offer this bird eye's perspective of skyscraper development, but Bechtle steadfastly adheres to the residential. For the artist, works like these offer the challenge of grappling, as in the case of *Twentieth Street VW* (1990), with a supremely high horizon line and vast quantities of pavement (fig. 100). The formal task here is very much a modernist one: as Bechtle puts it, "having a painting that's two thirds or three quarters blank space and the challenge of activating that space without painting every pebble."¹⁰⁷ But his disinterest in the classically "urban" aspects of San Francisco also has much to do with the artist's staunchly anti-touristic position. His sense of native vision precludes even familiar destinations from becoming frequent painting subjects: though Bechtle has owned a vacation home in Massachusetts for over 25 years, the artist comments that he still has not figured out how to paint the area without feeling like a tourist.¹⁰⁸ Likewise, in San Francisco he not only avoids recognizable panoramas, but also the city's numerous natural and architectural icons.

Two of Bechtle's contemporaries, Richard Estes and Wayne Thiebaud—artists with similar subjects and substantial shared aesthetic lineage—have utilized such recognizable motifs. Thiebaud began painting his cityscapes in 1973; for many years the artist owned a home near Bechtle in Potrero Hill.¹⁰⁹ Thiebaud originally attempted to paint on site but was unsatisfied with

¹⁰⁷ Bechtle further comments that he has made some images that look down the hill, though the (very few) included fragments of the cityscape he describes as generic. For instance, the minute chunk of the cityscape visible in *Potrero Intersection—De Haro and Southern Heights* (2010) lacks any distinct identifiers of San Francisco. Bechtle, interview by author, June 22, 2010.

¹⁰⁸ A self-portrait watercolor depicts the artist at his Massachusetts home, though, as he notes, the picture is so closely cropped that the only indication of the New England setting is the shingles on the house which frame the view of the driveway. Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

the results. Subsequently the works became composites; they mesh the structures of multiple drawings and the artist's spatial memories and improvisations.¹¹⁰ His synthetic compositions allow for juxtapositions of multiple perspectives, and aim to generate both corporeal and emotional experiences: "Something to do with empathy, and drama, and the way [the multiple projective systems] gives you different kind of caricature, space caricature or color caricature, or even where you push things further than a single projective system might let you. And in this way you are helped to get the feelings of things, the way things physically feel."¹¹¹

Consequently, paintings like *Twenty-Fourth Street Intersection (Twenty Fourth Street Ridge)* (1977) are distinctly different from Bechtle's images of the Potrero, in this case using a fabricated intersection to achieve an amplified sense of geographic experience (fig. 101).¹¹²

Thiebaud's amplified topography creates a synesthetic fusion: the works convey gravitational pull and press the limits of flat canvas space through perspectival embellishment. Like his famed confection paintings, Thiebaud's city works also maintain a prominent sense of surface action, balancing the sense of precipitous descent with the weight of painterly facture and playful infusions of bright color.

Estes, unlike California natives Thiebaud and Bechtle, is chiefly associated with New York, though in recent years his scope has become international. His selected subjects have also shifted slightly: whereas the earlier New York paintings mostly avoid famous landmarks, instead chronicling the cluttered displays and busy facades of ordinary shops and multistory buildings,

¹¹⁰ Thiebaud explains of his process: "The city paintings are different from my other work in a crucial way. They are much more consciously abstract, more a combination of memory and actual observation. My figure paintings were all done from direct observation, and the still lifes were all done from memory, but the cityscapes were really a dialogue between the two." Constance W. Glenn, "Artist's Dialogue: A Conversation with Wayne Thiebaud," *Architectural Digest* 39, no. 9 (September 1982): 68.

¹¹¹ Wayne Thiebaud, *Wayne Thiebaud Cityscapes* (San Francisco: Campbell-Thiebaud Gallery, 1993), n.p.

¹¹² The locational specificity implied by the painting is somewhat misleading: the legible street sign in the center of the composition indicates that this is the intersection of Twenty-Fourth and Mariposa Streets, while in actuality the two streets do not intersect, but run parallel several blocks apart.

later works include such sites as the Guggenheim, Central Park, Times Square, and the Brooklyn Bridge. Along with this shift in subject matter, the artist's panoramic inclinations have also increased. Though his hallmark reflective surfaces remain an integral part of many images, the sense of refraction carried to mise-en-abyme extremes is often replaced by an interest in wide-angle views.

Estes's *View from Twin Peaks* (1990) takes as its subject a pair of tall peaks near the center of San Francisco—a site that offers a 360-degree view of the city (fig. 102). The location is a prime stop for tourists; the painting thematizes this act of a viewing pilgrimage. Estes's panorama pictures not only San Francisco's skyline and its surrounding waters, but also the switchbacks of the access road and the "vista point" parking lot, the latter sprinkled with visitors and merchants. The nearest figure is pictured in the midst of the quintessential tourist act—snapping a photograph of his companion seated in front of the scenic view. Here the earlier works' complex reflective surfaces are replaced by reflexive acts of looking, encouraging awareness of the visual rituals of tourism. The expanded perspective's slight fisheye effect, the jutting form of both the city's peninsula and the viewing lookout, and the juxtaposition of rolling hills and looping streets create intertwining curvatures and additionally heighten the work's spatial drama. At six feet across, the viewing experience is not unlike that of Muybridge's panorama: each project implies more than the eye can absorb in a single moment, joining large quantities of visual data in order to recreate the physical experience of such elevated perspectives.

Estes aims to create a phenomenological, embodied sense of vision: "When you look at a scene or an object you tend to scan it. Your eye travels around and over things. As your eyes move the vanishing point moves, so to have one vanishing point or perfect camera perspective is

not realistic.”¹¹³ This approach suits spots such as Twin Peaks, where the elevation invites the eye to scan the landscape, but also necessarily makes his paintings akin to a time-lapse experience, and thus markedly different from the snapshot-like approaches of his Photorealist colleagues. Like Thiebaud’s images, Estes’s paintings are highly synthetic; they assemble a multiplicity of perspectives to conjure more of a sense of the city than a direct transfer of its components. The differences between Bechtle, Thiebaud, and Estes’s cityscapes are constituted not merely by their chosen iconography, but also their fundamentally distinct ways of perceiving the city. Each is crafted to suit its particular environmental experience: Thiebaud’s altered geography and color choices generate a heightened sensation of San Francisco’s rolling hills; Estes’s slightly chaotic reflections or lateral condensation of multiple perspectives express New York’s density or the saturation of tourist spots; and Bechtle’s horizontally sliced inclines refigure verticality, communicating the spatial nuances of the urban residential without resorting to overly familiar views. For Bechtle, everydayness is paramount: his works renew city vision not by stressing San Francisco’s already dramatic offerings, but by balancing specific urban elements—views up its inclines of irregular, paved terrain and stacked row houses—with the architectural regularities of residential neighborhoods. Thus the city is distinct but not divorced from its Bay Area neighbors, blending life in the traditional metropolitan center and its surrounding environs.

Sunset: the Suburban City

While Bechtle develops specific techniques for adapting the city’s nearly saturated visual-topographic tradition, much about these works is linked to his earlier suburban images.

¹¹³ Richard Estes quoted in John Canaday and John Arthur, *Richard Estes: The Urban Landscape* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1978), 38.

These continuities are most apparent in his images of the Sunset district. His paintings of the west-side neighborhood are inspired in part by his years of commuting to the area to teach at San Francisco State University, but the artist also relates that the neighborhood reminds him of the area of Alameda where he grew up.¹¹⁴ This seemingly small note of autobiographical resonance in fact speaks to a central aspect of San Francisco's architectural and demographic history. The Sunset district was not fully developed until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; its building record is informed by occasionally peculiar circumstances and instances of mass construction that parallel national trends of spreading suburbanization. In the 1890s horse-drawn streetcars rendered obsolete by new electric versions were transported to the area, where a number of residents purchased the cars for a small sum (\$20 with seats, \$10 without) and transformed them into commercial and living spaces. The bohemian area steadily filled with the ready-made units and became known as "Carville" (fig. 103).¹¹⁵ Likewise, following the 1906 earthquake, many of the thousands of "earthquake shacks" built through a relief fund were moved to Sunset's open lots when the city urged their removal from more central districts (fig. 104).¹¹⁶ This tradition of small, nearly identical row houses reached its apex with Henry Doelger's massive real estate development: between the 1920s and 1960s his company built 24,000 homes in the area.¹¹⁷ Doelger houses were an early example of assembly line building on

¹¹⁴ Bechtle, interview by author, June 22, 2010.

¹¹⁵ Natalie Jahraus Cowan, "Carville: San Francisco's Oceanside Bohemia," *California History* LVII, No. 4 (Winter 1978-79): 309, 316.

¹¹⁶ John King, "The Rent Was \$2 a Month, Gave Quake Refugees a Roof" *San Francisco Chronicle* March 30, 2006 <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=%2Fc%2Fa%2F2006%2F03%2F30%2FBAG00HURPP35.DTL> (accessed December 12, 2011).

¹¹⁷ Patricia Lee Brown, "Praising San Francisco's Champion of Conformity," *New York Times* January 29, 2003 <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/29/us/praising-san-francisco-s-champion-of-conformity.html> (accessed December 11, 2011). Standard Building Company built another suburban-like development on the slopes of Twin Peaks in the 1950s. "Midtown Terrace," like many suburbs, is comprised of single-family homes and a few public facilities—there is no commercial development. See Rex Bell, "A Brief History of Midtown Terrace," Western Neighborhoods Project, <http://www.outsidelands.org/midtown-terrace.php> (accessed February 24, 2013).

small lots, yielding affordable, well-crafted, single-family homes (figs. 105, 106).¹¹⁸ Though the façades vary slightly, borrowing traces of Spanish and American colonial, French provincial, or modernist traditions, they are united in appearance by their stucco exteriors, equal size, and a consistent layout that features bay or picture windows over the centrally-placed garage.¹¹⁹

Despite the extent of this decades-long construction spree, Sunset is not Doelger's most well known development. That title is held by the famed location of Malvina Reynolds's aforementioned "Little Boxes," Westlake, Daly City.¹²⁰ Comprised of 6,500 houses and 3,000 apartments, the area is a model postwar suburban development: it functions as an extensively planned mini-city, complete with all the necessary commercial, cultural, and public facilities. Yet, just as striking as Doelger's finely articulated plan for the construction and layout of these homes are their often whimsical, brightly colored appearance (fig. 56). As Reynolds sang, "There's a green one and a pink one/And a blue one and yellow one," though the end of the lyric, "and they all look just the same," is not quite accurate. Like most suburban developments, Westlake was built with a limited number of floor plans, but those seven basic styles were adapted to produce 260 unique façades. Thus adjacent residences might be as ornamentally

¹¹⁸ Doelger house frames were built with redwood, an expense offset by streamlined, onsite milling practices. The basic "Junior Five" layout was a simple two-bedroom, bath, kitchen, and living/dining room arrangement, advertised as "House[s] of the Moment" and sold for \$4,500-5,000. Ken Garcia, "Visionary's Ticky-Tacky Landmarks," *San Francisco Chronicle* October 15, 2002 <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2002/10/15/BA74645.DTL> (accessed December 12, 2011).

¹¹⁹ For a chronology of Doelger styles, see "Doelger Home Styles," Western Neighborhood Project, <http://www.outsidelands.org/doelger-types.php> (accessed February 26, 2013).

¹²⁰ Over the years some of this initial distaste articulated by Reynolds's song has waned, though much of the architectural recognition of Westlake has been for Mario J. Ciampi's modern school designs, which were featured in *Life*, *Architectural Forum*, and *Fortune*. Ciampi, in fact, disliked Westlake's residential architecture and accordingly designed the exterior of the circular Vista Del Mar school with solid masonry block, eliminating any views of the surrounding neighborhood. Rob Keil, *Little Boxes: The Architecture of a Classic Mid-Century Suburb* (Daly City: Advection Media, 2006), 124, 127.

disparate as a colonial-inspired home and a “fish and chips”—a riff on the contemporary Googie style (fig. 107).¹²¹

The Sunset district, in fact, is visible from Westlake, creating a continuous fabric of Doelger row houses between suburb and city (fig. 108). A measure of this visual continuity is suggested by the works of another suburban observer discussed above, William Garnett. The images were commissioned for *The American Aesthetic* (1969), architect Nathaniel Alexander Owings’s case for the cultural and environmental value of high-density cities. Here, sandwiched between Garnett’s familiar photographs of Lakewood and concentric circles of Eichler homes in Palo Alto, are aerial views of the Sunset (fig. 109).¹²² Both the grid layout of the page and the various patterns of housing arrangements suggest rampant geometric swathing of the landscape. Though the Sunset homes are more tightly adjoined than those of the suburban images, their co-presence implies a unified development impulse, a connotation supported by the juxtaposed text. Owings mocks “Homo suburbanus’s” discovery that his own prized retreat has taken on the worst traits of the very urban form he fled:

The air is thick with the sounds and smells of his own and his neighbors’ autos and power lawnmowers, and with smog and dust, which supposedly had been left behind in the city. With these trials also comes the realization that people can become one with a homestead but not with a tract. Impersonal, drab sameness offers stony soil and withers personal roots.¹²³

Though he praises San Francisco for its investment in public transportation and its post-Embarcadero Freeway resistance to highway building, Owings contends that any analysis of its

¹²¹ The latter was designed by in-house architect Ed Hageman with two upward pitched roofs; it was nicknamed for its resemblance to a drive-in restaurant. *Ibid.*, 92-93.

¹²² Joseph Eichler also built postwar, middle-class suburban communities, though the homes are strongly influenced by modernist architecture, as evidenced by the flat roofs visible in the aerial view. The Fairmeadow development in Palo Alto, bounded by parks and schools, is still popular with families. Karrie Jacobs, “Saving the Tract House,” *New York Times* May 15, 2005 <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/15/magazine/15TRACT.html> (accessed December 12, 2011). On Eichler homes, see Paul Adamson, *Eichler: Modernism Rebuilds the American Dream* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 2002).

¹²³ Nathaniel Alexander Owings, *The American Aesthetic* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 106-7.

built environment could “end up with conclusive proof that she is the ugliest city in the world, not the most beautiful.”¹²⁴ As with Newhall and Adams’s aforementioned *This is the American Earth*, the threat of suburbanization is clearly articulated; the Doelger homes provide a vivid example of how even the world’s most revered cities are prey to the cheap, ruinous impulses of mass-produced housing.

Bechtle’s sense of hometown familiarity in the *Sunset* is likewise a measure of this fluid construction impulse. His works tap into the suburban-urban continuity but forego the hyper-charged rhetoric of much period cultural commentary. The most striking example of this geographic group is *Sunset Intersection—40th and Vicente* (fig. 18). As discussed in the first chapter, much of the painting’s structure owes to Diebenkorn’s San Franciscan works from the early 1960s. The painting empties the center of the composition, pushing the row houses toward the upper edge of the canvas. This formal decision, along with the familiar deployment of the road’s curved incline and the cropping of the right side of the source photograph, visually compresses the architecture (fig. 19). Thus the already closely aligned homes become an exceedingly tight stack of rooftops and chimneys. In the foreground, the angled view of the street’s flat portion reveals the Doelger homes’ balanced replication and variation, each proportionally equal but with slight differences in the shape, color, and façade.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Ibid., 141. The Embarcadero Freeway, which ran along the downtown waterfront, was immediately subject to critique after its initial opening and became a central cause in Northern California’s “freeway revolt.” The sections that were built were substantially damaged in the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake and subsequently demolished. See John King, “Fifteen Seconds that Changed San Francisco,” *The San Francisco Chronicle*, October 17, 2004 <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2004/10/17/MNCITY1.DTL> (accessed December 19, 2011). See also note twenty-one above.

¹²⁵ It is difficult to definitively say whether all of these homes are Doelger productions—city records are spotty—but the location and their design appear to strongly confirm that lineage. One of the homes in the foreground, 2424 Vicente Street, is a colonial-style Doelger from 1949. Outside Lands, <http://www.outsidelands.org/image.php?img=/images/2424-Vicente-St.jpg> (accessed March 9, 2013). Doelger’s most concentrated *Sunset* development is located just several blocks north of this intersection, from 27th to 39th Avenues between Kirkham and Ortega Streets.

Curiously, this embrace of grid regularity is coupled with one of Bechtle's most fanciful departures from his source photograph: the dramatically darkened sky encroaching from the left. The invented weather, however, is not an attempt to balance the "monotony" of Doelger row houses with a foreboding sky, but rather an art historical allusion. According to Bechtle the choice was inspired by Ambrogio Lorenzetti's image of a city set against a dark sky in his early Renaissance fresco, *Allegories of Good and Bad Government* (1338-40, fig. 110).¹²⁶ Moreover, the dark sky is intended to conjure some locational specificity: as Bechtle notes, these lighting conditions occasionally appear as part of the city's famed, thick fog banks.¹²⁷ The painting is a tautly configured study of light and shape, using the built environment to experiment with properties of surface, shadow, color, and brushwork. But the work is also a visual measure of architectural planning; both the perspectival compression and the palette generate subtle indications of spatial and atmospheric experience. Here seeing yields physical comprehension, offering not only a view of the under-remarked residential Sunset, but also a vibrant sense of how these development patterns inform urban experiences.

Ending here, with the suburban-city, does not mean that distinctions between these categories have been entirely effaced.¹²⁸ Rather, it reveals the categories to be more historically continuous than often presumed, particularly in the realm of residential designs. Some take this as grim sign of ubiquitous standardization, a pandemic of row houses destined to cover every habitable space. There are also those who mourn the quintessential suburb of yesteryear, as

¹²⁶ If one wishes to extrapolate a similarly symbolic implication from this allusion, it should be noted that the portion of the fresco referenced is on the side of good government. Bechtle, AAA interview, February 8-9, 2010.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ For instance, the increasing price of living in urban centers and inner suburbs is indicative of the great appeal traditional density—architectural, economic, and cultural—holds for many. See Christopher B. Leinberger, "The Death of the Fringe Suburb," *New York Times* November 25, 2011 http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/26/opinion/the-death-of-the-fringe-suburb.html?_r=2&emc=eta1 (accessed December 14, 2011).

evidenced by the elegiac tone of a number of recent suburban novels. The crises at the center of such works as Rick Moody's *The Ice Storm* and Jeffrey Eugenides's *The Virgin Suicides* may appear to be direct descendants of the losses conjured by Yates, Updike, and Cheever a generation earlier; familial discord still looms as the defining struggle of suburban existence in Eugenides's failed Eden and Moody's contemporary tragedy.¹²⁹ But these newer works are infused with a different narrative tone, one of youthful observation or remembrance, yielding suburban reveries tinged with melancholic fondness for lost moments in cul-de-sacs and ranch houses.

The ultimate of these works Waldie's *Holy Land* memoir: few others seem to have grasped the rootedness of suburban generations and the rituals that intermingle the profound and the everyday. Waldie himself is aware of this observational gap. In his description of the Garnett's Lakewood photographs, he remarks:

The photographs were images of the developers' crude pride. They report that the grid, briefly empty of associations, is just a pattern predicting itself.

The theorists and critics did not look again, forty years later, to see the intersections or calculate in them the joining of interests, limited but attainable, like the leasing of chain stores in a shopping mall.¹³⁰

The images reveal not that the grid is simply a "pattern predicting itself," as many viewers still presume, but rather, as Waldie asserts, a joining of interests, fundamental to the physical and ideological shaping of the postwar experience. The fear of placelessness and complete homogenization associated with suburbia will likely never subside, but the Photorealist paintings discussed here communicate how touches of that residential impulse permeate a very broad swath of American development.

¹²⁹ See Rick Moody, *The Ice Storm* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1994); and Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Virgin Suicides* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1993).

¹³⁰ Waldie, 106.

Many urban theorists and planners of the postwar period have held forth on how the city, suburb, town, and country should look. Likewise, a proliferation of neologisms and prefixes—fringe, edge, ex-urban, boomburg, Californication, Manhattanization, smart/mega/shrinking cities, and so on—has attempted to grapple with these environmental shifts, to coerce their unstable forms into stable linguistic signifiers. Henri Lefebvre’s take in *The Urban Revolution*, written in 1970, stands apart for its more perspicacious view of such “sprawl.” Rather than insisting on discrete boundaries for contemporary spatial forms, he argues that mankind has become thoroughly urbanized, not just in its architectural developments but in the totality of its culture:

The *urban fabric* grows, extends its borders, corrodes the residue of agrarian life. This expression, “urban fabric,” does not narrowly define the built world of cities but all manifestations of the city over the country. In this sense, a vacation home, a highway, a supermarket in the countryside are all part of the urban fabric. Of varying density, thickness, and activity, the only regions untouched by it are those that are stagnant or dying, those that are given over to “nature.”¹³¹

Writing in 1970, Lefebvre’s perspective on the dawning of global urbanization anticipates the flood of urban theory devoted to the spatial and economic confluences of postindustrial society from the past several decades. Its sense of possibility and pitfalls constitutes a more radical account than the abiding fear of rampant suburbanization, which often holds up traditional urban density as a bastion of cultural reserve. The Bay Area Photorealists are obviously less polemical than Lefebvre, but share the impulse of documenting “problematic” overlaps and turning to lived experience as an untapped repository of spatial meaning. Their works place audiences in the midst of environmental friction zones to observe pivotal markers of the shifting spatial everyday, revealing how familiar places are not simply confined by the cloning impulse of the suburban-
esque, but rather informed by fluidities often unrecognized.

¹³¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 3-4. Originally published in 1970.

CHAPTER 4

(Photo)Realist Currencies: Economic and Philosophic Exchange at Home and Abroad

The first three chapters have provided both a historiographic synthesis of the realist context of the 1960s and 1970s and argument for the formal and social significance of several Photorealist painters working within this vast and varied milieu. Their work, I contend, is not only a measure of contemporary aesthetic renegotiations—fully merging painting with photography and embracing the world of vernacular imagery in both form and content—but also a reflection of changes in America’s physical and social environments, offering precise indicators of shifting landscapes and the spatial nuances of postwar lifestyles. This final chapter returns to the larger context of realist dialogues and perceptions, examining modes of exchange in two seemingly disparate but mutually informative forums: the art market and the field of critical theory. These two avenues in turn introduce a larger network of actors and themes, and illustrate how Photorealism’s consumption and interpretation were tied to period ideals of national identity in the United States and abroad. In these overlapping circles of collectors, dealers, critics, novelists, and theoreticians the style served as a principal node in the redefinition of realist form and cultural critiques centered on the “realities” of American postwar society.

First, this chapter addresses collectors as essential actors in the narrative of Photorealism’s making. Having tackled the immense amount of negative criticism directed toward the style, it is crucial to also account for its success within the marketplace. Many writers

have related the gap between critics and purchasing public—as indicated in chapter two, usually with an elitist sense of disapproval for perceived philistinism—but few have explored this rift as a potentially fruitful interpretive territory. This lacuna is especially glaring for a style that fed almost entirely on popular support. Not only did collectors help buoy the careers of artists who found little encouragement in the critical milieu, their purchases promoted the circulation of these works and thus substantially increased their visibility. Collectors also occasionally acted as patrons, and consequently affected artists' subjects and strategies. Several of the artworks that played a central role in the social and formal arguments of the first chapter reappear here, this time in the context of commission and exchange.

In addition to concrete issues of production, visibility, and circulation, the topic of collecting begs larger questions of reception. What made Photorealism attractive to buyers, beyond its illusionistic accessibility and clear evidence of traditional skilled labor? Using a few major collectors as case studies, this chapter reflects on how the style became a medium for notions of national identity and renegotiation of modernist ideologies.¹ Big collectors, of course, are frequently more democratic in their tastes than critics—omnivorous appetites and unfettered purchasing power often result in fairly comprehensive aesthetic snapshots of an era. But more than the simple willingness to collect everything, these case studies reflect purposefulness about the choice of acquisitions. Photorealism was not simply the next thing to collect after Pop, but a kind of imagery and image production its admirers considered appropriate to shifts in both the art world and the American socio-political scene. The phenomenon of Photorealist collecting impacted not only market values and public perception, but was also place for buyers to exercise

¹ Examining the work of a few major collectors obviously will not yield a comprehensive account of Photorealist collecting. The collectors selected for this chapter are not only at the top of the pack in terms of general spending power, but each also acquired many Photorealist works—in each case enough to mount museum exhibitions based on their collections. Most importantly, either their personal views or purchases are adequately documented to provide a substantial ground for arguments concerning their collecting philosophy.

ideals of cultural identity related to the works' iconographic contents and aesthetic preferences connected to its return to figuration.

In the critical realm, however, interpretive instability was a persistent challenge. Photorealism has always been a slippery form: a diverse group of artists united more by technique than collective purpose, the style's practitioners consistently refuse to offer clear social or aesthetic commentary. This purposeful ambiguity encouraged critics to seek a theoretical foundation outside the style's own auspices, often looking abroad for stand-in intellectual support. Accordingly, the latter half of the chapter shifts to the international stage to explore several European writers and theoreticians' roles in realist developments within both literature and the visual arts. Meditations on the real were central to the crosscurrents of mid-century continental philosophy, and comparisons between certain strands of French cultural production—especially those stemming from the *nouveau roman* movement—and Photorealism were frequent in the 1960s and 1970s. Linda Nochlin and Linda Chase were the first to make these comparisons with the *nouveau roman* writer Alain Robbe-Grillet; their respective positions as the dominant voices on realism and Photorealism have given the connection a long afterlife. These instances of cross-cultural and intermedial dialogue shed light on the formal and social roles projected onto French literature and American painting, as both grappled with renewed notions of realist objectivity and representation in the postwar environment.

A number of formidable European collectors and writers also looked back across the pond, taking measure of America's newly rediscovered love of realism and attempting to account for its cultural sway. In Germany, American realist painting staged a noted entrance at *documenta V* and quickly became as desirable a commodity as Pop art. Following in the wake of the *nouveau roman* and *Nouveau Réalisme*, *l'hyperréalisme* also became an object of fascination

for a number of leading French cultural theorists, including Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard. This Euro-American realist circuitry was not a domino effect, but rather an imprecise refraction of overlapping concerns, as each nation appropriated from others what its aesthetic arbiters deemed relevant to their own philosophies and cultural production. The global conversation thus speaks to realism's renewed centrality in both questions of style and epistemology and inter-cultural influence.

European theorists perhaps had less direct impact on Photorealist practice, but the appeal of their insights for American critics and, likewise, the appeal of American artworks for Europeans, reveal essential elements of international postwar aesthetic dialogues. Numerous studies have traced “globalization” in the realms of contemporaneous practices, but realism has often maintained national associations. Photorealism was frequently described as quintessentially “American,” a form defined by the middle-class, consumerist objects and environments the artists chose to depict. While not discarding that label—indeed, the notion of “Americanness” is fundamental to the paintings' production and reception—looking to the European perceptions of American identity pulls at the construction of this label in manner following the productive decoding of much recent American art historical scholarship.² For theorists such as Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault, and Umberto Eco Photorealism was essentially synonymous with American culture—both for good and bad. These correlations, which range from the capitalist production of irreality to a renewed democracy of the image, enmesh the style in a web of contemporary impulses and carry its influence through several decades of cultural commentary.

Though the chapter focuses mainly on collectors and theorists, their voices and actions extend to a much larger network of exchange. The collectors are directly tied to gallerists: two

² For an overview of recent American art scholarship in this vein, see John Davis, “The End of the American Century: Current Scholarship on the Art of the United States,” *The Art Bulletin* 85, no. 3 (September 2003): 544-580.

men fundamental to the history of Photorealism, Ivan Karp and Louis K. Meisel, figure frequently here. The pursuits of these buyers and sellers in turn are in turn echoed in the (re)actions of curators, exhibition organizers, reviewers, the viewing public, and, occasionally, the artists themselves; again, many of the players that appeared in earlier chapters will reappear here, linked to the trade of both goods and ideas. Theorists, too, are often tied to these worlds of commerce and display—not only in commenting on Photorealism’s form and contents, but in contributing or being cited in essays for gallery and museum exhibitions; they are an essential part of reception, but also critical to the market structure. Just as Americans look to continental philosophy, Europeans look to American art; the results reveal both traditional inclinations toward nationalism and increasingly diffuse webs of global influence.

Stuart Speiser: Airplanes and the American Dream

In 1972, Stuart Speiser, a renowned aviation attorney and advocate for tort reform, asked gallerist Louis K. Meisel to develop a definition of Photorealism. The result was later published in *Photorealism*, the first of three volumes Meisel dedicated to the style, which inducts its main participants and effectively delineates its formal and conceptual parameters.³ Following the dealer’s encouragement, Speiser commissioned twenty-two paintings by almost all of the artists associated with Photorealism. This collection, now owned by the Smithsonian, still stands as the most comprehensive singular Photorealist commission and the only one with a collective theme.

None of these facts initially seem remarkable: a dealer writes something to bolster the value of the works he sells; the collector later commissions a series based on the values (both aesthetic and market-based) the gallery established; the collection is eventually accessioned by a

³ Louis K. Meisel, *Photorealism* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1980), 12-20. A fourth volume, according to Meisel, is forthcoming. Meisel, interview by author, New York, NY, April 13, 2012.

formidable museum. But the idiosyncrasies of this story and its associated social networks are fundamental to the larger story of Photorealism. Speiser's collecting habits extend to unexpected niches and significant matters of contemporary culture, from Ralph Nader and his seminal battle against General Motors to the ideological and military struggles of the Cold War. The tentacle-like reach of the details of Speiser's biography and acquisitions are indicative of the central role of collecting in Photorealist history. Speiser and Meisel's aims in commissioning a comprehensive, themed collection were likewise pivotal in attempting to establish perception of Photorealism as coherent movement—one distinctly rooted in nationalist ideology.

A native New Yorker, Speiser's devotion to flying produced a storied and fruitful career. He served as a flight instructor for the Army Air Force during World War II; before returning to Columbia Law School he worked as crop duster, commercial pilot, and surplus airplane broker.⁴ Eventually he was recruited by Harry Gair, a key figure in negligence law.⁵ Speiser went on to successfully try many sensational cases, including the Pan Am Flight 103 Lockerbie bombing and the Soviet attack on Korean Airlines Flight 007.⁶ The lawyer pioneered the use of engineering experts and forensic specialists and helped turn the tide toward larger liability settlements in civil lawsuits.⁷ Speiser's most well-known case, however, was not aviation-related. In 1965, Ralph Nader published *Unsafe at Any Speed*, which indicted General Motors's

⁴ Stuart S. Speiser, *Lawyers and the American Dream* (New York: M. Evans and Company, 1993), 93; and Stephen Miller, "A Pilot and Lawyer, He Helped Chart Aviation Tort Law" *The Wall Street Journal*, November 3, 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703778304575590711895715560.html> (accessed May 3, 2012).

⁵ As Speiser recounts, he had "stumbled into a field in which I could instantly become the leader, because there was nobody else in it." Speiser, 96.

⁶ Pam Am Flight 103 was bombed over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988; Korean Airlines Flight 007 was shot down over the Soviet Union in 1983.

⁷ T. Rees Shapiro, "Stuart M. Speiser, Lawyer; Won Privacy Lawsuit for Nader," *The Boston Globe*, October 30, 2010, http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/obituaries/articles/2010/10/30/stuart_m_speiser_lawyer_won_privacy_lawsuit_for_nader/ (accessed May 3, 2012).

Chevrolet Corvair as a prime example of fatally dangerous automobile manufacturing practices.⁸

GM subsequently attempted to intimidate Nader and discredit his testimony to the Senate.

Speiser eventually won a large settlement on Nader's behalf for invasion of privacy, but for the lawyer, the generous damages awarded were secondary to the nobility of the cause:⁹

Ralph used the settlement proceeds to build the world's first effective consumer movement, saving thousands of lives and changing American government, business, and society as no private individual had ever done before... It furnished a winning model for David-Goliath confrontations, giving other individuals the inspiration to criticize, to challenge, to sue if necessary, to hold the establishment accountable.¹⁰

Undoubtedly Nader's efforts were pivotal in improving car safety, and, Speiser, in successfully defending the consumer advocate, struck a forceful blow against willful corporate negligence.

Nonetheless, Speiser's prose is remarkably triumphalist—a quality made plain by title of the book in which this account appears: *Lawyers and the American Dream*.

Speiser penned numerous books, which range from well-used law texts to lofty tomes on law history and ambitious economic forays. While none of his writings reflect on his art collecting, the works provide an intriguing ideological context for his Photorealist commission, particularly his fanciful meditations on reforming American capitalism. Speiser's interest in economics stemmed from his legal practice, which required him to calculate accident victims' compensation for loss of future wages and utilize economists as expert witnesses. The conclusions he drew from these experiences mix elitist protectionism with a genuine interest in reforming capitalism.¹¹ Ambitiously, Speiser set about attempting to devise a solution to what he

⁸ Ralph Nader, *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-In Dangers of the American Automobile*, (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1965).

⁹ GM hired private detectives to harass Nader; Speiser won Nader a \$425,000 settlement in 1970. Shapiro, "Stuart M. Speiser, Lawyer; Won Privacy Lawsuit for Nader."

¹⁰ Speiser, 204.

¹¹ Speiser remarks, "I classify myself as a frightened capitalist who believes that capitalism has enabled America to achieve much that would not have been possible under any other system... I believe our welfare capitalism is running down and has become a patchwork system that creates enough internal conflicts to threaten our living

perceived as the nation’s problematic system of “welfare capitalism.” His proposal was a modified version of economist Louis Kelso’s “Financed Capitalist Plan,” which advocated offering working Americans the chance to buy shares in major corporations with credit from the federal government.¹² After lobbying senators and publishing an economic screed, Speiser attempted to garner more “grassroots support” with a fictional work, *SuperStock*.¹³

A mystery novel centering on the death of a corporate executive and the battles between Cold War superpowers—essentially an awkwardly devised novelization of Speiser’s own life and economic philosophy—*SuperStock* was poorly received, reviewers objecting to its insertion of lengthy economic lessons into a purported “espionage-murder mystery.”¹⁴ Nonetheless, Speiser’s transparent reframing of his own life and impressive idealism toward repairing both the national economy and global politics are noteworthy. Beyond its advocacy of adapting capitalism to become a more equitable system, *SuperStock* (and his subsequent nonfiction work, *How to End the Nuclear Nightmare*) proposes that this diluted infusion of Marxism will diffuse the Cold War and end nuclear proliferation. Speiser plainly contends, “It was only the natural enmity between capitalism and communism that compelled us to be enemies of the Soviet Union.”¹⁵

standards, our democratic institutions, and our moral values.” Speiser, *Ethical Economics and the Faith Community: How We Can Have Work and Ownership for All* (Bloomington: Meter Stone Books, 1989), 1.

¹² Speiser, *A Piece of the Action: The Quest for Universal Capitalism* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1977).

¹³ Speiser revived interest in Kelso’s plan, publishing *A Piece of the Action: A Plan to Provide Every Family with a \$100,000 Stake in the Economy* and lobbying Alaskan Senator Mike Gravel in the late 1970s. See Speiser, *A Piece of the Action: A Plan to Provide Every Family with a \$100,000 Stake in the Economy* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1977).

¹⁴ Speiser, *Ethical Economics and the Faith Community*, 16. *SuperStock*’s protagonist is a former Air Force pilot turned business-magnate with a heavy conscience.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17. The novel’s conceit improbably concludes with the American vice president’s endorsement and a Russian professor fawning: “If SuperStock can be sold to the Kremlin, the whole world would be enriched in many ways. The savings in military expenditures alone would be enough to create a new industrial revolution and a new age of hope and prosperity... I wish I were young enough to go into training as a salesman.” Speiser, *SuperStock* (New York: Everest House Publishers, 1982), 263. Speiser himself later noted the naïveté of his solution, but did not abandon the idea, but rather encouraged its dispersion by financing essay contests on the topic of how SuperStock

Lawyers and the American Dream, though less economically fanciful, is equally idealistic in its unwavering faith in American jurisprudence. As with his notion of collectively ensuring individual wealth by allowing access to traditionally elite forms of capital accumulation, here the common good—protection from powerful corporations—is obtained through the efforts of individual, noble litigators. These lawyers, as Speiser describes them, “fulfill the American Dream when they act as Equalizers in tort cases, representing underdogs against the establishment, using their education, skills, entrepreneurship, and self-initiative to right wrongs and get rich themselves, in the process.”¹⁶ As a civil litigator, his belief in the ability of capital to right legal and ethical wrongs is fairly predictable. But Speiser’s articulation of the American Dream also strongly echoes postwar visions of balancing individual manifest destiny and the collective good: “Achieving excellence on your own, and using it to do well financially and have a happy life, while doing good for others less fortunate.”¹⁷

Given his strongly held convictions concerning American capitalism and nationalist ideologies of upward mobility, it is perhaps unsurprising that Speiser was interested in collecting Photorealism—a style known for its focus on American consumer objects and the intense labor required to produce paintings.¹⁸ Connected by a cousin working for Speiser’s firm, Meisel learned that the attorney wanted to commission a series of airplane paintings and convinced him that Photorealism was the perfect form for his collecting aspirations. The commission ultimately

could ease Soviet-American tensions. The results were published in *Ethical Economics and the Faith Community: How We Can Have Work and Ownership for All*, with Speiser, in an apparent effort to solicit religious communities, adding a moralizing framework. Speiser, *Ethical Economics and the Faith Community*, 17-18.

¹⁶ Speiser, *Lawyers and the American Dream*, 42.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁸ Photorealism might also have proved a more attainable acquisition in comparison to more critically acclaimed styles: by Meisel’s account, Speiser was uninitiated in the art world when the two met, and only “dreamt of meeting the upper echelon of collectors.” Meisel, interview by author, New York, NY, April 13, 2012. The attorney did have an extensive collection of aviation memorabilia, including prints, posters, and paintings, though apparently, “nothing in his collection convinced Speiser that artistic justice had been done to the airplane.” Judy Beardsall, “Stuart M. Speiser Photo Realist Collection,” *The Art Gallery Magazine*, October 1973, 29.

reflected both Meisel's unabashed promotionalism and Speiser's outsize desires: Meisel persuaded nearly all of the Photorealists to participate, while Speiser payed each artist ten percent more than their going price for the "biggest and the best."¹⁹ In return, the lawyer received his coveted entrée into the art world, gaining access to new social circles, and, with his donation to the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum (NASM), national recognition.²⁰ Yet, despite this recognition, one wonders whether the ultimate siting of his paintings in an aerospace, rather than an art museum, disappointed Speiser.²¹ Notably Speiser also courted the National Gallery of Art for accession of the collection.²²

This outcome may have encouraged Speiser to pursue legal recognition of the collection's worth.²³ As was standard practice at the time, the tax value of his donation only accounted for the costs of each individual work; the lawyer persuaded the IRS to agree to a

¹⁹ A few artists are notably absent from the collection, including Chuck Close, John Kacere, and Robert Cottingham. Meisel also relates that some inclusions were "mistakes:" i.e. Ted Wilbur, an aviation pilot and illustrator, was "not really a Photorealist." Meisel, interview by author, April 13, 2012.

²⁰ Following his donation of the series to the National Air and Space Museum (NASM) in 1978, Speiser was awarded the Smithsonian's James Smithson medal, one of the institution's highest honors. The donation was the "largest" and "most valuable" NASM had ever received from a private source. Notably the report mistakenly describes the acquisition as "twenty-two photographs." Smithsonian Institution, *Annual Report of The Smithsonian Institution for the Year Ended September 30, 1979*, (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1980), http://www.archive.org/stream/smithsonianyeara1979smit/smithsonianyeara1979smit_djvu.txt (accessed May 8, 2012).

²¹ Meisel reports in *Photorealism* that the collection was donated to the Smithsonian, "to be exhibited in one or more of the museums in the Institution," but the deed agreement is solely with NASM. Meisel, *Photorealism*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1980), 13; and Aeronautics Division Registrar files, National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C (hereafter Aeronautics Division Registrar files, NASM). The *Annual Report* cited above also lists the accession as NASM's own. Of course inter-branch loan would not have been precluded and portions of the collection have been loaned frequently over the years. NASM does have sizable art collection within its Aeronautics Division and regularly mounts exhibitions in a gallery space in the National Mall building; the collection was shown in its entirety in *Assignment Aviation - The Stuart M. Speiser Photo-Realist Collection*, exhibited at NASM in 1980-81 and a national tour that stretched from 1983-85. (Currently none of the works are on view to the public, though several hang in staff-only spaces.) Moreover, it seems the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn or American Art branches would have been equally appropriate.

²² Meisel, interview by author, April 13, 2012.

²³ Notably NASM's Registrar files include a lengthy letter from curator Mary Valdivia to Speiser, requested by the collector, attesting to the collection's aesthetic value. Mary Valdivia to Stuart Speiser, 1984, Aeronautics Division Registrar files, NASM.

fifteen percent increase in valuation to reflect its total worth.²⁴ In general though, Speiser's financial dealings place him more in the realm of traditional patronage than other Photorealist collectors.²⁵ As Meisel relates in the catalog devoted to Speiser's collection, "the method was to be unrestricted commissions for the artists, and the result was to be a semi-public collection which would be made available through out the world."²⁶ This simultaneous sense of private and public good again crystalizes Speiser's vision of the American Dream.

Beyond the overzealousness of his writings, his storied personal and professional history, or the generous nature of his donation to a national institution, what can one learn from the lawyer's collection? Are the works simply a reflection of his love of aviation? Undoubtedly the commission reflects such traditional collecting desires; it can be viewed as essentially a portrait of Speiser, honoring his lifelong occupation with a panoply of *au courant*, outsized paintings. Yet, such a conclusion is in many ways too facile. Several moves by the collector and his dealer informed the collection's reception, and, in turn, that of Photorealism more generally. By setting boundaries for the subjects of the paintings and persuading nearly every Photorealist to participate, Speiser and Meisel lent the appearance of a coherent movement. Speiser confirmed this desire to convey cohesive clarity:

I've gone to a number of Photo Realist exhibitions in the past year, and to try to say what this movement is from those collections is very difficult. You get a Volkswagen from one guy and a horse from another; you get a 1965 Morley that's a ship and a 1972 Estes that's a delicatessen, and don't think you get a sense of the full scope of the movement in art. Since all the works in the collection have been done at the same time on the same theme, I think it is very valuable.²⁷

²⁴ Meisel relates that the collection cost Speiser \$150,000, plus \$15,000 for the dealer's commission; according to the gallerist it was valued at 1.5 million dollars at the time of donation (1978). Meisel, interview by author, April 13, 2012.

²⁵ Speiser provided support for such activities as Ron Kleeman's travels to Florida for source photographs of racing cars. Ibid.

²⁶ Meisel, *Photo-Realism 1973: The Stuart M. Speiser Collection* (New York: Eminent Publications, 1973), n.p.

²⁷ Speiser quoted in Beardsall, 31.

The attempt to provide coherence is particularly salient given the collection's expansive national tours: Meisel's original exhibition of the works traveled to eighteen sites, while the Smithsonian's tour included thirteen additional institutions. Many of Meisel's locations were university art museums, while NASM partnered with art, science, and natural history museums; collectively the shows exposed an unusually wide range of audiences to Photorealism.²⁸ The theme, while certainly self-indulgent, also facilitated comparisons of stylistic, iconographic, and technical variation. Speiser and Meisel's singular achievement of (near) comprehensiveness undoubtedly displayed their art world prowess, but also provided a unique viewing opportunity. Just as the collector's request for the dealer to write a definition of Photorealism may have been self-serving, it nonetheless generated stylistic criteria that would be cited throughout Photorealism's long history.

Yet, though Speiser's assigned aviation theme produced a cohesive collection, the otherwise loose parameters allowed for diverse iconography and a range of painterly approaches. A quick inventory reveals that the works are roughly split between those that depict real airplanes (thirteen) and toys or models (eight).²⁹ The majority of the artists fitted the aviation theme within the parameters of their usual subjects: Bechtle's *SFO Malibu* centers on an automobile parked adjacent to the Bay Area airport's tarmac; Estes's *Alitalia* is a typically complex depiction of the airline office's reflective façade; Mel Ramos's *Fraulein Mit Fleugel* is another of his Vargas-style pinup girls in front of a biplane; and Flack's *Spitfire* features objects

²⁸ For complete itineraries of the exhibitions, see any of the relevant artist biography pages on the Louis K. Meisel Gallery website, <http://www.meisलगallery.com/>.

²⁹ The remaining work, Noel Mahaffey's *TWA*, features only the airline's corporate building. Most of the works are large-scale paintings in oil or acrylic, but a few are not: Malcolm Morely and John Salt both contributed watercolors, the former offering a large, gridded work aptly indicative of the artist's brand of realist subjects as conceptual endeavor. Strangely the Salt watercolor is the only work reproduced in the catalog in black and white. Its numbering—along with that of the last painting, Martin Hoffman's *Jet Fighter*—is out of order, making the catalog appear to be a somewhat slapdash effort. The catalog was produced the same year as the commission, in conjunction with an exhibition at the Addison Gallery of American Art at Philips Academy that went on to tour nationally. Meisel, *Photo-Realism 1973: The Stuart M. Speiser Collection*, n.p. All works in the collection are dated 1973.

that appear in many of her still lifes set on a reflective tabletop—the latter element also a recurrent device of her trademark spatial ambiguity (figs. 111-114).³⁰ The overall impression is quite varied; while a number of images fit within Photorealism’s reputed fascination with shiny machinery, the collection is not dominated by such object-oriented views. Landscapes and figures are equally important as the planes themselves in defining the works’ contents and tenor. This diversity is a good measure of the wide range of interests operating within the style and attests to interpretive freedom granted to each artist.³¹

In a few cases, particularly the ones central to this dissertation, Speiser’s commission pushed the artists toward new realms of process or iconography. Bechtle’s *SFO Malibu*, though typically focused on a parked car, is also one of the artist’s earliest works to feature a view of the city landscape (fig. 111).³² The painting thus anticipates Bechtle’s significant move toward urban imagery in the early 1980s. Likewise, Charles Bell’s contribution, *Seaplane in Bathtub*, sparked the artist’s interest in reflected and refracted light and led to his most well known series, the gumball machine paintings (fig. 115).³³ Most notable though, is the work McLean made for the collection, *Sacramento Glider* (fig. 33). As noted in chapter one, the painting is both an important document of the connections among the three Bay Area Photorealists and a decisive

³⁰ All titles are from NASM’s Registrar files. Curiously the artworks are unlabeled in the catalog, though their titles frequently appear in other sources. Mel Ramos, as Meisel freely admits, is not a Photorealist; he was one of the first painters the dealer represented and thus apparently merited inclusion. Meisel, interview by author, April 13, 2012.

³¹ According to Meisel the artists were guaranteed that their works would be accepted, even if they ultimately had nothing to do with aviation; the subject was an “inspiration rather than a restriction.” However, it seems that participation at least required willingness to endeavor to tackle the assigned subject matter—as implied by a few artists’ refusals. Chuck Close, John Kacere, and Robert Cottingham declined to participate because they felt the subject would inject artificial, outside interests into their oeuvre. In the end all of the participating artists produced aviation themed works. Beardsall, 34; and Meisel, interview by author, April 13, 2012.

³² Though San Francisco International Airport (SFO) is located roughly thirteen miles south of the city, and therefore the painting’s dotted hillside is likely South San Francisco—a separate city not actually contiguous with San Francisco proper—the wider city view is still anomalous at this point the artist’s career. San Francisco International Airport, <http://www.flysfo.com/web/page/tofrom/driv-dir/> (accessed May 9, 2012).

³³ Meisel, *Photorealism*, 57. The Speiser commission also encouraged Tom Blackwell to move away from his motorcycle works toward a number of airplane paintings. *Ibid.*, 83.

moment of change in McLean's process. Befuddled by how he could include both an airplane and a horse in the same image, the artist relates that he initially thought of Thoroughbreds being shipped by air, but could not locate an image. Still at a loss for an appropriate scene, McLean offhandedly remarked to Meisel that he might try using a kid with a model airplane and add a horse.³⁴ Ultimately the idea resonated; the work's genesis encapsulates the social and aesthetic ties between the three artists: McLean and Goings's children posed as models, while Bechtle's preferences in cars served as an iconographical example for the "plain old generic plane" McLean sought.³⁵

This generic model plane seemed to become an object of fascination at the Smithsonian. NASM's registrar files reveal that a replica of the model used in the source photograph was commissioned by the museum from Alan F. Schwartz (fig. 116).³⁶ Schwartz's scale determination calculations and drawings for the model are remarkably precise; clearly he studied the painting to extrapolate its scale and the relative size of the figures and model plane, aiming to make the most faithful replica possible.³⁷ The replica model, like the original, made of balsa strips and covered with red tissue, was accessioned in 1981 and exhibited with the painting.³⁸ This strange layering of representation and reality—a model of a model plane built from a painting based on a photograph—is a supremely curious incident in the history of Photorealist

³⁴ McLean, interview by author, Castro Valley, CA, November 16, 2011.

³⁵ Oral history interview with Richard T. McLean, conducted by Jason Stieber, September 20, 2009, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C (hereafter McLean, AAA interview, September 20, 2009).

³⁶ Aeronautics Division Registrar files, NASM. The museum's acquisition records are unsurprisingly specific about the kind of aircraft featured in almost every artwork in the collection—much more so than the artists were with their titles, which generally do not include airplane names—but McLean's model received extra attention.

³⁷ Presumably the actual model type McLean used was not in production or unavailable; the plane McLean used for the source photograph was borrowed from a model shop for the shoot. McLean himself has no recollection of NASM's model. McLean, interview with author, November 16, 2011. If NASM's Registrar files are complete, no other work in the collection received this treatment, though presumably a number of works that featured toys or models could have. NASM's current curator and collections manager were not able to locate the model, though at the time of my research the institution's sizable art collection was undergoing a facility relocation to the Udvar-Hazy Center.

³⁸ Aeronautics Division Registrar files, NASM.

exhibiting.³⁹ The impulse to physically recreate the world of McLean's painting is undoubtedly a relic of where the Speiser collection ultimately found its home: an aeronautical museum where visitors come to view historical aircraft. The model is also possibly an indicator of the work's distinctive look: perhaps more than any other work in the collection, *Sacramento Glider's* snapshot-style yields an intensely vivid and strikingly familiar sense of reality. This quality can again be attributed to the specific demands of Speiser's commission, which prompted a sea change in McLean's process, and, as a result, his overall aesthetic. Ironically, an "unnatural" alliance of subjects commanded by the commission shifted McLean's work toward a more intimate, less Pop-like engagement with his subjects.

A.D. Coleman, who figured in chapter two as a staunch defender of photographic territory against what he perceived as Photorealism's crass encroachment, was spurred to write about the style upon viewing the Speiser collection at Meisel's gallery. Despite his enmity toward Photorealism's appropriation of photographic means, Coleman admits the collection is coherent and instructive, and "functions as a paradigm of the Photo-Realist movement."⁴⁰ But Coleman's musings on the edifying value of the collection quickly cede to his conclusion that the works are fueled by a "capitalistic impulse."⁴¹ The photography critic's reaction is not inapt: Speiser clearly thought of his commission as an investment, as many collectors do. The paintings, too, are capitalist products—in more ways than one. Their size is generally bound to the upper-tier of the market that demands awe-inspiring scale—recall Meisel and Speiser's desire that the works be the "biggest and the best," qualities Speiser paid to ensure. Likewise, the

³⁹ Occasionally source photographs are shown alongside finished paintings, but the practice is more common in print publications. This instance is the only one I am aware of where an object depicted in a Photorealist painting was recreated in three-dimensional form.

⁴⁰ Coleman, "From Today Painting is Dead," in *Light Readings: A Photography Critic's Writings, 1968 – 1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 186; originally published in *Camera* 35 (July 1974).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

artists' subjects are the products of a capitalist nation: cars, planes, and toys are ubiquitous consumables, defining aspects of America's postwar ascent. Even a traditionally commodified human transaction—sex—features prominently in the collection: Ramos's *Fraulein Mit Fleugel* references the soft-core commodification of female sexuality in mid-century pinup imagery; Arnie Besser's *Betty* depicts a prostitute posing next to a model airplane display; while Jerry Ott's female nudes in *Messerschmitts* lounge in front of a silver Mylar backdrop, revealing the scene's construction of synthetic sheen (figs. 113, 117, 118).

Yet, for the most part, the works are not mere exaltations of commodity culture—they are, as with the images by Bechtle, Goings, and McLean discussed in the previous chapters, indications of how consumerism infiltrates and integrates into the postwar American cultural landscape. Even two of the aforementioned nudes include overt historical references: Ramos places his subject in front of a plane with German markings, while Ott's title is a reference to the German aircraft manufacturing corporation, known for its production of World War II fighter aircraft—the woman at right holds a model North American P-51 Mustang, while a German Focke-Wulf 190 dangles precariously (and perhaps symbolically) from the silver foil backdrop.⁴² Indeed, for many Americans viewing the collection in 1973 or thereafter, the imagery of military aircraft—which also appears in Tom Palmore's *P-40 in Fish Tank*, Tom Blackwell's *White Lightning*, Ron Kleeman's *Mustang Sally Forth*, Martin Hoffman's *Jet Fighter*, and Paul Staiger's *F-101*—would have had strong connotations of America's past armed glories and present imbroglios (figs. 119-123).⁴³ Most of the featured aircraft (or model aircraft) date from World War II, and thus are safely ensconced within the country's triumphant past, but Hoffman and Staiger's planes are from the Korean and Vietnam wars, respectively. The

⁴² Ramos' plane is fictitious. Aeronautics Division Registrar files, NASM.

⁴³ Ibid.

Photorealists' propensity for "neutral" subjects generally precluded depictions of violence or protest contemporary to their era, but in these aviation paintings there are palpable traces of American military endeavors. These traces range from children's toys to U.S. Air Force snapshots and images of fighter jets in flight; collectively they are an indication of how foreign affairs and military conflicts filter into the everyday, such political events subtly asserting their presence in playrooms, calendars, photo albums, newspapers, and other such sites of commonplace ephemera.

Speiser's own writings on law and economics through the prism of the American Dream and his personal involvement with military, private, and commercial aircraft further lend a political slant to his commission. His subject choice easily lent itself to images with connotations of national identity. Speiser in fact intended an international tour of the paintings, remarking in 1973:

This is one of the few things the Russians might take, because it's utilitarian and fits in with the only sort of art they let their people see, which seems to be metal objects and things like that rather than idle capitalist sort of abstract things. When this collection moves around the world, wholly apart from the fact that it is airplanes, it will be a very definitive statement of what we think is a very important art movement. People will be able to say, "This is Photo Realism."⁴⁴

Regardless of his limited understanding of Russian art viewership, it is clear that the collector saw his paintings as continuous with his nationalistic endeavors in law and economics and intended to use them to promote both the "movement" and American ideals. Likewise, Meisel's description of Photorealism as "art for the people" cements the promotion of these paintings as populist American works.⁴⁵ Finally, acquisition by a national museum with a mission to "inspire and educate the nation" through the preservation and display of aeronautical and spaceflight

⁴⁴Speiser quoted in Beardsall, 32. Notably the *Art Gallery* article on Speiser's collection appeared next to yet another Chase piece on Photorealism, "Recycling Reality."

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

equipment ensured that the collection would become not simply part of the American aesthetic legacy, but remained enshrined at the cross-section of the nation's cultural, political, and technological pursuits.⁴⁶

Morton G. Neumann and Richard Brown Baker: Democratic Collecting and the “American Scene”

Speiser was, by all accounts, new money in an old school system; though not the only relatively green collector interested in the style, many buyers were far more established.⁴⁷ Their stories are important foils to that of the aviation attorney: rather than using Photorealism to gain entry into the art world, these men added to already extensive holdings, thus incorporating the style into a recognized fold of artists and critically approved styles. Their acquisitions were not made without trepidation or rebuke, but their prominence in the art world also meant that their Photorealist collections received considerable press attention and generated a number of national exhibitions. Like Speiser, Morton G. Neumann and Richard Brown Baker became public faces of the movement, supplying not only financial support but also their own interpretive lenses. Their collections link the works to an extensive network of aesthetic and monetary connections, guided by the participants' attempts to anticipate new directions in American painting.

A central aspect of these networks revolves around the gallery world. Both Neumann and Baker were linked to dealer Ivan Karp. Just a few blocks away from Meisel's Soho locale, Karp's gallery O.K. Harris Works of Art was a destination for prominent clients like Max

⁴⁶ Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum Mission Statement, http://airandspace.si.edu/events/pressroom/presskits/museumkit/overview_nasm.cfm (accessed July 18, 2012).

⁴⁷ For instance, Meisel reports that famed British collector and dealer Charles Saatchi bought Photorealist works just as he began amassing his aesthetic empire. Meisel, interview by author, April 13, 2012.

Palevsky, Sidney Lewis, Baker, and Neumann in the 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁸ Karp carried many of these connections from his time at Leo Castelli's eponymous gallery, where he worked from 1959 to 1969.⁴⁹ Castelli's was a central presence on the New York scene, with an exhibition history that includes formidable European painters and American Abstract Expressionists, Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns's first major shows, and foundational moments in Pop.⁵⁰ Castelli's prowess had begun to wane by the seventies, as a wave of new gallerists like Mary Boone and Larry Gagosian rose as competitors, but by that time Karp had already departed to start his own space.⁵¹ Of the entirely new roster of artists Karp showed at OK Harris, several of the earliest were realists, including Duane Hanson, John De Andrea, and Ralph Goings. Despite the gallerist's professed preference for abstract work, his desire to "open up a new territory" both aesthetically and geographically—his gallery was one of the first in Manhattan's Soho neighborhood—overrode his personal inclinations.⁵²

⁴⁸ Ivan and Ethan Karp, interview with author, New York, NY, April 17, 2012. On Max Palevsky, see Elaine Woo, "Max Palevsky dies at 85; computer magnate and philanthropist," *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 2010 <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/may/06/local/la-me-0506-max-palevsky-20100506> (accessed May 15, 2012); on Sidney Lewis, see Roberta Smith "Sydney Lewis, 79, Art Collector and Patron," *New York Times*, March 16, 1999 <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/03/16/arts/sydney-lewis-79-art-collector-and-patron.html?src=pm> (accessed May 15, 2012). The same year he contributed to the Speiser collection, Ralph Goings was also commissioned by Palevsky to paint one of the early tech magnate's homes. Despite the lavish nature of this assigned subject, Goings's *Palevsky Pool* (1973) is typically understated, namely featuring a large row of potted plants along a brick façade, and only a small corner of the eponymous swimming pool.

⁴⁹ Oral history interview with Ivan C. Karp, conducted by Ronny Cohen, April 17, 1986–October 18, 1988, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C (hereafter Karp, AAA interview, April 17, 1986–October 18, 1988).

⁵⁰ As Peter Schjeldahl relates, the gallerist "became, effectively, the scene's predominant critic. What he showed didn't invariably succeed, but what he wouldn't show came to bat with two strikes against it. His winning bets came to seem self-fulfilling prophecies." Peter Schjeldahl, "Leo the Lion: How the Castelli Gallery Changed the Artworld," *New Yorker* June 7, 2010, http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2010/06/07/100607crbo_books_schjeldahl (accessed May 15, 2012).

⁵¹ Karp quarreled with his employer over artists added to the gallery stable. He recalls, "I told him at a certain point in 1968, that if certain artists were brought into the fold, that I wouldn't be comfortable there. I didn't think that they would be appropriate for our setting, and they didn't represent the gallery's original philosophical posture." Karp, AAA interview, April 17, 1986–October 18, 1988. James Rosenquist reports that the disagreement came to a head over Dan Flavin's work, of which Karp said, "That's not art, that's lighting fixtures." James Rosenquist with David Dalton, *Painting Below Zero: Notes on a Life in Art* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 121.

⁵² Karp, AAA interview, April 17, 1986–October 18, 1988.

Neumann and Baker were both acquainted with Karp from his days at Castelli.⁵³

Neumann was perhaps the best established of the bunch. The industrialist began collecting in 1948, gaining entrance into the world of the European and American avant-gardes through prominent dealers like D.H. Kahnweiler, Pierre Matisse, and Sidney Janis.⁵⁴ Neumann, however, was of catholic tastes, and collected assemblage, Op art, Pop, and realism as these trends became current. In the catalog for the 1980 National Gallery exhibition of Neumann's collection, Sam Hunter notes that both Karp and Neumann delighted in ignoring the prevailing opinion that investing in realism was a pursuit for the uncultured:

In a short span of time [Neumann] acquired nearly fifty examples of Malcolm Morely, John Clem Clarke and the more photographic Richard Estes, John Kacere, Ralph Goings, Richard McLean, Audrey Flack, the sculptors Duane Hanson and John Di Andrea [sic], and many others. The dealer who best served him as a liaison with these artists and their works was Ivan Karp... While Neumann today often affects rather solemn attitudes when the subject of art collecting is brought up, scratch just beneath the surface and you will find a touch of the perverse, a streak of maverick insubordination and an ill-concealed delight in shocking his own particular social circle. One senses that Neumann has always felt slightly uncomfortable with the custodians of gilt-edged modernism, even though he himself went to school with collecting of that kind and proved himself a more than apt pupil in traditional modes of gathering superlative modern art.⁵⁵

This sense of confident rebellion also echoes in many of Karp's interviews. But whereas Hunter observes Neumann to be more at home with realism than modernism, Karp frequently lamented the labeling of his gallery as a "hyperrealist institution." Though he rightfully points out that this

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Sam Hunter, *The Morton G. Neumann Family Collection* (Washington, D.C.: The National Gallery of Art, 1980), 16.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 15. This exhibition was generally perceived as one of a number of fruitless attempts to convince the family to donate its works. On the institutional courting of the Neumann collection, see Deborah Solomon, "The Collector Who Is Breaking a Thousand Curators' Hearts," *New York Times*, December 9, 1997, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/12/09/giving/the-collector-who-is-breaking-a-thousand-curators-hearts.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm> (accessed May 21, 2012). A number of modernist works were eventually auctioned by Sotheby's in 1998 to help pay estate taxes after Morton Neumann's death, but the bulk of the collection remains in the family. See Sotheby's, *27 Works from the Morton G. Neumann Collection* (New York: Sotheby's, 1998).

description belies his O.K. Harris's diverse exhibition history, these statements seem to be inflected with the unease of weathering contemporary realism's negative critical associations.⁵⁶

Baker, whose collection rivals Neumann's in depth and breadth, was likewise aware of the perceived lowbrow nature of his realist collecting. Upon purchasing a Duane Hanson sculpture in 1971, Baker reflects: "I regret to think also of the revulsion Mother would almost surely feel if she were to know that a portion of her insurance money will be spent on such a proletarian work. She would doubt my sanity."⁵⁷ Baker's comments come from his diaries—an unusually thorough source of reflection on the financial, social, and psychological freight of elite collecting—now housed at Yale University, along with the bulk of his art collection.⁵⁸ As few of Neumann's own sentiments on collecting are on record, it is hard to ascertain whether he shared this angst. On the surface, the two men's involvement with the arts seems similar: both spent a number of years collecting modernist works, were intimate with art world inner circles, and amassed highly diverse collections that included extensive contemporary realist holdings. Both Neumann and Baker's realist collections toured the Midwest in the late 1970s/early 1980s; these shows comprise two of the most comprehensive Photorealist exhibitions to date. Likewise, both are clear foils to Speiser's new money and the singularly-directed, self-homage of his commission.

Yet, Baker's story is not a simple tale of moneyed, old-school acquisition; his circumstances and aspirations both differed from and overlapped with Speiser and Neumann's in pivotal ways. Like Speiser, Baker was a prolific producer of autobiographical accounts, though very few of Baker's writings were intended for public consumption in the manner of Speiser's

⁵⁶ Karp, AAA interview, April 17, 1986-October 18, 1988; and Ivan and Ethan Karp, interview by author, April 17, 2012.

⁵⁷ Richard Brown Baker Papers, Original Diaries, 1971, MSS 598, Box 42, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

⁵⁸ The British portions of Baker's collection were donated to the Rhode Island School of Design.

law and economics endeavors.⁵⁹ Baker was not part of the nouveau riche, but neither was his family money a longstanding legacy.⁶⁰ His career path meandered between the “conventional” and “artistic”; he dabbled in journalism, foreign affairs, and both professional writing and painting.⁶¹ Ultimately Baker’s occupation was collecting—he not only kept meticulous records, but also spent much time writing about his art world encounters in voluminous diaries and notebooks.

These diaries show Baker to have been frequently consumed with internal financial reckoning: without an occupational income, his purchases were limited by his inheritance—itsself vulnerable to market fluctuations. Baker continually fretted over acquisitions and frequently went on “spending diets”; this enforced frugality also had the effect of reaffirming his mission to collect widely and support emerging artists. Nonetheless, debt was a persistent burden, especially given the collector’s proclivity for developing groupings, or mini-collections, within the larger scope of his holdings. Along with contemporary British art, Photorealism was one of Baker’s dominant interests in the 1970s.⁶² The collector’s connections with both Pop art—he was one of the earliest to acquire works by Roy Lichtenstein, before the artist’s first showing at Castelli—and Ivan Karp perhaps make the leap to Photorealism somewhat expected, though Baker’s attentions were more precisely focused than simply following Karp’s lead or participating in the latest fad of representational painting.

⁵⁹ Of course Baker donated his diaries and notebooks to Yale, making them available to the public. During his lifetime several excerpts from his diaries were also published as part of exhibition catalogs and the like. Nonetheless, his writings are still of a much more intimate nature than Speiser’s novel and legal works.

⁶⁰ Baker’s maternal grandfather was a self-made millionaire who became the president of the Industrial Trust Company. (Industrial Trust eventually became Fleet National Bank.) Jennifer Farrell, *Get There First, Decide Promptly: The Richard Brown Baker Collection of Postwar Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 14.

⁶¹ An English student at Yale, Baker subsequently attended Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, studying international affairs. Baker spent time as a reporter and editorial assistant at the *Providence Journal-Evening Bulletin*, a private secretary to the American ambassador to Spain, a British specialist with the Federal Communications Commission, and a research analyst and foreign affairs officer for the Office of Strategic Services and its successor, the Central Intelligence Agency. *Ibid.*, 17-18.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 35.

For Baker, Photorealism's appeal lay in its attention to the "American scene"; he acquired works with the intent of exhibiting them under this rubric.⁶³ His realist collection was featured in several exhibitions, including *Richard Brown Baker Collects! A Selection of Contemporary Art from the Richard Brown Baker Collection* in 1975, and *Selections from the Collection of Richard Brown Baker and America in the 70's as Depicted by Artists in the Richard Brown Baker Collection*, both in 1979.⁶⁴ The latter show was the fullest realization of his aspirations for the works. Its Oakland University locale presented a somewhat unique opportunity: curated by Kiichi Usui, a longtime friend who Baker met at the Art Students League in 1957, it was the fourth exhibition of Baker's works at the gallery, his collection having served as the inaugural show in 1966.⁶⁵ This intimate relationship allowed Baker to forcefully articulate his thematic desires for the exhibition, at one point becoming infuriated over what he perceived to be a change in the scope of the show. His consternation turned out to be the result of a typographical error—one that omitted "America in the 70's" from the proposed exhibition title—but Baker's firmness over the curatorial lens is nonetheless significant:

I have been collecting for five or six years in the sphere of works that suggest various aspects of the American scene as artists see it in the 1970s, hoping that the works assembled might someday qualify for presentation in a museum as a theme show illustrating the diversity of media used and approaches taken to the visible world of the United States as it looks in this decade. This subject has interested me partly because of its utter difference as a source of inspiration to artists from the approaches current in the 1950s. It seems the reverse of abstraction.

⁶³ In addition to the nationally-known Photorealists in his collection, Baker also acquired a number of realist works by lesser known artists depicting his hometown, Providence, Rhode Island. Heejung Kim, *Research on the Richard Brown Baker Collection: Insights into the Role of a Collector in Contemporary Art* (M.A. Thesis, S.U.N.Y. Fashion Institute of Technology, 2003), 30.

⁶⁴ Farrell, 46.

⁶⁵ Judith Tannenbaum, "Richard Brown Baker in the 1990s: Portrait of an Eclectic Collector," in *Get There First, Decide Promptly: The Richard Brown Baker Collection of Postwar Art*, 144; and Kiichi Usui, *Expressive Visions and Images: Two Aspects of Art of the 80s from the Richard Brown Baker Collection* (Rochester, MI: Oakland University, 1991), 3.

... I begin now to see that I have misunderstood your intentions, or at least that the theme of the show of visible America in the 1970s, as selected from within the limitations of my personal collection, is out of the question in your gallery...

As I presently view the possibilities, you could put together a less thematic, more blandly generalized exhibition under such a title as "(x number) Paintings of the 1970s from the RBB Col" which would draw upon some of my rather few large realist paintings that have not been shown at Meadowbrook and also exhibit a number of abstracts. Without going through my accessions book attentively, I would say that more than half of my acquisitions of large size paintings during the past 6 or 7 years are in fact abstractions...⁶⁶

The foil of abstraction throughout the letter is telling; Baker maintained both interests simultaneously and often wrestled with the import of his new realist acquisitions, weighing whether his newfound predilection was progressive or retardataire.⁶⁷

This quandary was magnified by Photorealism's particular status as a style that fetched high prices but had gained very little critical traction. A year after his initial communications with Usui, Baker wrote of the show's opening:

Kiichi's show has a theme, one that I myself developed, and have been anxious to do justice to. Pride supports my hope that when I stand in Oakland Meadowland gallery I shall feel that the pictures assembled by me that have been created in this decade and present aspects of the United States are varied enough and of sufficient artistic quality to merit being offered for public viewing. I wouldn't want to feel, and have sophisticated people conclude, that my theme may be tenable and pertinent but that the works shown are less than first class... My misfortune is that the output of artists who are outstanding as photo (or hyper) realists is limited. Their paintings take long to do. Prices are high, consequentially, if one considers that few of them have yet to become desirable to museum curators and rich collectors. The most widely praised photo-realist, Richard Estes, sells at a level beyond my aspiration and has for several years.⁶⁸

Baker's anxieties were not unfounded; these criticisms are now pointed toward his legacy. The most recent assessment of his collection, a comprehensive volume from Yale with essays by art history heavyweights like Thomas Crow and Robert Storr, is fairly dismissive of Baker's

⁶⁶ Richard Brown Baker to Kiichi Usui, October 11, 1978, Richard Brown Baker Papers, MSS 598, Box 3.

⁶⁷ A partial draft of an unused introductory essay Baker wrote for the exhibition articulates the same tension. Richard Brown Baker Papers, MSS 598, Box 3.

⁶⁸ The entry also notes Karp's generosity in extending credit to Baker so he could purchase top works. Richard Brown Baker Papers, Original Diaries, September 18, 1979, MSS 598, Box 45.

Photorealist works. Storr contends: "...Photorealism ended up the strongest suit in Baker's hand at the end of the 1970s, though as a movement it is widely regarded as one of the lesser schools of the decade despite photography's ever broader influence on painting and ever increasing importance as a medium in the same period."⁶⁹ Storr has made valuable contributions to the anti-canonical impulse, but here he perpetuates the perception of Photorealism as a subpar seventies artifact.⁷⁰ Likewise, though he has offered more positive remarks about Photorealism in other forums, in this instance he fails to contribute any new understanding of the style or shed light on why Baker was so attracted to it, calling the collection "idiosyncratic" despite the clear aims Baker expressed in his writings.⁷¹

Despite his internal wrestling over the value of realism, Baker was confident enough in his collecting vision to continue acquiring Photorealist works. Three additional paintings, Goings's *Walt's Restaurant* (1978-79), Martin Hoffman's *CAB (Westford Series)* (1979), and John Salt's *Silver Plymouth in the Woods* (1979), were expressly purchased with the Meadow

⁶⁹ Storr admits that the collection contains "major works" by Bechtle, Goings, and Cottingham, but concludes it is "oddly exclusionary" for lacking substantial pieces by Close, Morely, Richard Artschwager, and Vija Celmins. He overlooks two simple explanations for Baker's neglecting of these artists: they were either above Baker's price range or not associated with Karp, his primary source for Photorealist works. Robert Storr, "A Man About Town," in *Get There First, Decide Promptly*, 105.

⁷⁰ See, for instance, Storr, *Modern Art Despite Modernism* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002).

⁷¹ Storr, "A Man About Town," 105. Storr authored a catalog on Chuck Close, in which he, like many other critics, distinguishes Close from the Photorealists: "Whatever the distinct merits of their paintings, the work of Robert Bechtle, Richard Estes, Ralph Goings, Robert Cottingham and their peers relied on photography for verisimilitude and a certain homogeneous graphic 'look,' but stopped short of any serious scrutiny of the convergence of the two media." He is not wholly disparaging, seeing in the style some critical edge but little formal innovation: "[The style exhibited] a critical ambivalence toward postwar prosperity... In that regard Photorealism as a movement looked 'backward' in technique, and, to a degree in subject matter even as it was being promoted as the next 'new' thing." Storr, *Chuck Close* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002), 40. Storr also recently spoke at a conference held in conjunction with the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum's exhibition *Shared Intelligence: American Painting and the Photograph*—again advocating for a view of art history as a "delta" with various streams, rather than a single mainstream—and participated in the conference's artist panel with Robert Bechtle and Audrey Flack. Storr, "The Great Divide," Challenging 1945: Exploring Continuities in American Art, 1980s to Present Symposium, Georgia O'Keeffe Museum Research Center, Santa Fe, NM, July 14-16, 2011.

Gallery exhibition in mind (figs. 124-126).⁷² *Walt's Restaurant*, which cost Baker \$25,000, was in fact the collector's most expensive acquisition to date.⁷³ Despite the debt Baker incurred with the Goings purchase, he proceeded to buy the Salt painting soon after. Reflecting on the appeal of Salt's work, which features an abandoned, disintegrating Plymouth typical of Salt's subjects, Baker writes: "... in view of the two General Motors Chevrolets being the subject of my smaller Ralph Goings' oil I fancied, especially for the Detroit area, the inclusion of a Chrysler Motor Co.'s Plymouth. And the decayed state of the Plymouth abandoned in the woods, I added, seems appropriate to this time when the Chrysler Co. is known to need financial bailing out by the Federal Government to avoid bankruptcy."⁷⁴ The pointed contemporary economic connection here is not only apt, but, as the second chapter's survey of period criticism suggests, rather unusual. For most observers fetishism—or, in the case of Salt's studies of automotive deterioration, elegiac tribute—is Photorealism's perceived aesthetic tenor.

The catalog essay for *America in the 70s*, written by Oakland University professor Charlotte Stokes, supports Baker's particular vision of contemporary realism's import.⁷⁵ Placing the Photorealists within the specific tradition of landscape painting, Stokes ponders the move away from the 19th century penchant for the picturesque and the drive to "isolate and come to terms with many of the unlovely aspects of the world around us."⁷⁶ As argued in the previous chapter, this reckoning meant not simply accepting the "unlovely" aspects of American objects and places, but recognizing them as key harbingers or embodiments of development patterns—

⁷² Usui, *America in the 70's as Depicted by Artists in the Richard Brown Baker Collection* (Rochester: Oakland University, 1979), 8.

⁷³ Richard Brown Baker Papers, Original Diaries, September 18, 1979, MSS 598, Box 45.

⁷⁴ The Salt also held great appeal because of the artist's very limited production; Baker had wished to purchase a work on first exposure to the artist's work a few years prior, but the entire show was sold out. Ibid.

⁷⁵ Baker also began to write an essay for the exhibition, but it was not included in the final publication. See note 62.

⁷⁶ Charlotte Stokes, "As Artists See It: America in the 1970s," in Usui, *America in the 70's as Depicted by Artists in the Richard Brown Baker Collection*, 11.

locales where new and old forces of both commercial and residential pressures exerted themselves on the landscape. Stokes's conclusions are more tentative, but they nonetheless reinforce Baker's idea of Photorealist socio-spatial relevancy.⁷⁷

Neumann's realist exhibition, organized by Kalamazoo Institute of the Arts in 1981—coincidentally another small Michigan arts institution—is an intriguing foil to Baker's Oakland University showing.⁷⁸ Here the weight of Neumann's force as a collector is immediately evident: the catalog contains an homage to Neumann by Karp and an introductory essay by prolific Photorealist advocate Linda Chase, while the exhibition eventually traveled to a larger institution, the Terra Museum of American Art.⁷⁹ Both Karp and Chase sing Neumann's praises. Chase writes, "Collecting these works in the early seventies when the work was new and shocking and its staying power untested, took a distinct kind of collecting courage which we can only admire and applaud."⁸⁰ The exhibition is itself rather scattershot, extending beyond the landscape-centered focus of Baker's gathering to include studio realists and a variety of other genres. Further thematic threads or a larger sense of stylistic import are left unexplored; the

⁷⁷ Stokes's tenor is also notably different from an essay devoted to Baker's realist works in *Richard Brown Baker Collects!* The earlier work, written by a Yale graduate student, provides an insightful dissection of the workings of the form, but ultimately deigns it severely wanting: "In the attempt to reconcile the boldness of and monumentality of recent painting with the exquisite precision of pure literalism, the photo-realist's response to the world is embarrassed, laconic, and opinionless." Leo J. Rubinfien, "Laconic Literalism," in *Richard Brown Baker Collects! A Selection of Contemporary Art from the Richard Brown Baker Collection*, ed. Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr. (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1975), 104.

⁷⁸ The exhibition traveled to several Midwest and East Coast museums. Linda Chase, *American Super Realism From the Morton G. Neumann Family Collection*, ed. Helen Sheridan (Kalamazoo: Kalamazoo Institute of the Arts, 1981), 1.

⁷⁹ The dealer in fact suggested the show to the Kalamazoo director. *Ibid.*, 2. The Terra Foundation altered the exhibition name from *Super Realism from the Morton G. Neumann Family Collection* to *American Super Realism from the Morton G. Neumann Family Collection*. See *American Super Realism from the Morton G. Neumann Family Collection* (Evanston, IL: Terra Museum of American Art, 1983).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 4. Another Photorealist collector, William Jaeger, reports similar sentiments: "Looking back at 1970 it is impossible to describe the courage it took to consider buying a 4'x5' painting of a beat up pickup truck and hang it in one's living room. Most traditional paintings of that era were usually smaller, more colorful, and certainly much prettier." Yet, the painting in question (Goings's *Paul's Corner Cushion*, 1970) had in fact already been sold to Max Palevsky, another wealthy collector who also commissioned Goings to make a painting of his home. See note 48 above; and William Jaeger, "A Collector's Story," in *In Sharp Focus: Super-Realism*, ed. Constance Schwartz (Roslyn Harbor: Nassau County Museum of Art, 1991), 5.

organizers seemingly presumed that the collector's storied history with modernist heavyweights would elevate Photorealism, positioning it as a similarly avant-garde trend equally worthy of top-tier collectors.

Baker, by contrast, continued to accumulate works with iconographic links. Like Speiser's commission, Baker's collection contains a significant record of the ties between the three Bay Area Photorealists. Among the works the collector purchased in the 1980s are the portraits discussed in chapter one: Bechtle's self portrait, *Santa Barbara Chairs* (1983), (the color lithograph version of) his portrait of McLean, *Santa Barbara Patio* (1982), and his portrait of Goings, *Sacramento Montego* (1980) (figs. 28, 26, 29).⁸¹ It is unclear whether Baker sought out these works because of their status as artist's portraits, or perhaps simply because of their similarly strong, distilled iconography. Each man is figured alone, their bodies functioning as pivot points between the stark brights and darks of the outdoor scenes. Baker collected a number of realist portraits during the eighties, many of which were again featured by Usui in another exhibition at the Meadow Brook Gallery, *Expressive Visions and Exquisite Images: Two Aspects of the Art of the 80s from the Richard Brown Baker Collection*. By this time, as Usui notes in the catalog, realism's return seemed more at home amidst the pastiche-heavy tenor of the moment. Yet, Baker's response to this suggestion of an appropriationist decade was to again stress his continued acquisition of abstraction alongside realism.⁸² Though here the collector's fondness for abstraction seems less indicative of equivocations over realism: with abstraction's critical zenith

⁸¹ Baker acquired *Santa Barbara Chairs* for the sum of \$25,980, despite just having bought a self portrait by realist William Beckman for \$58,000. The Beckman self portrait remained the most expensive work Baker ever purchased. Jan Howard, "A Maverick Collector for the 1980s," in *Get There First, Decide Promptly: The Richard Brown Baker Collection of Postwar Art*, 138.

⁸² The show also contained neo-expressionist works and more conceptual uses of photography by artists like John Baldessari and Chuck Close. Usui, *Expressive Visions and Images: Two Aspects of Art of the 80s from the Richard Brown Baker Collection*, 14.

now well in the past, Baker's comments read as democratic impulses rather than an outdated allegiance to high modernism.

Bechtle's artist portraits may have also held a personal resonance for Baker. The quiet dignity of the three artists is echoed in a portrait Usui made of Baker—the curator was also a realist painter—in the early nineties (fig. 127). Of this painting, which was based on a casual photograph taken in Baker's apartment, Baker remarked: “If I'd anticipated that a portrait was to be created from my pose at that moment, I'd probably have been self-conscious and worn a different pair of trousers. What enhances your painting is its unpremeditated informality.”⁸³ This same unrehearsed quality likewise informs Bechtle's portraits, adding to the vividness of their photographic accuracy. Bechtle's works exude gravity through contrasts of light and austere staging, but also maintain the ease of everyday life, as with the noted informal trousers and slightly bemused expression relayed in Usui's portrait of the collector. Though not quite equivalent to the autobiographical indulgence Speiser exhibited by commissioning an entire stylistic stable of artists to create paintings around his aviation passions, the urge to collect works with personal resonance also seemed to strike Baker in his later years.⁸⁴

Ultimately, Speiser, Neumann, and Baker's penchant for Photorealism cannot be distilled to a singular impulse or aesthetic ideology. Photorealism's “neutrality” or openness make it susceptible to many uses, but the passions of these collectors also point to its relevance to contemporary culture. While Baker's collecting habits and curatorial inclinations are generally the most thoroughly articulated, Speiser and Neumann's collections also offer valuable documents of both a collecting era and the height of Photorealist production. These purchased

⁸³ Baker, letter to Usui, December 11, 1992, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, RI, quoted in Tannenbaum, 146.

⁸⁴ Baker liked Usui's portrait enough to purchase it from his friend. Tannenbaum, 146. Likewise Baker admitted the William Beckman self portrait he purchased around the same time (see note 75) reminded him of himself. Howard, 121.

and commissioned works convey unexpected aspects of the objects' circulation and historically relevant connections like the Speiser works' allusions to military conflict or Baker's insistence that the best Photorealism was a measure of socio-environmental shifts. The collectors' embrace is also an essential counterweight to general critical antipathy, reflecting a readiness to move not just beyond the confines of modernist abstraction, but also past the then well-established trends of the 1960s. Purchasing Photorealist works still yielded impressively big, well-crafted paintings, but also often linked wealthy collectors with decidedly banal, "low" subjects. Among the trio's collected works are pictures of cars, trucks, diners, fast food restaurants, delis, toys, airports, produce, neon signage, suburban patios and gardens, Times Square billboards, Las Vegas motels, motorcycle carburetors, and gutters full of trash. They were thus occasionally accused of aesthetic slumming, but given their own origins as collecting novices, it seems more appropriate to consider their tastes as evidence of continued open-mindedness about value in contemporary art. As Baker aptly commented, "My collection represents more time spent walking around and looking than it does money. That's been my minor contribution to American life—to be there and buy what's not yet wanted."⁸⁵

The German Connection: Peter Ludwig and *documenta V*

Photorealist collecting, of course, was not limited to American buyers. By the mid-seventies Photorealist exhibitions were an international phenomenon, with showings in France, England, Germany, Spain, Italy, and Japan. In terms of purchases though, Germany led the

⁸⁵ Roberta Smith, "Richard Brown Baker, Collector and Donor of Contemporary Art, Dies at 89," *The New York Times*, January 27, 2002 <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/27/nyregion/richard-brown-baker-collector-and-donor-of-contemporary-art-dies-at-89.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm> (accessed June 4, 2012).

pack.⁸⁶ Germany was also the site where the international community first took notice of the style at *documenta V*. German acquisitions caused consternation among both American critics and dealers, while the 1972 *documenta* would become an iconically-charged event, tapping into contemporary arguments over institutional power and the merits of a return to realism. The fluid relationships between German collectors, exhibitions, and museums are a particularly fertile instance Photorealist exchange abroad, and indicate how the style's perceived American identity entered the international mix.

In 1970 Phyllis Tuchman contributed a lengthy article to *Artforum* on the history of American art in Germany. Unlike Abstract Expressionism, which had taken longer to reach to Europe, Pop was seen nearly simultaneously in the U.S. and Europe. By early 1963 Ileana Sonnabend, whose gallery served as a central distributor for American art, had mounted a show of works by Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist, Claes Oldenburg, and John Chamberlain at her Paris gallery—less than a year after Pop made a major splash in New York.⁸⁷ In turn, the strong market in place for Pop fostered a warm reception for Photorealism among many of Germany's leading art aficionados. Pages of reproductions accompanying Tuchman's text catalog the leagues of works by top American artists like Warhol, Johns, Lichtenstein, and Rauschenberg then held in German collections:

Newer acquisitions convey how much readier and more prepared Germans are to buy recent American art than Americans, either museums or private collectors... It is astonishing to see so much American art in Germany and it is unnerving to see New York

⁸⁶ Though it is difficult to statistically document the breakdown of various foreign buyers, both Karp and Meisel confirm that Germans were the lead purchasers. Art periodicals and period memoirs also bear out this market dominance. Ivan and Ethan Karp, interview by author, April 17, 2012; and Meisel, interview by author, April 13, 2012.

⁸⁷ Catherine Dossin, "Pop begeistert: American Pop Art and the German People," *American Art* 25, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 102-3. On Ileana Sonnabend's role in the Parisian art world, see Hiroko Ikegami, *The Great Migrator: Robert Rauschenberg and the Global Rise of American Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), 17-56.

art there before it is displayed in New York. Much of the art is so well-chosen that the pleasure of experiencing art is even more rewarding than in New York.⁸⁸

Tuchman's ambivalent tone implies pride in American movements' attractiveness to German buyers—a clear confirmation of their recent innovations—and admiration for German aesthetic savvy, but also envy of Germany's more developed cultural system, one where the value of contemporary art was readily apparent. As for the German predilection for figurative American art, Tuchman surmises that these works align with the nation's own Expressionist and Bauhaus histories—a heritage occluded by the traumas of World War II. Thus, according to the critic, “Instead of a lot of color field paintings, for example, one will unexpectedly see in the Aachen museum some work by figurative artists (Sidney Tillim, Lowell Nesbitt). The American art seen in Germany is not necessarily proportionate to the way it is seen in New York.⁸⁹ Germany's interest in American realism is clearly distinguished as out of sync with domestic priorities; in the case of Photorealism, which lacked American critical approval, German buyers' boldness would make many observers increasingly uncomfortable.

American Photorealist dealers were somewhat divided on the issue of foreign collectors. Meisel shared Tuchman's ambivalence over European market prowess. The gallerist recalls resisting the tidal wave of foreign interest in the mid-seventies: he attempted to both retain and buy back pieces, in order to “keep” or “reclaim” them for the American market and or museums.⁹⁰ Karp, perhaps as a byproduct of his time at Castelli, seemed more at ease with

⁸⁸ Phyllis Tuchman, “American Art in Germany: The History of a Phenomenon,” *Artforum* 9, no. 3 (November 1970): 68.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁹⁰ Meisel comments that he perceived some of the French collectors in particular as faddish. Meisel, interview by author, April 13, 2012.

European buyers.⁹¹ Richard Brown Baker—himself attuned to foreign “competition”—conveys the weighty presence of certain European collectors in the Castelli circle. Recounting a conversation with a peer concerning a recent Lichtenstein show, Baker reports, “I mentioned that Dr. Peter Ludwig has bought one of the larger paintings. Arnold commented that Ludwig is Germany (in respect to pouring money into American art) and that if he were Castelli, he’d keep Ludwig under armed guard... It amuses me to imagine Hans Kraus and Leo Castelli in a tug-of-war to pull money out of the German chocolate manufacturer.”⁹²

The “chocolate manufacturer” was indeed one of Germany’s leading collectors of American art; Castelli referred to him as “the best collector I ever had.”⁹³ Along with Karl Ströher, Wolfgang Hahn, Siegfried Cremer, and Heinz Beck, Ludwig amassed a vast collection of postwar American art. As Tuchman notes, the difference between elite German and American collectors lay not only in their frequently aggressive pursuit the latest contemporary art, but that the works they acquired often immediately filtered into museum collections.⁹⁴ Eventually accumulating over 50,000 artworks and establishing over thirty museums in Germany and abroad, Ludwig helped rebuild national holdings decimated by Nazi plundering.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, dealings with East Germany, the Soviet Union, and other Communist nations, along with the sale

⁹¹ Castelli was Italian and ran a gallery in Paris specializing in Surrealism prior to immigrating to America. He also maintained strong ties with ex-wife, Ileana Sonnabend. Sonnabend’s role in the European art world is discussed further below.

⁹² Richard Brown Baker Papers, Original Diaries, March 24, 1971, MSS 598, Box 42. Rosenquist also provides another amusing anecdote of collecting rivalry between Ludwig and architect Philip Johnson. Rosenquist, 199. Hans Kraus was a renowned rare book dealer; Ludwig also collected Medieval manuscripts. See Wolfgang Saxon, “Hans Peter Kraus, 81, Book Dealer and Collector,” *New York Times*, November 2, 1988, <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/11/02/obituaries/hans-peter-kraus-81-book-dealer-and-collector.html> (accessed March 4, 2013).

⁹³ Ferdinand Protzman, “Peter the Great,” *Artnews* 91 (February 1992): 77.

⁹⁴ Tuchman, 60.

⁹⁵ Eric Pace, “Peter Ludwig, 71, German Art Collector, Dies,” *The New York Times*, July 23, 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/07/23/arts/peter-ludwig-71-german-art-collector-dies.html> (accessed June 4, 2012); and Frank Whitford, “Obituary: Peter Ludwig,” *The Independent*, July 27, 1996, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-peter-ludwig-1330671.html> (accessed June 4, 2012).

of his prized medieval manuscript collection to an American institution caused considerable consternation among European museum officials and scholars.⁹⁶ Likewise, though he held a Ph.D. in art history, Ludwig's tastes also came under fire. Critics claimed he was frequently misguided by inclinations toward faddish developments and representational works. As one British obituary asserts, "In spite of his reliance on unpaid specialist advisers, most of them scholarly museum curators, he had his blind spots. He thought abstraction had had its day, had no sympathy for conceptual art, and too often acquired whatever was fleetingly fashionable. His own taste was for the representational; hyperrealism, or, indeed, the realist painting encouraged in the Soviet satellites."⁹⁷ Even in the international market, purchasing Photorealism meant risking critical reproach.

As he had done with Pop at the previous *documenta* in 1968, Ludwig made a major spate of Photorealist acquisitions at *documenta V*.⁹⁸ Much has been written about the famously troubled event, which became an art world flash point for debates over both contemporary aesthetics and the role of art institutions. The exhibition is also particularly relevant to the discussion of realist reception and interpretation. *Documenta* had by the early seventies succeeded the Venice Biennale as the most talked about European art event.⁹⁹ Harald Szeeman curated the 1972 exhibition, following his innovative work at the Bern Kunsthalle, *Live in Your*

⁹⁶ The latter was donated to the J. Paul Getty Museum amidst suspicion of tax evasion from the German government; Ludwig paid a fine and the matter was dropped. Thanks to Melanie Sympson for this medieval scholarship perspective.

⁹⁷ Whitford also claims Ludwig's expertise did not prevent him from buying only second-rate Picassos—the very subject of his dissertation. Whitford, "Obituary: Peter Ludwig." Ludwig likewise clashed with curators and critics over his collection of East German art and his contention that Nazi art should be exhibited. Protzman, 78-9.

⁹⁸ Dossin, 107.

⁹⁹ On *documenta*'s usurping of the Venice Biennale's place as the most watched European art world event, see Franz Schulze, "Europe's Big Summer Art Feast," *Chicago Daily News*, August 5-6, 1972, 5.

Head: When Attitudes Become Form—the first major European survey of Conceptual art.¹⁰⁰

Documenta v's governance and content likewise raised the ire of participants and audiences. Art world cognoscenti perceived the shift away from Szeeman's original vision—the first plan adapted founder Arnold Bode's slogan "Museum of 100 Days" into a "100-Day Event," but was determined financially and practically unfeasible—to a thematic framework as a disappointing retreat from a happenings-like challenge to the institutional mainstream.¹⁰¹ Subsequently, sculptor and conceptualist Robert Morris issued an open statement of protest in *Flash Art* co-signed by a number of prominent artists, decrying the lack of control they maintained in exhibiting their works. Morris also alluded to dissatisfaction with Szeeman's curatorial lens: "I do not wish to have my work used to illustrate misguided sociological principles or outmoded art historical categories."¹⁰² Thus *documenta V* arrived as an already embattled event; that it was enormously expensive and included a palpable streak of sensationalism only added fodder for critics who perceived the rise of such outsized events as a sign of the art world's descent into the carnivalesque.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Szeeman's approach offered artists an unusually high degree of control over their contributions, but also signaled the rising phenomenon of curator as auteur, gathering diverse contemporary artists to stage a unique event. The exhibition however, met with public disapproval, particularly by Kunsthalle board members who decried the lack of Swiss representation. Szeeman subsequently resigned from his position as director of the Kunsthalle. Barry Barker, "When Attitudes Become Form," *Flash Art* 275 (November – December 2010) http://www.flashartonline.com/interno.php?pagina=articolo_det&id_art=672&det=ok&title=WHEN-ATTITUDES-BECOME-FORM (accessed June 5, 2012).

¹⁰¹ Szeeman's change of heart was not simply a matter of costs: his previous exhibition *Happening and Fluxus* was disrupted by artists' protests over the removal of a work by Wolf Vostell that included a calving cow; Szeeman himself joined the counter-protest. The *Happening and Fluxus* debacle further convinced the curator that an event-based concept would be ultimately unrealizable. Gabriele Mackert, "documenta 5," in *50 Jahre documenta, 1955-2005*, vol. 1, eds. Michael Glasmeier and Karin Stengel (Göttingen: Steidl, 2005), 253-54.

¹⁰² Annelie Lütgens, "documenta 5," in *50 Jahre documenta*, 258. Carl Andre, Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Fred Sandback, and Robert Smithson withdrew from the exhibition. Hans Haacke, Sol LeWitt, Dorothy Rockburne, and Richard Serra ultimately allowed their work to be shown, but their indignation epitomized rising discontent over institutional strictures. Friedhelm Scharf, Gisela Schirmer, "Off the Wall, Artists' Refusals and Rejections: A History of Conflict," in *50 Jahre documenta*, 120.

¹⁰³ See, for instance, conservative voices familiar from chapter two, Barbara Rose and Hilton Kramer. Barbara Rose, "Document of an Age," *New York Magazine*, August 14, 1972, 66-67; and Hilton Kramer, "Documenta 5: The Bayreuth of the Neo-Dadaists," *The New York Times*, July 9, 1972, 15. Douglas Davis, writing in *Newsweek*, also

Documenta v's art, too, was the subject of much debate. Under the rubric of "Questioning Reality: Image Worlds Today," Szeeman and his team included not only a broad range of contemporary art practices, but also work by "outsider artists" and common objects, effectively effacing the boundaries between high art and the everyday. Responses were decidedly mixed, with critics divided between those who appreciated the bold gesture toward inclusiveness and those who found its scope scattered, arcane, or self-defeatingly silly. Photorealism was a fitting match for Szeeman's attempt at aesthetic meritocracy, but for those who saw *documenta* as a glorified marketplace, the style's profusion of polish and glorification of the everyday made it simply a commodity object par excellence.¹⁰⁴

In some ways Photorealism's presence at *documenta V* was a part of commodity exchange: following the style's extensive inclusion—eleven American painters were shown, in addition to Europeans with similar practices, like Franz Gertsch and Gerhard Richter—Ludwig acquired a large number of works straight from the exhibition.¹⁰⁵ Ultimately his collection would rival, if not exceed, those of his American counterparts. In addition to Ludwig's bulk Photorealist procurement, there were other commercial extensions: a limited edition portfolio of lithographs, *10 documenta super realists*, was also produced in association with the exhibition.¹⁰⁶

pronounced the exhibition a spectacle lacking substance. Douglas Davis, "Art is Unnecessary. Or Is It?" *Newsweek*, July 17, 1972, 68-69.

¹⁰⁴ See, for instance, William Feaver, "Documenta, Eurofrut and the New Art," *London Magazine*, December – January 1972-73, 114; and "Document of a Dead End," *The Guardian*, July 10, 1972. Douglas Davis's *Newsweek* review (cited above) also critiques the show's commercialism.

¹⁰⁵ The exhibition also included realist sculptors Duane Hanson and John De Andrea, and a number of other realist painters such as Alfred Leslie, Howard Kanovitz, and Wayne Thiebaud. Lütgens, 250, & 260. Ludwig's purchases included paintings by Bechtle, Estes, Goings, McLean, Eddy, Salt, Schonzeit, Morely, and Close, many of whom he continued collect in subsequent years. The collector also acquired realist sculptures by Duane Hanson and Nancy Graves. My list has been culled from a number of sources including Meisel's *Photorealism* series, the Serpentine Gallery catalog referenced below, and the online collection databases of various Ludwig museums.

¹⁰⁶ The portfolio includes Staiger, Schonzeit, Salt, McLean, Goings, Gertsch, Eddy, Cottingham, Bechtle, and Posen in an edition of 300. See Museum of Modern Art Collection's Database, http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?criteria=O%3AAD%3AE%3A424%7CA%3AAR%3AE%3A1&page_number=3&template_id=1&sort_order=1 (accessed July 24, 2012).

And yet, Photorealism's presence was not just an indicator of purely market-driven desires, nor were Ludwig's purchases ferreted away as part of an inaccessible aesthetic empire. As Tuchman observed in the case of Pop art, these acquisitions were immediately put on view in museum collections and traveling exhibitions. Ludwig had in fact exhibited earlier Photorealist purchases at the Neue Galerie der Stadt Aachen two years prior, while portions of the collection traveled to London and Paris following *documenta* in 1973 and 1974.¹⁰⁷

Moreover, Ludwig recognized the capitalist elements of his taste—in the case of his Pop collection, he freely admitted that was part of the works' appeal—but also asserted these embodiments of American consumerism were in sync with West Germany's own postwar boom and the desire for material rewards in a culture with fresh memories of wartime austerity.

Christin J. Mamiya emphasizes that while the U.S. Marshall Plan provided substantial economic investment and guaranteed the presence of American goods in many parts of postwar Europe, it had the most pronounced impact in West Germany and was thus an essential catalyst in the creation of a receptive German audience for American Pop.¹⁰⁸ Ludwig remarked of his first Pop purchase, Tom Wesselman's *Landscape No. 2*, which features a German Volkswagen Beetle, "Every communist behind the Iron curtain wants a fridge, an auto and a tv. This is his idea of heaven. Medieval art was about God and the Next World. This art is about now, this world. It is about heaven on earth."¹⁰⁹ It seems probable that Photorealist purchases with similar

¹⁰⁷ Deutsche Guggenheim, "Picturing America: Photorealism in the 1970s, March 7 – May 10, 2009," www.deutsche-guggenheim.de/assets/pdf/presstext-46-en.pdf (accessed September 9, 2010). The London exhibition, *Photo-Realism: Paintings, sculpture and prints from the Ludwig Collection and others*, was held at Serpentine Gallery; its catalog essay is discussed further below. The Paris exhibition was *Art conceptuel et hyperréaliste: Collection Ludwig, Aix-La Chapelle*, at ARC in the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris.

¹⁰⁸ Mamiya argues the Marshall plan was most essential and effective in West Germany not only because of its pivotal symbolic status, but because the nation's economy (closed, highly regulated) was so markedly transformed by the new American model. Christin J. Mamiya, "The 'Triumph' of America Art? Pop Art in the Postwar World," in *Internationalizing the History of American Art*, eds. Barbara Groseclose and Jochen Wierich (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 188-89.

¹⁰⁹ Francis Wyndham, "Art in the Ruhr," *London Sunday Times*, August 9, 1970, 29.

iconography, such as Don Eddy's *Untitled (Volkswagen)* (1971)—one of a number of Eddy's Volkswagen images shown at *documenta* and recently featured in promotional materials for an exhibition of the Ludwig collection—were part of the same cultural collecting impulse (figs. 128, 129).¹¹⁰ In addition, certain aspects of Photorealism likely appealed to preexisting German fetishizations of American culture. For instance, McLean's horse imagery presumably resonated with the broad readership of Karl May's nineteenth-century novels about the American West; May's stories have remained popular for over a century and continue to draw hundreds of thousands of fans to the annual Karl May Festival each summer.¹¹¹ McLean's *Rustler Charger* (1971), which features an Appaloosa horse and other nods to both cowboy and American Indian culture, was shown at *documenta V* and purchased by Ludwig (fig. 81).

At *documenta*, Szeeman's inclusion of the style fit the kind of messy realist investigation articulated in his "Questioning Reality" framework. The three sub-categories devised for the exhibition, "The Reality of Representation," "The Reality of the Represented," "The Identity or Non-Identity of Representation and the Represented," initially sound tautological but in fact aptly formulate intersecting interests for the profusion of contemporary realist inquiries.¹¹²

Documenta v's purposeful contradictions are best exemplified by the "Individual Mythologies" portion of the exhibition, conceived by Szeeman himself. Szeeman explained this oxymoronic designation, which appears to break with the general theme of investigating reality, in semi-contentious terms: "When it began to look like photorealism and conceptual art might dominate,

¹¹⁰ Meisel's *Photorealism* lists the painting's title as *Untitled (Volkswagen and Pontiac)* whereas the Ludwig Museum omits Pontiac, the American brand name, from the title. Meisel, *Photorealism*, 195.

¹¹¹ Rivka Galchen, "Wild West Germany: Why do cowboys and Indians so captivate the country?" *New Yorker*, April 9, 2012, 40-45.

¹¹² Though Szeeman's hybrid model of Hegelian dialectics and Saussurian semiotics was perhaps not transparent to audiences, that very confusion was fitting, and perhaps semi-intentional. In addition to the confusion expressed in a number reviews, Szeeman and his collaborators' elaborate table, which assigns each of the exhibitions themes to one of the three categories, was not made public. Lütgens, 252, 255-56.

I stepped in with the ‘Individual Mythologies’ and deliberately threw a wrench into the works... These stupid debates between representational and nonrepresentational are unimportant. Those are all totally idiotic distinctions: conceptual or realistic.”¹¹³ Beyond rebuking those who saw the exhibition as a simplistic contest between Conceptualism and realism, Szeeman’s comments also allude to a political hurdle the exhibitors were unable to overcome: wanting to include socialist realism alongside contemporary realist trends from the West, they solicited works from the Soviet Union, China, and East Germany, but ultimately all three nations declined to participate.¹¹⁴ Ostensibly what Szeeman desired was not to distill essential traits of realist (or Conceptualist) practice, but to embrace the broad implications of the term in a manner appropriate to the both the rapidly shifting, pluralistic aesthetic zeitgeist and the very ground in which “art” and “life” were becoming less distinct.

The layout of the exhibition bears out this manifold-realisms approach and provides an indication of the particular context for Photorealism. Within the Neue Galerie, the curators presented “Parallel Images Worlds” in the basement, “Realism” (Photorealism’s location) and “Trivial Realism—Trivial Emblematics” (kitsch/common objects) on the ground floor, and “Artistry of the Mentally Ill,” and “Image World and Piety” on the upper floor. Thus the entire building engaged multiple takes on the construction of imagery and reality. The juxtaposition of the “Realism” with “Trivial Realism” is also a noteworthy provocation, encouraging the kind of comparisons denigrators of realism were only too happy to engage and thus precisely what exhibitors usually made sure to keep at bay (figs. 130, 131). In addition, the relatively more

¹¹³ Ibid., 260.

¹¹⁴ Moscow initially consented, but withdrew shortly before the exhibition was set to open without explanation. China was asked to loan the *Rent Collection Courtyard*, a group of life-size sculptures from the Cultural Revolution, but refused on the grounds that it was a national monument, though even the request to exhibit duplicates was denied. East Germany was solicited late in the process, and with no other socialist nations taking part, refused. Scharf and Schirmer, 119.

traditional practice of realist painting was also set against the living reality of performance art.¹¹⁵

Given the frequent propensity of American exhibitions to resort to historical lineages when attempting to crack the proverbial neo-realist nut, Szeeman's attempt remains an unusual instance of a wide contemporary embrace.

Ultimately the profusion of realisms on show at *documenta V* implied not only philosophical investigation, but also a sociological aim of surveying various realities in an egalitarian setting. In the case of Photorealism, European audiences were generally more apt to perceive social character as part and parcel of the works' media investigations than their American counterparts.¹¹⁶ When Ludwig's mass-Photorealist acquisition from *documenta V* was exhibited at London's Serpentine Gallery the following year, Lawrence Alloway reflected on Photorealism's place in *documenta* for the accompanying catalog. Noting that the original intent was to show the style alongside social realism, the critic concludes:

The project was clearly based on an iconographical reading of the works involved. What is characteristic of the photographic realists, but the topography of the interfaces and points-of-sale of American life? ... Thus there is a subject matter of great accessibility, not only to Americans who recognize the details of the hardware but to Europeans who recognize the process of industrialization that makes all of this possible and who know their equivalents.¹¹⁷

Though Alloway's perception of iconographic focus is somewhat at odds with Szeeman's intended framework, the critic's contention of European relatability is accurate. Moreover, few American observers extrapolated the historical relevance Alloway clearly identifies.

¹¹⁵ Gilbert & George, Joseph Beuys, Vito Acconci, Ben Vautier and a number of others presented diverse forms of bodily engagement. One imagines that viewing Gilbert and George's performance *Living Sculpture* would have made a particularly salient juxtaposition with John De Andrea and Duane Hanson's lifelike sculptures. Lütgens, 260.

¹¹⁶ The bent toward socio-political interpretation is evidenced not only in many European exhibition reviews, but also recent curatorial approaches. See, for instance, the 2011 suite of Photorealist exhibitions at the Ludwig Museums in Vienna, Aachen, and Budapest (the latter version included an intriguing comparison with Central and Eastern European parallels), the Deutsche Guggenheim's *Picturing America: Photorealism in the 1970s* (2009) and the Musée d'Art moderne et contemporain de Strasbourg's *Hyperréalisme USA 1965-1975* (2003).

¹¹⁷ Lawrence Alloway, "Introduction," in *Photo-Realism: Paintings, Sculpture and Prints from the Ludwig Collection and Others*, ed. Serpentine Gallery (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1973), n.p. Alloway is more generous toward realism here than in his earlier essay, "Notes on Realism." See chapter two.

These national discrepancies could simply be attributed to cultural remove, the social import of ordinary events and circumstances being easier to observe from a distance.¹¹⁸ Much like Tuchman's historical assertions concerning German attraction to American figurative art, Robert Storr contends the precedent of *Neue Sachlichkeit* predisposed German viewers to "representational art of the least sentimental and most graphic variety."¹¹⁹ This may be the case, though one could argue France and America have equally strong nineteenth and twentieth-century realist traditions. Alternatively, a recent exhibition at the Deutsche Guggenheim suggested that German audiences were primed to see the social value in the style's engagement with reproduction in part because of widespread familiarity with Walter Benjamin's seminal 1936 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."¹²⁰ That reference and similar associations between Pop Art and the Frankfurt School, however, are the subject of some debate. German cultural historian Andreas Huyssen's anecdote of originally misinterpreting Pop as part of the Frankfurt School's legacy (and thus intended as a critique of capitalism's consumer society) is frequently repeated by historians; Mamiya likewise contends the wide influence of such theorists as Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse account for some of the ambivalent critical responses to Pop.¹²¹ But Catherine Dossin argues that this interpretation is a misconstrued legacy, inaccurate in applying the theoretical interests of leftist intellectuals to the broader populace. In Dossin's view Pop actually appealed to Germans in a fairly straightforward manner, i.e. as a model of aspirational lifestyles now finally accessible in the postwar boom years.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Ludwig offered this explanation as a reason for the relatively delayed acceptance of American Pop art on its home turf. Mamiya, 190-91.

¹¹⁹ Storr, *Chuck Close*, 38.

¹²⁰ Mark Gisbourne, "In the Republic of Realism," *Deutsche Guggenheim Magazine*, Spring 2009, 10-11.

¹²¹ Mamiya, 192; and Andreas Huyssen, "The Cultural Politics of Pop: Reception and Critique of U.S. Pop Art in the Federal Republic of Germany," *New German Critique* 4 (1975): 77-97.

¹²² Dossin, 100-1.

Ludwig's comments on his collecting habits support this latter interpretation, but the interpretive lens Szeeman's provided at *documenta v* offered more complex terms of reception for Photorealism. Szeeman engaged with the risk of complicating rather than clarifying neo-realist practices, while Ludwig was eager to crown Photorealism alongside Pop as an index of the desirability of American lifestyles, recognizing the value of capitalist democracy both abroad and at home. Their divergent interpretations, however, were both unencumbered by the baggage of many American critics and collectors: loyalty to domestic modernism or wariness of indulging perceptions of the U.S. as lacking historic and cultural depth. While Speiser, Neumann, and Baker tie the style to both realist anxieties and patriotic confidence native to the postwar American art world, Ludwig and Szeeman's actions and interpretations speak to German appetites for American art as a means to growing their own nation's cultural status, frank views of contemporary consumption, and support for a wide sphere of aesthetic production—one that purposefully bled into the objects and qualities of everyday life.

New Novels, New Realism: Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes

Following *documenta V* a number of French exhibitions were devoted to Photorealism, including the aforementioned Ludwig collection exhibition, *Réalisme* at the Palais des Beaux Arts, *Hyperréalisme* at the Galerie Isy Branchot, *hyperréalistes américains – réalistes européens* at the Centre National d'Art Contemporain, *Hyperréalistes américains* at Galerie Arditti, and *Grands Maîtres Hyperréalistes américains* at Galerie des 4 Mouvements. The French market for the style was initially less robust than that of Germany, but this was true for much American art during the period: Paris, in particular Ileana Sonnabend's influential gallery, was a pivotal showcase for new American works, but generally served as a distribution point rather than the

ultimate destination.¹²³ But if the market was smaller, critical attention was all the more substantial.

The most significant of these networks of influence, comprised of novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet, theorist Roland Barthes, and several Photorealist advocates, illuminates how French theory and criticism were used to justify American artworks. The connections between the French writers and American interpreters are not direct—they span several decades of production and include works produced long before Photorealism’s international debut—but reveal how cross-media and cross-cultural parallels were translated in the search to redefine realist form. In this network of influences, Robbe-Grillet’s early novels became central examples in Barthes’s literary criticism, Barthes’s writings on the novelist in turn spurred Robbe-Grillet towards his own critical assertions, and these statements by Robbe-Grillet were taken up as inspiration for writing on American Photorealism. Ultimately the connection between Robbe-Grillet and the Photorealists was repeated frequently enough to reach the painters and even Robbe-Grillet himself; the chain of influence hence came full-circle. This exchange between French literature and American painting was never a one-to-one ratio, but rather reflected the selective interests of each party, with writers, theorists, critics, and artists borrowing each others’ words and visual motifs in an effort to articulate the formal operations and social implications of postwar realism.

At the center of this web is Robbe-Grillet, a leading figure of the *nouveau roman* movement. Several of his novels written in the 1950s quickly won the admiration of prominent French cultural commentators and critics like Barthes, but also engendered a substantial backlash among the nation’s literary establishment.¹²⁴ He and his fellow *nouveau romanciers* incited fierce

¹²³ Ludwig and other major collectors frequently purchased work from Sonnabend. Ikegami, 43, 54-55.

¹²⁴ Other members of the *nouveau roman* group include Nathalie Sarraute, Michel Butor, Marguerite Duras, Robert Pinget, and Claude Simon. The group, however, was not particularly cohesive; the label has been applied to different authors at different times. The most direct link is the writers’ initially shared publisher, Les Editions de Minuit.

debate over their tendency to dispense with clear plots, chronology, and character, often filling pages with extensive descriptions of ordinary objects. Notably, American academics were alert and receptive to the phenomenon early on: in 1959 *Yale French Studies* devoted an entire issue to the so-called “Midnight Novelists,” and by the early 1960s American scholar Bruce Morrisette would also become one of the foremost interpreters of Robbe-Grillet’s work, in turn influencing the novelist’s own perspective.¹²⁵

Among American art historians, Linda Nochlin was the first to propose the nouveau roman/neo-realist parallel in her influential 1968 exhibition *Realism Now*:

Robbe-Grillet’s call-to-arms—“Let it first of all by their presence that objects and gestures establish themselves, and let this presence continue to prevail over whatever explanatory theory may try to enclose them in a system of references... Gestures and objects will be there before being something; and they will still be there afterwards, hard, unalterable, eternally present, mocking their own ‘meaning’ ”—this credo could serve as the leitmotif of the new-realist outlook as a whole.¹²⁶

Though Nochlin is speaking to the broader spectrum of realist practices that reemerged in the 1960s, her reference to Robbe-Grillet would be repeated by a number of Photorealist commentators. Occasionally these citations function merely as a marker of substance—a shortcut to elevate paintings of common American scenery through reference to challenging French

Robbe-Grillet also worked as a literary consultant for the press. Arthur E. Babcock, *The New Novel in France: Theory and Practice of the Nouveau Roman* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 1-3.

¹²⁵ “Midnight Novelists” is a reference to the authors’ publisher. See *Yale French Studies* 24 (1959). This is not to say the movement was universally well regarded among American audiences: among others, Truman Capote offered a scathing appraisal of the novelists in his review of Butor’s novel *Mobile*, calling them “anti-writing writers.” Truman Capote, “The \$6 Misunderstanding,” *New York Review of Books* 1, no. 2 (1963), 14. Robbe-Grillet noted that Morrisette in fact introduced him to American culture, an environment he found far more hospitable than England: “The English are insular and turned towards America; they do not like the Continent and European culture. The Americans, on the contrary, are alert to what is happening in Europe. The English are wary of seriousness; the Americans are more earnest. They have accepted Derrida, Foucault, Barthes—all difficult thinkers.” Shusha Guppy, “Alain Robbe-Grillet: The Art of Fiction,” *The Paris Review* 91, no. 99 (Spring 1986) <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2819/the-art-of-fiction-no-91-alain-robbe-grillet> (accessed June 30, 2012). In an earlier interview Robbe-Grillet cites Morrisette’s interpretations extensively and mentions that he provided comments on the novelist’s manuscript for *Project for a Revolution in New York* (1970). Vicki Mistacco, “Interview: Alain Robbe-Grillet,” *Diacritics* 6, no. 4 (Winter 1976): 40.

¹²⁶ Linda Nochlin, *Realism Now* (Poughkeepsie, NY: Vassar College, 1968), 10-11.

literature.¹²⁷ But other protracted comparisons indicate a more thorough attempt to establish cross-media and cross-cultural links.¹²⁸ This literary-visual arts parallel, though, was not a direct corollary between Robbe-Grillet's fictional works and Photorealist painting. Rather, the exchange filtered through a number of sources, most notably Barthes and Robbe-Grillet's interpretations of the latter's novels and their directives for the course of contemporary literature.

Robbe-Grillet's writings have been deemed a literary equivalent to a number of artistic practices, including the Nouveau Réaliste and neo-Dada/Pop aesthetics of the early 1960s; the author in fact collaborated with several artists, including Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns.¹²⁹ His early writing is intensely visual in a manner novel to even the most vivid of realist fiction. Moreover, the way in which the writer conveys this glut of visual information is supremely precise and anti-metaphoric, "objective" in its avoidance of anthropomorphizing or romantic tendencies. For instance, the opening paragraph of his fourth novel, *Jealousy* (1957), sets an incredibly specific architectural scene:

Now the shadow of the column—the column which supports the southwest corner of the roof—divides the corresponding corner of the veranda into two equal parts. The veranda is a wide, covered gallery surrounding the house on three sides. Since its width is the same for the central portion as for the sides, the line of the shadow cast by the column extends precisely to the corner of the house; but it stops there, for only the veranda

¹²⁷ For instance, a 1984 letter written by a Smithsonian curator to Stuart Speiser (at his behest) on the current value of his collection cites the Robbe-Grillet parallel. Mary Valdivia to Stuart Speiser, 1984, Aeronautics Division Registrar files, NASM.

¹²⁸ For instance, Herbert Raymond suggests the parallel in an interview with Richard Estes in 1974, noting "a very strong effort to eliminate the self as a feeling subject." Estes responds by saying such conflict has always existed in art, referencing Ingres and Delacroix. Herbert Raymond, "Richard Estes: Interview with Herbert Raymond," *Art and Artists* 9, no. 5 (August 1974): 28. More on the false equation of Robbe-Grillet and anti-subjectivity follows below.

¹²⁹ For a complete list of Robbe-Grillet's collaborations with visual artists, see Ben Stoltzfus, "Introduction," in *La Belle Captive*, Alain Robbe-Grillet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 2. (Robbe-Grillet illustrated *La Belle Captive* with seventy-seven paintings by Magritte, though the work was not precisely a collaboration, as Magritte died several years prior.) Stoltzfus considers the Robbe-Grillet-Johns connection at length in "Robbe-Grillet's and Johns' Targets, Metafiction, Autopoiesis, and Chaos Theory," *The Comparatist* 29 (May 2005): 5-25. Robbe-Grillet also revealed that a character in his 1976 novel *Topology of a Phantom City* was partially modeled on Rauschenberg. Mistacco, 39. In the neo-realist vein, Rosalind Constable compared painter Lowell Nesbitt to Robbe-Grillet in "Style of the Year: The Inhumanists," *New York Magazine* December 16, 1968, 49-50. Finally, *Artforum* featured an extensive in memoriam tribute to Robbe-Grillet, including an essay by Conceptualist Lawrence Weiner. See Tim Bishop, "Into the Labyrinth," *Artforum* 46, no. 10 (Summer 2008): 382-393.

flagstones are reached by the sun, which is still too high in the sky. The wooden walls of the house—that is, its front and west gable-end—are still protected from the sun by the roof (common to the house proper and the terrace). So at this moment the shadow of the outer edge of the roof coincides exactly with the right angle formed by the terrace and the two vertical surfaces of the corner of the house.¹³⁰

Collectively this and countless other descriptive passages amount to more technical information than the reader can absorb; Robbe-Grillet's technique frequently seems as much *mise-en-scène* as it is narrative prose.¹³¹ Barthes, seizing on the descriptive qualities of Robbe-Grillet's work, posits the author as the leader of a new kind of "objective literature": "For Robbe-Grillet, the function of language is not a raid on the absolute, a violation of the abyss, but a progression of names over a surface, a patient unfolding that will gradually 'paint' the object, caress it, and along its whole extent deposit a patina of tentative identifications, no single term of which could stand by itself for the presented object."¹³²

Robbe-Grillet himself soon took up Barthes's terms in a series of essays, most notably "A Future for the Novel" and "On Several Obsolete Notions," which seek to define a new era of fictional strategies. According to the Robbe-Grillet, surface, rather than the depth valued in nineteenth-century realist literature, has become paramount: "Around us, defying the noisy pack of our animistic or protective adjectives, things *are there*. Their surfaces are distinct and smooth, *intact*, neither suspiciously brilliant nor transparent."¹³³ These early proclamations provided rich

¹³⁰ Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Two Novels By Robbe-Grillet: Jealousy and In the Labyrinth*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 38.

¹³¹ Robbe-Grillet did write and direct a number of films, most famously *Last Year at Marienbad*, a screenplay he wrote for Alain Resnais. Though there are parallels between his literary and cinematic pursuits, they fall mostly outside the discussion here. As for Robbe-Grillet's unique sense of description, many early respondents (often disparagingly) pointed to his training as an agronomist. While this background may have offered an unusual skillset for a fiction writer and informed his style, the only direct exhibition of this knowledge is in *Jealousy*, which is set on a banana plantation.

¹³² Roland Barthes, "Objective Literature," in *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 14.

¹³³ Robbe-Grillet, "A Future for the Novel," in *For a New Novel*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 19. On Robbe-Grillet's adaptation of Barthes' ideas and terminology, see Galia Yanoshevsky, "The

fodder for Photorealist proponents like Linda Chase. Following Nochlin's lead, Chase devoted an essay to the connection in 1975, quoting extensively from Robbe-Grillet's literary prescriptions.¹³⁴ For Chase, the crux of the parallel lies in Robbe-Grillet's valuing of physicality over symbolism: "Instead of this universe of 'signification' (psychological, social, functional), we must try, then, to construct a world both more solid and more immediate. Let it first of all by their *presence* that objects and gestures reveal themselves..."¹³⁵ Here Robbe-Grillet's pronouncement serves as an apt description of Photorealism—a style which attempts to bypass the potential pitfalls of signification for an openness of form and, to use the artists' favored term, "neutrality" of rendering.¹³⁶ Chase does acknowledge the paradox of her comparison: the very affirmation of realities rather than ideals that Robbe-Grillet champions is conveyed, in Photorealist practice, through the construction of illusion—a direct relation to the world through secondary source material.¹³⁷ It is, in fact, the borrowing of the photograph that fosters a sense of objectivity.

The Photorealists were frequently reluctant to provide explicit interpretations of their work, preferring laconic flexibility to the fixity of supplementary articulations. Advocates, seeking to remedy such verbal reticence and counter the weight of negative criticism, deemed Robbe-Grillet's literary theories a fitting stand-in manifesto for the style. Barthes's early

Significance of Rewriting, or *Pour un Nouveau Roman* as the Manifesto of the *Nouveau Roman*," *Journal of Romance Studies* 3, no. 3 (2003): 49-53.

¹³⁴ Linda Chase, "Existential vs. Humanist Realism," in *Super Realism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton), 81-95. As the title of her essay indicates, Chase misunderstands Robbe-Grillet's position within the French literary continuum—she aligns his work with Sartre and the Existentialists, when in fact Robbe-Grillet authored extensive critiques of their work and the shortcomings of "committed" literature. See Robbe-Grillet, "Nature, Humanism, Tragedy," in *For a New Novel*, 49-75.

¹³⁵ The remainder of the phrase Chase elides: "...and let this presence continue to prevail over whatever explanatory theory that may try to enclose them in a system of references, whether emotional, sociological, Freudian or metaphysical." Robbe-Grillet, "A Future for the Novel," 21.

¹³⁶ Sophie Howarth also makes this connection, specifically with Bechtle's use of the term neutral. Sophie Howarth, "Pretty Fascinating Boredom," *Tate Magazine* 24 (Spring 2001): 65.

¹³⁷ Chase, "Photo Realism: Post-Modernist Illusionism," 16.

interpretations further reinforced the parallels. Thus Thomas Albright calls Barthes's introduction to *Jealousy*, "One of the most lucid descriptions of the characteristics of Photo Realist painting."¹³⁸ Not only does Barthes's essay compare the novelist's perspective to the spatial effects of modern painting and camera vision, he also offers both actual and potential Robbe-Grillet objects which are strikingly akin to Photorealist iconography: "urban landscapes (street directories, postal schedules, professional-service signs, traffic signals, gatehouse fences, bridge superstructures)," "commonplace interiors (light switches, erasers, a pair of glasses, percolators, dressmaker's dummies, packaged sandwiches)," and the neon sign on the Paris's Gare Montparnasse railway station—the latter deemed a "good object for Robbe-Grillet because its presented complexity of structure is entirely visual in effect."¹³⁹

Notably only one visual arts writer who cites Robbe-Grillet follows suit in honing in on specific object descriptions, the rest stopping short of direct comparisons of the fiction and paintings.¹⁴⁰ Nochlin, however, attends to the comparison in more explicit terms. In her essay "Some Women Realists," Nochlin proposes the *nouveau roman* as parallel to paintings by Sylvia Plimack Mangold and Vija Celmins:

Mangold's mode of approach is a detachment so passionate that, taken as a state of mind, it might well be considered obsession... If *Floor II* is antipoetic and antievocative, it is also a reminder that there is such a thing as a deliberately antipoetic poetry, and that the

¹³⁸ Albright's focus is Bay Area artists, but his comments here refer to Photorealism as a whole. Thomas Albright, *Art in the San Francisco Bay Area: 1945-1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 212.

¹³⁹ Barthes, "Objective Literature," 11, 22. If one were to spell out these corollaries more specifically, the "urban landscapes" would likely belong to Bechtle or Estes, the "commonplace interiors" to Goings, and the Gare Montparnasse neon sign to Robert Cottingham or Noel Mahaffey.

¹⁴⁰ This gap could be attributed to the (unexpressed) assumption that written and visual media are comparable but ultimately incommensurate—an insinuation à la Lessing (or even Greenberg) that Robbe-Grillet's dictates can only be utilized as a rough guide to a medium he is not addressing. Lessing's classic eighteenth-century text, *Laocoon*, distinguished painting from poetry as spatial versus temporal arts; Greenberg's essay, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," also argues a "purist" position, though he is interested in defending the visual from the literary. See Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay Upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Ellen Frothingham (New York: Noonday Press, 1957); and Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 1: Perceptions and Judgments, 1939-1944*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 23-38.

innovative force of the French New Novel, which uses prose to erase its own significance, reached its zenith in the sixties. The extraordinarily muted yet rapier-sharp realist imagery of an artist like Vija Celmins offers, perhaps, the best parallel with Robbe-Grillet's attempt to abolish significance in literature: is her *Eraser* of 1970 a sly reference to the French writer's *Les Gommés*, as well as being a self-evident Pink Pearl by Eberhard Faber and nothing more?¹⁴¹

Nochlin's comparison is brief and rests mostly on wordplay or visual puns, but suggests a starting point for what kinds of subjects and descriptive qualities might be equivalent.¹⁴² Despite the numerous references to Robbe-Grillet in critical literature, no writer has further formulated explicit literary-visual linkages.¹⁴³ Chase perhaps alludes to particular Bechtle works when praising Robbe-Grillet for recognizing that "an empty chair may be indicative of an absent person, but to see it as such is to eliminate the possibility of seeing the chair as itself," but the connection is never spelled out.¹⁴⁴ The catalog for Bechtle's retrospective at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art begins to take the bait Chase sets up, employing her quote in a short essay on *Santa Barbara Patio* (1983), *Ambassador-by-the-Sea* (1976), and *Santa Barbara Chairs* (1981), but stops short of juxtaposing the paintings with excerpts of Robbe-Grillet's fiction.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Nochlin, "Some Women Realists," in *Super Realism*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975), 77. While Mangold and Celmins are infrequently grouped with the original generation of Photorealists supported by Karp and Meisel, both their style and working methods are similar.

¹⁴² In her earlier essay for *Realism Now*, Nochlin also suggests William Bailey's *Eggs* and Don Nice's *Turnip* as equivalents to Robbe-Grillet's writing. These painters are realist rather than Photorealist, but for Nochlin the modes are continuous: "Whether this perception is direct, or mediated by the mechanical apparatus of the camera, as it is for so many artists, is irrelevant to the major issue." In other words, contemporary vision has internalized camera vision to extent that the actual use of photographs is somewhat insignificant. While I disagree with Nochlin on the last point, I agree that both realist and Photorealist painters of this era can be said to strive for the same kind of "objectivity." Nochlin, *Realism Now*, 9, 11.

¹⁴³ This includes the two most extensive studies of the connection, which offer some close readings of the novels and paintings, but no direct comparisons. Both studies are divided into literary and visual arts sections—an organizational strategy that weakens their case. See Patricia Joan Hemphill, *Robbe-Grillet and New Realism Objectives Compared*, (M.A. Thesis, California State University, Long Beach, 1981); and Robert S. Lemon, *The Figurative Pretext: A Comparative Explication of the Fiction of Alain Robbe-Grillet and the Painting of the Photo Realists* (Ph.D. Diss., Ohio University, 1976).

¹⁴⁴ Chase, "Existential vs. Humanist Realism," 88.

¹⁴⁵ Joshua Shirkey, "Santa Barbara Patio, Ambassador-by-the-Sea, Santa Barbara Chairs," in Robert Bechtle, Janet Bishop (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2005) n.p.

Taking into account the obvious caveat that word and image are not equivalent—as W.J.T. Mitchell articulates, the relationship is generally defined by “a contested border”—the question of parallels between Robbe-Grillet and Photorealism remains.¹⁴⁶ Can direct pairings such as Bechtle’s paintings prominently featuring empty chairs, namely the *Santa Barbara* and *Watsonville*-titled works from the mid-1970s and early 1980s, and Robbe-Grillet’s descriptive passages be convincingly made (figs. 28, 28, 30)? Again, *Jealousy*, with its extensive imagery of the domestic milieu, offers the clearest potential corollary. Indeed, an empty chair features prominently in Robbe-Grillet’s scene setting:

It was A... who arranged the chairs this evening, when she had them brought out on the veranda. The one she invited Franck to sit in and her own are side by side against the wall of the house—backs against the wall, of course—beneath the office window. So that Franck’s chair is on her left, and on her right—but farther forward—the little table where the bottles are. The two other chairs are placed on the other side of this table, still farther to the right, so that they do not block the view of the first two through the balustrade of the veranda. For the same reason these last two chairs are not turned to face the rest of the group: they have been set at an angle, obliquely oriented toward the openwork balustrade and the hillside opposite. This arrangement obliges anyone sitting there to turn his head around sharply toward the left if he wants to see A... —especially anyone in the fourth chair, which is the farthest away.

The third, which is a folding chair made of canvas stretched on a metal frame, occupies a distinctly retired position between the fourth chair and the table. But it is this chair, less comfortable, which has remained empty.¹⁴⁷

Robbe-Grillet’s precise description provides a vivid visual account of object configurations and spatial dimensions. The novel even includes a floor plan of the central characters’ home, with the

¹⁴⁶ W. J. T. Mitchell, “Word and Image,” in *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 60. Mitchell’s essay provides a historical overview of the issues surrounding visual versus literary analysis; his conclusion is apt here: “Understood as a dialectical trope rather than a binary opposition, “word and image” is a relay between semiotic, aesthetic, and social differences. It never appears as a problem without being linked, however subtly, to questions of power, value, and human interest.” Mitchell, 59.

¹⁴⁷ “A...” is the name given to one of novel’s the central characters; more on this character’s identity and relationship to other characters follows below. Robbe-Grillet, *Two Novels By Robbe-Grillet*, 43-44. Of course, the comparison is somewhat compromised by the fact that Robbe-Grillet’s words are being read in translation. But this is likely how Nochlin and Chase and other critics encountered the writings—certainly their quotations derive from the English translations of Robbe-Grillet’s works. Bechtle also comments that he read Robbe-Grillet in translation. Bechtle, interview by author, June 22, 2010. In addition, there is a certain consistency to reading both Robbe-Grillet and Barthes in English, as almost all of the works under consideration were translated by Richard Howard.

veranda chairs noted in the legend (fig. 132).¹⁴⁸ Yet, the diagram is something of a red herring: the legend reveals that one room of the house cannot be accounted for (“X. Storage room or other (not described).”) and the element labeled number four on the veranda is missing (“II. Veranda: 1) Franck’s chair. 2) A...’s chair. 3) Empty chair. 5) Cocktail table.”)¹⁴⁹ Assuming the floor plan to be a clear transcription of the novel’s setting entraps one in the pitfall common to many early interpretations of Robbe-Grillet’s work: the failure to adequately consider the novels’ numerous contradictions and lacunae, mistakenly assuming the occurrence of meticulously rendered descriptive passages amounts to cumulative objectivity.¹⁵⁰

Ultimately these ambiguities should serve as a notice of the confusing plot and chronology to come—if such terms can even be said to apply to the text. *Jealousy* is in large part a series of looping accounts, a recursive exercise that embeds apparently objective descriptions within a subjective viewpoint. The unnamed narrator’s perspective carries the reader through the perceptive experience of jealousy, fanatically recording details but without the distancing regard to provide logical coherence. Do A..., presumably the narrator’s wife, and Franck, their ever-present neighbor, consummate their relationship? Does an affair lead A...’s husband to violence, as the “reddish streak” that appears in the final iteration of the “Now the shadow of the column”

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 36-37.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 37.

¹⁵⁰ Curiously, the floor plan first appeared in the American translation of *Jealousy*, not the original French publication. Babcock, 43. On the problem of tracing the reason for the addition of the floor plan, see Stephanie Elisabeth Sobell, *The Architectural Novel: Postmodernism’s Literary Construction Sites*, Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2009, 44. Sobell reports that no sources, including the Robbe-Grillet Archive, clarify the issue. Perhaps the change is an indicator of perceived American credulity, though more likely it was an attempt by Robbe-Grillet to supplement the novel with something comparable to the original explanatory jacket blurb. The latter, which misleadingly described the novel in very straightforward terms and alluded to none of its formal experimentation, was actually written by Robbe-Grillet himself; it was published with the initial French edition and then withdrawn. He later remarked that it was intended for critics who do not have time to read the books they have to write about. On critical interpretation of the blurb, see Zahi Zalloua, “Alain Robbe-Grillet’s *La Jalousie*: Realism and the Ethics of Reading,” *Journal of Narrative Theory* 38, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 13-36.

description seems to imply?¹⁵¹ Robbe-Grillet would later quash such lines of inquiry, writing that the book “was not a narrative mingled with a simple anecdote external to itself, but again the very unfolding of a story which had no reality than that of the narrative, an occurrence which functioned nowhere else except in the mind of the invisible narrator, in other words of the writer, and of the reader.”¹⁵² The book’s consistent use of the present tense nearly precludes such reconstructions, instead forcing the reader to reckon with the dizzying accumulation of specific moments, each slightly altered description of the “shadow of the column” or the “squashed centipede” evoking both recognition and confusion, but never collective clarity.

Accordingly, even if *Jealousy*’s veranda furniture is not directly assigned metaphoric descriptors, the scene is not devoid of subjective or even symbolic resonance. The chairs have been purposefully arranged and encourage distinct social interactions: A...’s chair is paired with Franck’s, separate from the others. Likewise the third chair seems to impinge on the duo: “less comfortable” and “distinctly retired,” it remains pointedly unoccupied. The seat is presumably for Franck’s wife, consistently absent from the proceedings due to a sick child and heat-related illness. But it is the fourth chair, about which the least is said, that is pivotal. This blank space—the unlabeled number four in the aforementioned floor plan—the reader eventually understands, is the position of the unnamed narrator, continually observing his wife and neighbor, gleaning the possible physical traces of an extramarital affair. But this void is also the embodied position, the specific space suggested by the sharp turning of the head necessary to observe A... . Thus the narrator’s place is at once delineated and vacant, a measure of perception that is both firmly anchored among the domestic objects and psychologically slipping through the novel’s spatial and temporal registers.

¹⁵¹ Robbe-Grillet, *Two Novels by Robbe-Grillet*, 134.

¹⁵² Robbe-Grillet, “Time and Description in Non-Fiction Today,” in *For a New Novel*, 154.

Do Bechtle's chair paintings offer anything analogous? Details of setting, at least, are fairly easily compared. In the paintings, the seating arrangement is usually tipped: rather than an observed coupling or awkward trio, the figures are solitary, surrounded by several empty seats. The vivid palette and intense California sunshine offer not the expected moments of outdoor revelry, but rather mostly austere moments of reflective solitude. Like *Jealousy's* tropical setting, Bechtle's West Coast locales display the fluidity of interior and exterior central to living in warm climates. Likewise, light defines the environments—a truism that ostensibly applies to any location, but is heightened to extremes in both Robbe-Grillet and Bechtle's renderings. As with Robbe-Grillet's novels, light and shadow guide the viewer's attention toward the shape of objects and their spatial locations, and thus induce reflection on the construction of visual impressions. For instance, both *Watsonville Chairs* (1976) and *Santa Barbara Chairs* (1983) position the central figures near or partially in deep shadow, casting a slight tension over otherwise mundane proceedings (figs. 30, 28). They are, as *Jealousy* largely is, about observers being observed.

Collectively, the *Watsonville* and *Santa Barbara* works function in a manner roughly parallel to Robbe-Grillet's repeated "Now the shadow of the column" descriptions, each instance indicating different lighting conditions in the same locale but not necessarily the linear passage of time. The artworks thus retain their ontological status as a series of snapshots rather than transforming into a dramatic arc. Goings' ruminations on the temptation to project narrative into his paintings, discussed in chapter one, are likewise apt: after offering a number of anecdotal details related to the central female figure in *One-Eleven Diner*, the artist ultimately says these scenarios should not "become more important than the painterly considerations: the light and her

relationship to other objects and spatial divisions.”¹⁵³ Echoing Robbe-Grillet’s sentiments about the misleading pursuit of extrapolating external realities, for Goings, and indeed all of the Photorealists, narrative suppositions are ultimately secondary to the process of aesthetic construction.

Goings is one of a few Photorealists that has professed admiration for Robbe-Grillet’s writings. Chase cites this appreciation as a central piece of evidence in her essay on the Photorealist-Robbe-Grillet link, noting that the painter was particularly drawn to a passage in *The Voyeur* (1955) in which the protagonist, Mathias, recalls drawing a seagull as a child: “Mathias remembers not what he felt, but the grain of the wood, the sheen of the wax, and the precise color of the bird’s feathers... The message is clear: for the purposes of descriptive art all that is relevant is visual fact.”¹⁵⁴ This particular connection between Goings and Robbe-Grillet is subsequently repeated in several other texts on Photorealism. In the early 1980s Patricia Joan Hemphill surveyed a number of Photorealist and realist painters on the subject of whether they knew of or had been influenced by Robbe-Grillet.¹⁵⁵ While the survey is not comprehensive, several realists, including Tom Blackwell, Yvonne Jacquette, Sylvia Mangold, and Stephen Posen, also affirm finding parallels between their work and Robbe-Grillet’s or being familiar with the purported connection.

McLean has also spoken extensively about Robbe-Grillet, noting a strong affinity for the novelist’s idea that “things in the world—objects—have an existence independent of whatever

¹⁵³ Goings quoted in Chase, *Ralph Goings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988), 46.

¹⁵⁴ Chase, “Existential vs. Humanist Realism,” 92. Both John L. Ward and Christine Lindey cite the Goings-Robbe-Grillet link. See John L. Ward, *American Realist Painting, 1945-1980* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), 271; and Christine Lindey, *Superrealist Painting and Sculpture* (New York: William Morrow, 1980), 105. In addition, Hemphill’s survey reveals that Chase and Goings might have been spreading the word: Tom Blackwell reports that he read Robbe-Grillet after a discussion with the two. Hemphill, 179.

¹⁵⁵ In Hemphill’s survey Goings denies direct influence, but relates a feeling of “kinship... a mutual interest in the skin of reality.” My interview with Goings confirmed this sense of “being taken” with Robbe-Grillet’s work. Hemphill, 179-83; and Goings, interview by author, April 27, 2010. Bechtle also confirmed having read Robbe-Grillet, but did not elaborate on the connection any further. Bechtle, interview by author, June 22, 2010.

significance we might assign them.”¹⁵⁶ McLean went so far as to use a Robbe-Grillet quotation as his artist’s statement for the exhibition *Real, Really Real, Super Real* (1981)—the same passage originally referenced by Linda Nochlin in her 1968 essay for *Realism Now*.¹⁵⁷ McLean’s citation in turn spurred critic Donald Kuspit to take all of the contemporary realists to task for their aspiration toward nouveau roman style objectivity: “The most remarkable thing about the world is not, in Robbe-Grillet’s words, simply that it is the case, but rather that it seems to be the case but is not, until it is subjectively—stylistically and symbolically—the case.”¹⁵⁸ Kuspit grants the artists some reprieve for striving to “ennoble” reality rather than simply duplicating it, but of late his opinion of the Photorealist pursuit has hardened.¹⁵⁹ Kuspit remarks that the result of striving for such unfiltered reality is, ironically, deadening artificiality: “...the world, seen through a Photorealist lens, seems disturbingly unreal: it is impossible to reconcile ourselves to—let alone feel comfortably at home in—a world in which we can gain no subjective foothold.”¹⁶⁰

Ultimately, both those who viewed the Photorealist link to Robbe-Grillet-esque objectivity as strength and those critiqued its limitations reveal a narrow understanding of the novelist’s work, limited by looking only to the earliest interpretations of Robbe-Grillet. Barthes’s “Objective Literature” essay was highly influential, but soon recognized as overly consumed with the novels’ descriptive qualities. Robbe-Grillet’s writing became one incarnation of the kind of radical text Barthes sought throughout the fifties, sixties, and seventies: the “zero degree” text

¹⁵⁶ Richard McLean, AAA Interview, September 20, 2009.

¹⁵⁷ Perhaps McLean’s use of the quotation was spurred by conversations with Nochlin, who contributed an essay to the *Real, Really Real, Super Real* catalog. The catalog essays by Nochlin and Philip Pearlstein for this show are discussed in chapter two.

¹⁵⁸ Donald Kuspit, “What’s Real in Realism?” *Art in America* 69 (September 1981): 92.

¹⁵⁹ John L. Ward correctly notes that Kuspit both disproportionately focuses on the narrative and symbolic aspects of new realism and oversimplifies Robbe-Grillet’s intent. Ward, 270.

¹⁶⁰ Kuspit, “The Real in Photorealism,” *Artnet* December 22, 2009
<http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/kuspit/photorealism12-22-09.asp> (accessed June 29, 2012).

(*Le Degré Zéro de l'écriture*, 1953) the text resistant to “mythology” (*Mythologies*, 1957), the “authorless” text (“La Mort de l’auteur,” 1968), or the “writerly” text (*S/Z*, 1970).¹⁶¹ Though his methodology shifted, Barthes remained interested in works that resist ideological closure, and thus allow for a multiplicity of signification and the opportunity for active consumption.¹⁶² The desire to locate such forms seemingly caused Barthes to initially ignore essential aspects of Robbe-Grillet’s writing. The major critical fissure between the two came in 1963, with the publication of Bruce Morrissette’s analysis of *The Erasers* (1953), which refutes Barthes’s *choisiste* interpretation of Robbe-Grillet.¹⁶³

While Morrissette’s analyses perhaps corrected course too strongly, resulting in, as Stephen Heath contends, a reduction of “the plurality of the work in the name of a representational readability,” they did cause Barthes to partially amend his views—though without discounting his own earlier perspective.¹⁶⁴ In the introduction to Morrissette’s tome on Robbe-Grillet (and his last essay on the novelist), Barthes asserts that there have become two versions of the writer: the Robbe-Grillet of “immediate things,” and “destroyer of meaning,” and the Robbe-Grillet of “mediate things,” and thus “creator of meaning.”¹⁶⁵ Ultimately Barthes moves past the binary to suggest more generally that it is this very question of meaning—not the answer to the question of meaning—that literature puts forth. Literature is thus the history of

¹⁶¹ See Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968); *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972); “The Death of the Author,” in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142-49; and *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).

¹⁶² On Barthes’ consistent desire for a “writerly text” and the obstacles he encountered, see Ronald L. Bogue, “Roland Barthes, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and the Paradise of the Writerly Text,” *Criticism* 2, no. 2 (Spring, 1980): 156-71.

¹⁶³ Morrissette argues that not only had Barthes ignored key aspects of the novel’s plot, but that he had also failed to note clear references to the myth of Oedipus, and thus mistakenly asserted that the novels’ objects were without human significance. Babcock, 36-37.

¹⁶⁴ Stephen Heath, *The Nouveau Roman: a Study in the Practice of Writing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1972), 120.

¹⁶⁵ Barthes, “The Last Word on Robbe-Grillet?” in *Critical Essays*, 198.

technique, not because of modernist teleology—i.e. a formalist *l'art pour l'art* impulse—but because technique is the only possible way of suspending the world's meaning, arresting the question rather than answering it.¹⁶⁶ This conclusion falls in line with Barthes's quest for modes of active consumption: "we are all part of Robbe-Grillet, insofar as we are all busy relaunching the meaning of things, as soon as we open one of his books."¹⁶⁷

Robbe-Grillet, however, despite his numerous displays of affection for Barthes, remained fixated on the theorist's earlier interpretations. On the occasion of the Barthes's death, Robbe-Grillet reflected on their shared history in terms particularly relevant to this discussion:

Paradoxically, in the fifties he took my own novels as infernal machines that enabled him to spread terror: he went on to reduce their insidious slippages, the ghosts between their lines, their self erasure and their gaps, to a "thingly" [choisiste] universe that, instead, affirmed its own solidity, objective and literal. Of course, that aspect was admittedly present in the books (and in my theoretical remarks), but as one of the two irreconcilable poles in a contradiction. Barthes took the decision to turn a blind eye to the monsters hidden in the shadows of the hyperrealist painting.¹⁶⁸

Robbe-Grillet's own suggestion of hyperrealist painting as a metaphor for his writing is, of course, an enticing addition to the critical stream of nouveau roman-Photorealism comparisons. His earlier writings, however, refute the oft-made connection between his work and camera vision, seemingly precluding a direct parallel with Photorealism.¹⁶⁹ Along with the structure of his novels, Robbe-Grillet's assertions concerning his own work shift considerably over time, making it difficult to clearly resolve his authorial intentions. Yet, while it is important to acknowledge the novelist's propensity for critical playfulness and about-faces in his literary

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 203.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 204.

¹⁶⁸ Robbe-Grillet, "Roland Barthes's Choice," in *Why I Love Barthes*, trans. Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 56-57.

¹⁶⁹ For instance, Robbe-Grillet writes: "The entire interest of the descriptive pages—that is, man's place in these pages—is therefore no longer in the thing described, but in the very movement of description. We thus see how false it is to say that such writing tends toward photography or toward the cinematographic image." Robbe-Grillet, "Time and Description In Fiction Today," 148-49.

opinions, it would be imprudent to wholly discard the Photorealist-Robbe-Grillet critical lineage. By the early 1980s the equivalence between Photorealism and the nouveau roman as apexes of literary and visual objectivity was an accepted commonplace in the critical discourse.

In addition to providing an intriguing instance of cross-cultural and cross-media exchange, the nouveau roman body of literature beneficially opens up Photorealist interpretation past narrow readings of “kitschy” iconography or preoccupations with technique. The choicest elements of both practices are undeniable: they are what impart a radical sense of realism, altering the way description functions within fiction and painting. But this element cannot be taken in isolation, as art historians and critics often did, ignoring the potential “monsters hidden in the shadows.” Photorealist paintings do not present as purposefully a confounding take on subjectivity as Robbe-Grillet’s novels, but nor are they devoid of interpretive conundrums. As with each of Bechtle’s chair painting, particular views are given—views that both reveal and occlude, clearly delineating some objects and tucking others into the shadows—that encourage reflection on the act of viewing itself. Likewise, as Barthes proposes in his final meditation on Robbe-Grillet, the painters engage in the willful suspension of meaning, retaining the question rather than providing the answer. The Photorealists refuse to resolve or clearly narrativize their images: they reconstruct the camera’s “objective” imagery but never specifically seal its contents.

Finally, in both cases there is a sense of approaching the precipice of postmodernism. While Photorealism never fully tips over into the territory of *mise-en-abyme* or the simulacral, the painters purposefully engage the formal and conceptual reverberations of creating representations of representations. Robbe-Grillet likewise employs such devices as a novel within the novel (a central aspect of *Jealousy*), or, more broadly, uses entire novels to rework

established genre conventions (i.e. *The Erasers* can function as a play on detective stories, *The Voyeur* as a play on murder mysteries, *Jealousy* as a play on romance novels, etc.), thus confirming similar appropriations of form across media.¹⁷⁰ As the writer himself articulates, “The *real*, the *false*, and *illusion* become more or less the subject of all modern works.”¹⁷¹ Both Robbe-Grillet and the Photorealists use camera vision in quotations, not precisely duplicating its means, but adapting its strategies to reinvigorate older forms of aesthetic production. The Robbe-Grillet-Photorealist chain of influence is not a clear or even consistently accurate translation of literary to visual aims, but nonetheless sheds light on how novelists, painters, theorists, and critics found fruitful resources of realist form among their predecessors and contemporaries, in both their own media and nations and extending across those borders.

Photogenic Painting

While French literary discourse provided American critics a way to interpret Photorealism’s rejiggering of realist forms, other French writers dealt more directly with the style’s image operations. Chief among these works is Michel Foucault’s 1975 essay “Photogenic Painting,” devoted to the French painter Gérard Fromanger.¹⁷² Associated with the Narrative Figuration movement, Fromanger’s aesthetic is more overtly Pop than that of the Photorealists—particularly his saturated, non-naturalistic palette and his tendency to simplify the details of his source material—but his process of painting directly from projected photographs generates significant parallels (fig. 133). Indeed, the plethora of French exhibitions and publications showcasing Photorealism in the early seventies made the comparison unavoidable.

¹⁷⁰ Lemon also suggests this parallel. But while he correctly identifies the shortcomings of previous critics who employed the link, his conclusion that both the novelist and painters use their subjects merely as a “pretext” for formal experimentation is overreaching, particularly in the case of the Photorealists. Lemon, 15-64, and 123-26.

¹⁷¹ Robbe-Grillet, “Time and Description In Fiction Today,” 150.

¹⁷² Michel Foucault, “Photogenic Painting,” reprinted in *Critical Texts* 6, no. 3 (1989): 1-12.

A number of these events and texts exhibited palpable streaks of nationalism. *Hyperréalistes américains – réalistes européens* and *Les Hyperréalistes Américains*, for example, were clearly intended not simply to showcase American Photorealism, but to establish international connections and even European superiority or precedents. The former exhibition juxtaposed a diverse lot of American and European realist painters and sculptors, if with a bit of resentment for the former: “The extraordinary success that the American Super Realists has masked and in a way distorted a more complex phenomenon, that of the return to figuration that was under way at the same time among European artists.”¹⁷³ As Sarah Wilson notes, this strategy of asserting national precedents was a common one: Italy suggested Giorgio de Chirico, Germany Christian Schad, and France Salvador Dalí.¹⁷⁴ Dalí’s own introduction to *Les Hyperréalistes Américains* offers the following epigraph as proof of his own influence many decades prior: “En 1933, Dali a clamé que sa peinture était la photo-couleur, à la main, d’images délirantes et super fines d’une irrationalité concrète.”¹⁷⁵ Both the Surrealist and Linda Chase claim the readymade as a formative influence on the Photorealists in their essays for the book—an assertion that is not illogical but indeed can be made for an exceedingly wide range of

¹⁷³ Daniel Abadie’s essay for the CNAC exhibition is more generous, seeing Photorealism as a response to key questions of contemporary visual culture. The show’s catalog remains one of more unusual artifacts of the period: it includes a set of twenty-four slides, with each artist allotted a reproduction. The format seems intended to encourage both increased image circulation and comparisons between individuals and nationalities. Archives de l’Art Contemporain, *hyperréalistes américains – réalistes européens* (Paris: Centre Beaubourg, 1974), n.p. Earlier, more explicitly negative French reviews were published by Andréi B. Nakov and Madeleine Deschamps-Huppert in *XX^e Siècle*. See Andréi B. Nakov, “‘Sharp-focus realism’: le retour d’image,” *XX^e Siècle* 38 (June 1972): 166-68; and Madeleine Deschamps-Huppert, “La surface du réalisme,” *XX^e Siècle* 41 (December 1973): 160-62.

¹⁷⁴ Sara Wilson, *The Visual World of French Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 142-43.

¹⁷⁵ [English translation: In 1933, Dalí proclaimed that his painting was really hand-made color photographs of delirious and superfine images of concrete irrationality.] Salvador Dalí, “Préface,” *Les Hyperréalistes Américains*, Linda Chase (Paris: Filipacchi, 1973), 4. The text was also translated into German and English, though Dalí’s preface remains in both editions. One alteration between the French and English text is notable: the French version of Chase’s essay uses the label l’hyperréalisme, while the English translation uses the broader term New Realism, despite the fact that she is specifically discussing Photorealism. Likewise, the title of her essay is changed from “L’Hyperréalisme Américain” to “New Realism.” The German title, “Der Neue Realismus in Amerika,” is something of a compromise. See Chase, *Hyperrealism* (New York: Rizzoli, 1975); and *Der Neue Realismus in Amerika* (Berlin West: Rembrandt Verlag, 1973).

twentieth-century artists.¹⁷⁶ In this case it functions more as a declaration of French antecedence than a central aesthetic lineage.

“Photogenic Painting” likewise uses Photorealism as a foil, with the native artist coming out ahead. But while the short piece, written for the occasion of Fromanger’s 1975 exhibition *Le désir est partout [Desire is everywhere]*, is undeniably a glowing endorsement of the French painter, it is also, in typically Foucauldian fashion, a historically perspicacious consideration of image production.¹⁷⁷ For Foucault, the problem of recent anti-representational sentiment results in a critical antipathy with broader political implications:

An attempt has been made to convince us that the image, the spectacle, the resemblance and the false resemblance were not good, either theoretically or aesthetically. And that it was unworthy not to despise such trivia.

As a result, deprived of the technical possibility of fabricating images, limited to the aesthetics of an art without images, bent under the theoretical obligation of discounting images, charged with reading images as nothing other than a language, we could then be turned over, bound hand and foot, to the force of other images—political, commercial—over which we had no power.¹⁷⁸

Hence the writer’s nostalgia for an earlier period of greater image mobility: those fin de siècle moments when various kinds of photographic imagery jostled for status, a productive freedom ensuing from the competitive play between painting and photography. Realism is also incorporated into the historic fold, offering not simply the mimetic, but adventures of form and concept: “The faithfulness to things themselves was both a challenge and an opportunity for the imperceptibly different yet always similar dance of images which hovered above them.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Dalí and Chase, *Les Hyperréalistes Américains*, 4, 8.

¹⁷⁷ As Joseph Tanke notes, Fromanger certainly benefited from Foucault’s endorsement, though other major writers, including Jacques Prévert and Gilles Deleuze, had already voiced their support, making Foucault’s essay less pivotal in terms of practical gains. Joseph Tanke, *Foucault’s Philosophy of Art: A Genealogy of Modernity* (London: Continuum International, 2009), 135.

¹⁷⁸ Foucault, 4.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

For Foucault, Pop and Photorealism restore to the twentieth-century viewer this pleasure of the image. This re-established love is not the choicest attention to obdurate physical detail many saw in the link between Photorealism and Robbe-Grillet. Rather, the two re-teach representational appreciation, “not through a return to figuration, not through a rediscovery of the object with its real density, but by plugging into the unending circulation of images.”¹⁸⁰ If it seems this interpretation tips over into the territory of postmodernism, Foucault stops short of such complete dematerialization, noting that the works provide an image in transit, “seized in the middle of its trajectory from photograph to painting.”¹⁸¹ The reinstatement of image movement results in paintings that open rather than “purify” or foreclose the image field, and thus resuscitate the fecundity of manipulative techniques and a broader range of subjects. Foucault’s conclusion is a democratizing inversion of the high-modernist mandate: “Now can ‘anything’ be painted? Yes. But that is perhaps also an affirmation and a will to paint. Rather, we should say: let everybody enter into the game of images and start playing.”¹⁸²

Foucault admires the Photorealists, but ultimately sees Fromanger as exceeding their trajectory. Aspects of Fromanger’s method, such as using “chance photographs,” heightened color, and his election to forego drawing and paint directly from the projected slide image, are said to result in a “an event-painting on the event-photo”—i.e. the creation of a continuous action between image and artist. Undoubtedly their look and aims are somewhat disparate: nowhere in Photorealism does one find, as with Fromanger, the painter’s shadow transposed over the source image or pedestrians transformed into vividly colored solid bodies.¹⁸³ Yet Foucault’s comparison

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid., 12.

¹⁸³ Foucault’s use of the terms “hot” and “cold” to describe Fromanger’s color contrasts undoubtedly derive from Giles Deleuze’s essay on the artist published a few years prior, “Cold and Heat.” Deleuze, in turn, borrows the terms from Marshall McLuhan—another intriguing case of cross-cultural influence. See Gilles Deleuze, “Cold and Heat,”

of the Narrative Figuration painter with Photorealism is somewhat flawed. Citing Estes and Cottingham, he argues that the American artists' photographic choices often result in a "painterly composition or the virtual presence of the painting."¹⁸⁴ While the description is not inaccurate, his choice of outlying examples is somewhat misleading: Estes unusually combines multiple photographic sources for his paintings, while Cottingham's cropped, highly geometric compositions are often more abstracted than the bulk of Photorealism. By contrast, Bechtle, McLean, and Goings all share Fromanger's taste for candid source photographs, "photos that do not hold on to anything, that have no centers or privileged subjects."¹⁸⁵ Their resulting works have just as much the feeling of a singular, aleatory quality as the French artist's street scenes.

There is, however, a defining difference between Fromanger and the Photorealists: subject matter. *Le désir est partout* included not only Parisian street scenes, but also images of the artist's recent tour of China and the 1971 Toul prison revolt.¹⁸⁶ Foucault himself was deeply involved in latter issue, having helped found the activist Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons (GIP); Fromanger was also a participant.¹⁸⁷ The group aimed to increase transparency in penal operations and give voice to the imprisoned.¹⁸⁸ *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault's famed analysis of the evolution of the modern penal system and its emphasis on disciplinary power, was

in *Gérard Fromanger*, Gilles Deleuze, Adrian Rifkin, and Michel Foucault (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1999), 61-80. In some ways Fromanger's effects are more akin to conceptualist John Baldessari's series of found photographs and film stills in which the figures' faces are obscured by brightly colored painted dots; the images are verist, but likewise de-naturalized by simplified color and shape.

¹⁸⁴ Foucault, 6.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ On Fromanger's visit to China and French leftist involvement with Communist government, see Wilson, 149-50.

¹⁸⁷ On the relations between politically oriented French theorists of the 1960s and 1970s and their interest in Fromanger, see Adrian Rifkin, "A Space Between: on Gérard Fromanger, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault and some others," in *Gérard Fromanger*, 22-59.

¹⁸⁸ On Foucault's involvement with GIP, see Cecile Brich, "The Groupe d'information sur les prisons: The voice of prisoners? Or Foucault's?" *Foucault Studies* 5 (January 2008): 26-47; and David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault: A Biography*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 257-89.

published the same year as “Photogenic Painting.”¹⁸⁹ Foucault writes of Fromanger’s paintings: “Prisoners in revolt on a rooftop: a press photo reproduced everywhere. But who noticed what happens in it? What commentary ever rendered the unique and multiple event that circulates within it? By sowing a few multicolored spots whose position and value are not calculated in respect to the canvas, Fromanger draws numerous festivals from the photo.” (fig. 134) As Wilson observes, despite his direct involvement with the pressing injustices of the national incarceration system, Foucault’s commentary on these paintings is surprisingly oblique.¹⁹⁰ Fromanger’s work ultimately stimulates not simply because of charged political iconography, but the way in which it reinvests the image with movement and multiplicity, rescuing it from the historical vacuity of ad-nauseam media reproduction.

Photorealism purposefully avoids such provocative subject matter and overt manipulations of image content. But perhaps there is a way in which the style arrives at a comparable result. If Fromanger reopens an iconic moment by making an image into an event, Photorealism also encourages circulation by selecting non-narrative stills—slices of time and space that are specific enough to suggest a past and future, but purposefully indeterminate in refusing a singular course of action—and recalling the long history of painted photographs and other such media transgressions Foucault references. The Photorealist painting is, so to speak, always in medias res, an accumulation of past actions that mark reality but do not mandate a particular outcome. Foucault articulates the communicative effects of such intermedial transfers: “The profoundness of photography from which painting tears unknown secrets? No; but the opening up of photography by a painting, which, through itself, calls and transmits unlimited

¹⁸⁹ Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975). The work was translated as *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* in 1977. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

¹⁹⁰ Wilson, 151-52.

images.”¹⁹¹ Certainly Photorealism’s “event”—one devoted to ordinary spaces and objects, defined by “neutral” aspirations—differs from the resonance of Fromanger’s more topical works. But even if one deems their effects ultimately incommensurate, “Photogenic Painting” deserves attention for its focus on the material and ideological implications of these types of painting. Against the tide of many critics, Foucault suggests a way in which the new kinds of figurative painting yield democratic potential, both enlivening the medium itself and re-awakening audiences to the power of images.

American Hyperrealities: Jean Baudrillard, Umberto Eco, and Xavier Veilhan

While American Photorealism made its European debut in the early seventies, the European-American dialogues discussed thus far cover a wider historical breadth: the nouveau roman and Barthes’s associated commentaries date from the mid-1950s through the 1960s, and respond not only to the heavy legacy of nineteenth-century realism, but also the force of postwar Existentialism. Likewise, Foucault’s endorsement of photo-based painting comes in the mid-1970s, but politically has its roots in May 1968, when massive student and worker protests led to repressive measures by the de Gaulle government, and, in turn, leftist countermeasures like GIP.¹⁹² The last of this chapter’s literary case studies, Jean Baudrillard’s *America*, dates from the mid-1980s, when issues like global capital, decentered cities, and image appropriation and simulation dominated critical dialogues. This chronological progression is not meant as an interpretive teleology, but rather an indication of how each era connected with Photorealism in terms relevant to the contemporary social, economic, and political scene.

¹⁹¹ Foucault, “Photogenic Painting,” 8.

¹⁹² Brich, 28.

Baudrillard's writing also ties back to chapter two, which concluded in the thick of postmodernism. There I noted how the theorist pushed image interpretation to (or even beyond) its limits, asserting a complete destabilization of signification embodied in the "precession of the simulacra." Yet, while Photorealism inches toward postmodernism, it is not fully part of its embrace; the works are in part about simulation, but also retain essential elements of modernist structure in order to distill and render "painterly" their photographic sources. The style does not completely efface the difference between the real and the represented, as some critics maintained. Nonetheless, a return to Baudrillard here is apt, particularly to deal with his perception of the "Americanness" of hyperreality.

America is part travelogue, part theoretical meditation, an idiosyncratic rumination on the significance of contemporary American culture. Published five years after *Simulacra and Simulation*, many of the ideas contained in that seminal work remain, though the tone is less nihilistic. Much of the text is comprised of the theorist marveling at the Southwest's desert landscapes, finding their strange topographies and extreme climate conducive to a physical experience of dematerialization. America for Baudrillard is both unreal and naïve, but also modern in a way that Europe never can be, his native continent being too physically and psychologically rooted in centuries of civilization:

America is neither dream nor reality. It is a hyperreality. It is a hyperreality because it is utopia which has behaved from the very beginning as though it were already achieved. Everything here is real and pragmatic, and yet it is all the stuff of dreams too. It may be that the truth of America can only be seen by a European, since he alone will discover here the perfect simulacrum—that of the immanence and material transcription of all values. The Americans, for their part, have no sense of simulation. They are themselves simulation in its most developed state, but they have no language in which to describe it, since they themselves are the model. As a result, they are the ideal material for an analysis of all the possible variants of the modern world.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1986), 28-29.

Here complete devotion to capitalism becomes the basis for a kind of (ir)reality that exceeds any prior kind of cultural production; utopia is embodied in material form. Baudrillard's perspective thus inverts the view of America that began this chapter, that of collector Stuart Speiser.

Speiser's sense of American capitalism is, of course, a much more straightforward, aspirational vision—an unwavering belief in the power of this country's founding mythology in the potent form of postwar upward mobility. But it is also one that looks to Europe for guidance, borrowing aspects of socialism to render capitalism more equitable and sustainable. For Baudrillard, on the contrary, America is the endgame: Europe may retain the intellectual lead, but ultimately there is no contest in terms of true modernity. "The confrontation between America and Europe reveals not so much a *rapprochement* as a distortion, an unbridgeable rift. There isn't just a gap between us, but a whole chasm of modernity. You are born modern, you do not become so. And we have never become so."¹⁹⁴

America contains only one direct reference to Photorealism, but it is worth quoting at length:

This is a society that is endlessly concerned to vindicate itself, perpetually seeking to justify its own existence... The society's 'look' is a self-publicizing one... This explains why the hyperrealists were able to paint it naively, without either irony or protest (Jim Dine in the sixties), in much the same way as Pop Art gleefully transposed the amazing banality of consumer goods on to its canvases. There is nothing of the fierce parodying of the American anthem by Jimi Hendrix, merely the light irony and neutral humour of things that have become banal, the humour of the mobile home and the giant hamburger on the sixteen-foot long billboard, the pop and hyper humour so characteristic of the atmosphere of America, where things almost seem endowed with a certain indulgence towards their own banality. But they are indulgent towards their own craziness too. Looked at more generally, they do not lay claim to being extraordinary; they simply are extraordinary. They have that extravagance which makes up odd, everyday America. This oddness is not surrealistic (surrealism is an extravagance that is still aesthetic in nature and as such very European in inspiration); here, the extravagance has passed into things... Whatever the boredom, the hellish tedium of the everyday in the US or

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 73.

anywhere else, American banality will always be a thousand times more interesting than the European—especially the French—variety.¹⁹⁵

For Baudrillard, Photorealism is precisely suited to his view of America as a place exaggerated in its natural form, a world of extremity embodied in the everyday. Anything akin to high art is beside the point, missing the pleasure of kitsch and hyperreality that subsume the weight of history and the real. “If you simply remain fixated on the familiar canon of high culture, you miss the essential point (which is, precisely, the inessential).”¹⁹⁶

An earlier work by Baudrillard, “Symbolic Exchange and Death,” expounds on this conflation of representation and reality, with the hyperreal emerging as their “mutual fulfillment and overflowing into one another through an exchange at the level of simulation of their respective foundational privileges and prejudices.”¹⁹⁷ Notably the critic locates a precedent familiar to this chapter—the nouveau roman. Like many other writers he dwells on the movement’s purported desire for objectivity, but for Baudrillard, “This objective microscopics makes reality swim vertiginously, arousing the dizziness of death within the confines of representation for its own sake.”¹⁹⁸ Thus the old constructions of illusion (perspective, spatial and psychological depth) are superseded by a state in which reality itself is an aesthetic hallucination.

In Baudrillard’s view Photorealism is American art par excellence precisely because it is so artless—it embodies the “extravagance” already imbued in the nation’s common possessions and ordinary landscapes; reality is hyperreal. If these remarks seem typically bombastic, they are also representative of a recurrent French response to Photorealism. Writers such as Jean-Claude

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 85-86.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 101.

¹⁹⁷ Baudrillard, “Symbolic Exchange and Death,” in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 149. Originally published as *L’échange symbolique et la mort* in 1976.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 148.

Lebensztein reiterates Baudrillard's view of the United States: "La lecture que fait Baudrillard de l'hyperréalisme n'est pas fausse: livrée à elle-même, elle est simplement banale, ni plus ni moins que les mondes parallèles consommés avec le pop-corn."¹⁹⁹ Again, as Sarah Wilson observes, French reaction to Photorealism "produced confused emotions, a mixture of desire and fear." Its images of American landscapes relayed the "supremacy of America's huge space and its power in terms of national and human resources," but its representations of the nation's lifestyles and material culture ultimately confirmed for many "the alienating strangeness of these facsimiles of American 'reality.'"²⁰⁰

Nor is Baudrillard alone among European theorists. Umberto Eco's essays from the 1970s on American hyperreality, collected in *Travels in Hyperreality*, likewise seek the excessive embedded in this country's cultural landscape. Both men are particularly attracted to the West Coast—in their view a place both lacking historical depth and home to a new mode of living, a post-urban world beholden to confections of spectacle. Baudrillard remarks, "Elsewhere, sites of natural beauty are heavy with meaning, with nostalgia and the culture itself is unbearable in its seriousness... No such thing in California, where there is total rigour, for culture itself is a desert there, and culture has to be a desert so that everything can be equal and shine out in the same supernatural form."²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ [English translation: Baudrillard's reading of hyperrealism is not wrong: by itself, it is simply banal, neither more nor less than the parallel worlds consumed with popcorn.] Jean-Claude Lebensztein, *Hyperréalismes USA 1965-1975, Musée d'Art modern et contemporain de Strasbourg, 27 juin – 5 octobre 2003* (Paris: Harcourt, 2003), 29. Likewise, a recent Italian work on Richard Estes asserts: "We [Europeans] quite care for what is thought, or for what can be hidden behind reality, while for them make sense mainly facts, what is realized: what Baudrillard defines as the 'perennial up-to-dateness of signs,' 'the total reliability of what is done and of what you see,' 'the pragmatism of things.'" Sandro Parmiggiani, "Richard Estes: The Sensuousness of the Real," in *Richard Estes*, ed. Sandro Parmiggiani and Guillermo Solana (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), 75.

²⁰⁰ Wilson, 144.

²⁰¹ Baudrillard, *America*, 126. As I argue in chapter three, in my opinion this is not what California's landscapes signify. The state may be home to occasional extremes, but it is also a harbinger of national demographic trends and their associated social and environmental effects.

For a number of European observers, Photorealism was clearly perceived as a powerful enough statement of American identity to spur them to investigate its realities (or hyperrealities). Eco, too, notes Photorealism serves as a starting point for his inquiry: “We must understand... from what depth of popular sensibility and craftsmanship today’s photorealists draw their inspiration and why they feel called upon to force this tendency to the point of exacerbation.”²⁰² Ultimately, though, Eco suggests Photorealism may only be a weak variant of the outré instances of fakery he has cataloged, the artists “timid voyeurs of an immense and continuous ‘found object.’”²⁰³ While both Baudrillard and Eco see America as hyperreal and are frequently drawn to the same sites—Disneyland in particular—in Eco’s vision the real persists alongside the fake, even if the latter becomes more desirable. In Baudrillard’s view Disney and its ilk are presented as imaginary in order to disguise the hyperreality and simulation that has permeated the rest of the country, whereas for Eco the tourist attraction confesses its falsity in order to stimulate consumer desire for such illusion. Baudrillard finds humor and interest in Photorealism, but his perspective is clearly one of diminishing returns for art historical analysis. His equation renders the painters naïve transcribers of an already exaggerated culture; their process and aims do not merit any consideration. In Eco’s scenario the attraction of Photorealism is lesser than that of extravagant instances of pop cultural and art historical “reconstruction,” but his analysis offers an intriguing attempt to understand the appeal of commercial fakery. Imitation can exceed the real through its illusion of completion and contemporary accessibility.

These notions of the hyperreal find an interesting echo in a recent French take on Photorealism, Xavier Veilhan’s 2003 installation piece, *Le Projet Hyperréaliste*. Veilhan borrowed five works from the Neumann Family Collection for the project—Bechtle’s *Roses*

²⁰² Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 7.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 48.

(1973), Goings's *Blue GMC* (1969), Estes's *Canadian Club* (1974), McLean's *Dializ* (1971), and Cottingham's *Suzanne's* (1974)—and installed them in a freestanding pavilion with low lighting and walls covered in black vinyl. The effect of the dimly lit environment was near dematerialization: the paintings, hung flush with the black walls and without frames, migrate back toward their early form as slide projections, hovering in mid-air (figs. 135-137).

Yet, both the paintings and Veilhan's work partially resist the hyperreal impulse. Before viewers experienced the interior of the pavilion they could circumnavigate the entire structure, examining not only its construction, but also the verso of each canvas (fig. 138). As Tom Morton writes in his review for *Frieze* magazine, "*Le Projet Hyperréaliste* deals, then, with illusion, but breaks illusion's cardinal rule: it shows you how the trick works before showing you the trick itself."²⁰⁴ Likewise, footprints accrued in the black interior and made the space appear lived in and subject to ordinary use, rather than a magical chamber of disembodied images (fig. 139). Veilhan seems to have created the work with these material interests in mind: "As soon as I started to look at [Photorealist painting], I realized that I was more interested in the oil-painted, rather than the airbrushed works. I cannot exactly explain why, but I feel that the paintings I chose are in the tradition of Velázquez, Manet and Warhol, with a certain generosity and strength."²⁰⁵ Airbrushed paintings, created with extremely thin, even coats of mechanically-dispersed paint, generally do not reveal their construction or display surface interest in the way that oil paintings do. Selecting oil Photorealist works ensured a push-pull between illusion and materiality: the paintings are both appropriated as readymade images and enticing objects of artifice, but also substantial, physical objects. Moreover, by choosing paintings from a single,

²⁰⁴ Tom Morton, "Back to Reality," *Frieze*, May 2004, 83.

²⁰⁵ Xavier Veilhan, quoted in Morton, 84. Veilhan's website says of the project "By emphasizing the contrast between the materiality of art and the illusion it projects *The Photorealist Project* exposes the artifice of art." "The Photorealist Project," <http://www.veilhan.net/rubrique-1246/cible-1128.html> (accessed March 5, 2013).

well-known collection, the viewer is reminded of the works' provenance—and by extension the style's history as objects preferred by private collectors against the general disdain of the critical mainstream. Again, the hyperreal is a tantalizing but ultimately unfulfilled proposition in Photorealism: the paintings are remarkable feats of illusion and purposefully exploit the perceptual conundrums of modern-day media circulation, but they also call back to both their material properties and historical subjects—subjects which embody real social and political economies. As much as Baudrillard may believe Photorealist paintings are scintillating cases of the American unreal, this fantasy is only available to those who chose to ignore their clear marks of construction, histories of provenance, or referential subjects, all of which persist beyond the cultural fantasies of the simulacra.

Contrary to the simple, frequently told tale of derivation from Pop and critical dismissal, Photorealism has been used and interpreted in a number of ways heretofore little noted. The style has served as a springboard for a variety of mediations on nationality, markets and consumerism, and image production. Though there is no single through-line linking the interpretations discussed in this chapter, they are not entirely disparate. Each sees collectors, dealers, critics, curators, or theorists expressing the desires of their age, in realms both political and aesthetic. The collective yield is a telling accumulation of cultural aspirations and exchanges: Americans and Europeans pursue especially “American” artworks; Americans seek the support of European critical theory; European theorists look to American cultural production; and painting based on photography finds parallels in literature. These points of contact not only substantiate cross-media and cross-cultural parallels, but also signal the desires driving appropriations across the arts and between nations. In this sense the “mistakes”—perceiving Robbe-Grillet's work as the height of literary objectivity or Photorealism as the epitome American hyperreality—are as

revealing as the more “accurate” assessments. Photorealism, thought by many to signify very little, on the contrary, has helped define a number of pivotal cultural and aesthetic transactions. Perched on the border between modernism and postmodernism, past the rosy glow of postwar ascent but not quite in the era of decentered capitalism, its historical moment rests at a critical juncture. The aesthetic responses the Photorealists devised in this moment speak to a transformation not only of painterly means, but a crystallization of American culture appealing to a broad swath of consumers and commentators.

CONCLUSION

A defining question for artists of the twentieth century has been how to interpret the materials and conditions of modern life. In the wake of abstraction's mid-century apex, this question was often formulated with an eye to how representation would fully re-enter the scene. The artists of this dissertation are one strand of this larger impulse, raising the issue of whether realism could still suitably embody contemporary culture. In their hands, the question of realism's relevance involves not only the longstanding traditions of representational painting, but also photography's ever-increasing cultural weight and the shifting nature of postwar lifestyles and environments.

This dissertation argues that Photorealism has made its most substantial offerings in the latter categories. Painting was perhaps bound to snap back from "pure" abstraction toward figurative or illusionistic impulses, but Photorealism's aesthetic contributions are more significant than a temporary infusion of mechanically-recorded imagery into the traditional realm of paint and canvas. The style's melding of the two mediums is both a continuation of over a century's worth of hybrid experiments and a harbinger of painterly and photographic directions to come, including large-scale color imagery, profusions of appropriation, and growing fluidity between art and life. While it is tempting to read Photorealism as simply an early, weaker variant of postmodernism's media fusions and image mediations, these rear-view perspectives limit the historical narrative to an already-established path. Moreover, such interpretations tend to obfuscate the form's concerted efforts to represent contemporary life—to make works that speak

to the here and now, as defined by the collective experience of middle-class life in late twentieth-century America.

Photorealism is clearly devoted to life's common matter(s), but the significance of that devotion has been the subject of much debate. The everyday is perhaps best described as a territory easily understood but difficult to interpret. How do routines, mass-produced objects, and common living spaces or landscapes come to signify the larger social and political attitudes of contemporary culture? Photorealism does not attempt to persuade viewers of singular meaning of the everyday; rather, it directs attention toward the critical junctures of ordinary life and thus brings into focus what is often overlooked. Such focus requires not only a finely-tuned receptivity to the nuances of the visual environment, but also an understanding of how to clarify its spaces for a contemporary audience. Thus the Bay Area Photorealists freely mix modernist means with photographic content and structures and likewise adapt common tropes of vernacular imagery to the needs of large-scale painting. Ultimately their goal is to communicate the significance of their everyday subjects: by photographing, filtering, and enlarging these environments, they not only imbue these spaces with pictorial force, but also encourage a more nuanced understanding of the construction of the postwar American landscape.

In the current moment—an age when the internet gives voice to every budding critic or cultural observer, the marketplace is thoroughly globalized, and modes of artistic creation often appear too manifold to even catalog—the aesthetic debates of the 1960s and 1970s may now seem quaintly restricted. And yet, Photorealism has frequently resurfaced in recent years, with a resurgence of institutional attention to the style's originators. Major museums such as the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Deutsche Guggenheim, the Walker Art Center, and the Musée d'Art moderne et contemporain de Strasbourg have recently included Photorealist

paintings in group exhibitions or have offered retrospective evaluations of the style as a whole. Nostalgia and curiosity undoubtedly play a role in these inclusions, as their curatorial strategies invite viewers to wax poetic over the look of the recent past or to consider why the form raised so much critical ire.

Perhaps an even greater testament to the form's continued relevance than this (admittedly measured) institutional rehabilitation is its continued production by its original proponents. Though a few Photorealists like Audrey Flack and Ben Schonzeit moved away from the style to explore other forms and media, many have remained faithful to the practice. In centuries past this choice would likely not have seemed anomalous, but the current rate of stylistic turnover, and, more importantly, wide range of accepted styles and media, makes fidelity to a singular mode fairly atypical. This is not to imply that the Photorealists are creatively stagnant—new subjects and adaptations of technique attest to the contrary—but that the style maintains its viability as a lens onto the contemporary world.

Apropos of this present-ness, a colleague remarked to me a few years ago that viewing a painting by Robert Bechtle included in the 2008 Whitney Biennial made him wistful for the artist's earlier works. The painting, *Six Houses on Mound Street* (2006), is yet another of the artist's parked-car scenes; this one features a Volvo sedan situated on a diagonally-receding Alameda street (fig. 140). For this viewer it was disappointing to see Bechtle turn his attention to the automotive aesthetics of the present moment, one populated by boxy Swedish vehicles rather than the elongated American brands of the immediate postwar era.¹ And yet, this contemporaneity is an essential aspect of the Photorealist viewing experience: the painters do not

¹ Like many of Bechtle's paintings, the featured car was a number of years old when the painting was made: the Volvo pictured is part of the 200 series, produced from 1974 to 1993. Volvo's current designs are much sleeker than the tri-digit models (140 – 960) produced from the 1960s through the late 1990s. See James Dolon, "Driver's Seat, Volvo 200 Series: An Underappreciated Classic," *The Motoring Enthusiast Journal* http://www.themotoringenthusiastjournal.com/driven/volvo_200_series.htm (accessed April 1, 2013).

aim to venerate particular stylistic trends, but rather to elucidate the material records of contemporary life.

While the first generation of Photorealist painters continues to observe the world around them using variants of their original method, subsequent generations often register shifts of technical means. A quick perusal of Louis Meisel's current crop of young Photorealists or recent catalogs such as *Exactitude: Hyperrealist Art Today* reveals that those who now adopt the style frequently produce works more detailed and precise than those of their predecessors.² This increase in photographic verisimilitude seemingly reflects two changes. First, the younger artists are chronologically at a greater remove from modernism—i.e. the era when surface and facture bore a great weight in painting—and thus often exhibit a lesser propensity for explorations of flatness, geometry, or other elements of pure form. Second, many now employ digital photography, as opposed to the old methods of film cameras and slide photography. The newer technology affords vast quantities of visual information, much more than that available to the naked eye. While photography has always offered this lenticular augmentation to some degree, the way in which this data is now easily enlarged on any number of common personal electronic devices (or altered with widely-available software)³ shifts both process and spectatorship.³ Thus as a style and technical means, Photorealism continues to reflect new states of visual perception.

Just as Photorealism's formal and technical components retain purchase in the contemporary world, its subjects maintain relevance. This dissertation has considered, in particular, the Bay Area Photorealists' heightened attention to the construction of common

² See John Russell Taylor and Maggie Bollaert, *Exactitude: Hyperrealist Art Today* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009). There is also, as noted in the introduction, the counter impulse of obfuscating photographic source material, though these artists (i.e. Luc Tuymans or Gerhard Richter) are generally not placed in the Photorealist category.

³ For instance, James Elkins has recently suggested that the Google Art Project, which offers ultra-high resolution images of select artworks, problematically presents a viewing experience most artists never intend. James Elkins, "Is Google bringing us too close to art?" *The Daily Dot* <http://www.dailydot.com/opinion/elkins-is-google-bringing-us-too-close-to-art/> (accessed April 1, 2013).

environments. Such spaces have been at the center of decades-long debates over the erection, use, appearance, and impact of American housing development. This discourse is in turn loaded with cultural, sociological, and environmental ramifications. The question of who is allowed to live where, and, moreover, at what cost, challenges every planner, builder, architect, and (prospective) homeowner. Likewise, those who are excluded from these conversations—those left behind in decaying cities as suburbs swell, or those forced out of urban cores as gentrification takes hold—are equally subject to their outcomes. In Bay Area Photorealism, one sees life's physical containers (houses, cars, restaurants, and so on) offered up for detailed, enlarged consideration. The paintings invite the viewer to re-experience familiar surroundings, to stand with these ordinary spaces for the duration accorded to large, detailed paintings. Rather than imparting a particular opinion, the works encourage reflection on the formation of such judgments. Where is suburbia located and how do we define its (physical and ideological) territory? Where and how does it intersect with the urban or rural? How do cars shape our routines and neighborhoods? How do bodies respond to the spaces that they move through on a regular basis? How do residential streets fuse the public and the private? How do common pastimes—the “non-events” of daily life—collectively signify in contemporary culture?

These questions are purposefully open-ended: the artists' tactic of “neutrality” is intended to circumvent audience preconceptions (i.e. assumptions that suburbia is automatically uninteresting, or middle-class consumer culture consistently crass and disposable) and restore interest in the undervalued everyday. It is my contention that, beyond the broad impulse to address the physical and ideological matter of modern life, postwar aesthetics are often most powerfully articulated in conjunction with the shifting environment. Art, of course, changes along with the places it is made in, but the relationship is in fact reciprocal rather than

reactionary. Artists respond to changes in the built environment, but also alter perceptions of those spaces. Thus, for example, photography and modern architecture often relied on each other as co-conspirators, communicating novel visual and spatial forms and endorsing new kinds of aspirational lifestyles. Bay Area Photorealism's role is not so promotional, but it is another example of new aesthetic strategies fostered in conjunction with the rapid expansion of the nation's architecture, population, and economy. The practice thus conveys a fuller picture of the dynamics between the lived, observed, and appropriated incarnations of postwar space. Many other artists on the West Coast found a similar traction between the space of the everyday and their own art-making aims; this territory, I think, is a fruitful one that remains to be fully uncovered.

Table 1: Selection of Realism Catalogs and Surveys, 1968-83

Title	Institution/Author	Text	Date	Realism or Photorealism	No. of Artists	Sculpture
<i>Realism Now</i>	Vassar College, Linda Nochlin	essay (Linda Nochlin)	1968	both	25	no
<i>Aspects of a New Realism</i>	Milwaukee Art Center	essays (4)	1969	both	17	no
<i>Twenty Two Realists</i>	Whitney Museum of American Art	essay (James K. Monte)	1970	both	22	no
<i>Sharp Focus Realism</i>	Sidney Janis Gallery	preface	1972	both	28	yes
<i>Realist Revival</i>	American Federation of the Arts, NY, NY	essay (Scott Burton)	1972	both	28	no
<i>Phases of New Realism</i>	Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami	intro (director, John Baratte), artist bios	1972	both	67	yes
<i>Realism Now</i>	New York Cultural Center	preface (director Mario Amaya)	1973	both	38	yes
<i>The Super-Realist Vision</i>	DeCordova Museum, Lincoln, MA	foreword (Carlo Lamagna, curator)	1973	both	29	yes
<i>New/Photo Realism: Painting and Sculpture of the 1970s</i>	Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT	preface (director, James Elliot), essay (Jack Cowart)	1974	both	30	yes
<i>Selections in Contemporary Realism</i>	Akron Art Institute	preface (Philip Comfort), intro (Robert Doty)	1974	both	25	no
<i>Three Realists: Close, Estes, Raffael</i>	Worcester Art Museum	introductory essay (Leon Schulman, Curator Contemporary Art)	1974	both	3	no
<i>Seven Realists</i>	Yale University	preface, artist bios	1974	realism	7	no
<i>Imagist Realism</i>	Art Museum of the Palm Beaches Norton Gallery and School of Art, Richard Martin	preface, essay	1975	realism	12	no ¹
<i>Hyperrealism</i> ²	Linda Chase, Salvador Dalí	intro (Dalí), essay (Chase)	1975	Photorealism	23	yes

¹ This exhibition is the only one surveyed that includes video.

² This catalog was originally published in French in 1973 as *Hyperréalisme* (Paris: E.P.I. Editions Filipacchi, 1973) and in German as *Der Neue Realismus in Amerika* (Berlin: Rembrandt Verlag, 1973).

<i>Super Realism: A Critical Anthology</i>	Gregory Battcock	17 critical essays ³	1975	both	81	yes
<i>New Realism</i>	Jacksonville Art Museum	preface (director, Bruce Dempsey), artist bios	1977	both	30	yes
<i>Return of Realism, Four from the Allan Frumkin Gallery: Jack Beal, Alfred Leslie, Willard Midgette, Philip Pearlstein</i>	Meadow Brook Art Gallery, Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan	Forward, "Notes on the Frumkin Gallery", "A Historical Context for Contemporary Realist Painting"	1978	realism	4	no
<i>Things Seen</i>	Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska-Lincoln	intro (director, Norman A. Geske), artist bios (19 th and 20 th c. realism)	1979	both	49	no
<i>Super Realism</i>	Edward Lucie Smith	one extended, multipart essay	1979	both	64	yes
<i>Realism Photorealism</i>	Philbrook Art Center, Tulsa, John Arthur	preface, essays (2)	1980	both	15	no
<i>New Realism Revisited</i>	Brainerd Hall Art Gallery, SUNY Potsdam	preface, artist bios	1980	both	37	no
<i>Supperrealist Painting and Sculpture</i>	Christine Lindey	intro, 4 chapters	1980	Photorealism	38	yes
<i>Photorealism</i>	Louis K. Meisel	foreword (Battcock), introduction (Meisel)	1980	Photorealism	13	no
<i>Real, Really Real, Super Real: Directions in Contemporary American Realism</i>	San Antonio Museum of Art	essays (3), interviews (11), artist bios	1981	both	57	yes
<i>Contemporary Realism Since 1960</i>	Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Frank Goodyear	both smaller catalog for exhibition and longer text by Goodyear	1981	both	98	yes
<i>Super Realism From the Morton G. Neumann Family Collection</i>	Kalamazoo Institute of Arts,	foreword (director, Thomas A. Kayser), 'Homage' to Neuman (Karp), into (Chase)	1981	both	31	yes
<i>Seven Photorealists From New York Collections</i>	Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York	short introductory pamphlet	1981	Photorealism	7	no

³ Fourteen of these essays are reprinted from other sources, namely *Arts Magazine*. See publication information, Gregory Battcock, *Super Realism: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975).

<i>An Appreciation of Realism</i>	Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute Museum of Art, Utica, NY, John Manning	essay	1982	both	76	no
<i>American Super Realism From the Morton G. Neumann Family Collection</i> ⁴	Terra Museum of American Art, Evanston IL	foreword (director, Ronald McKnight Melvin) 'Homage' to Neuman (Karp), into (Chase)	1983	both	31	yes

⁴ This exhibition was a reprise of the one mounted by Kalamazoo a year prior; the catalog is a precise reprint of the earlier publication, with the exception of a new foreword by the Terra director. The work included in the exhibition was also precisely the same.

FIGURES



Fig. 1
Bill Owens, *Working [I Do It for the Money]*, 1977.
Photobook published by Simon and Schuster, New York.



At one time or another, 70 percent of people have a foot problem but only 3 percent seek professional care. I enjoy being a podiatrist. To see a patient who has suffered with corns for years and to correct that problem is a gratifying experience. When your feet hurt, you hurt all over.

I'm a new-realist painter. People think it's glamorous to paint but it's just hard work. Each painting takes two to four months to complete. The possibility of getting national acclaim is almost nil.

Fig. 2
Bill Owens, *Working [I Do It for the Money]*, 1977.
Photobook published by Simon and Schuster, New York.



Fig. 3
Robert Bechtle, *Nancy Reading*, 1963-64. Oil on canvas. 44 x 54 in.



Fig. 4
Robert Bechtle, *Nancy Sitting*, 1964. Oil on canvas. 47 x 55 in.



Fig. 5
Richard Diebenkorn, *Woman in Profile*, 1958. Oil on canvas. 68 1/8 x 59 in.



Fig. 6
Richard Diebenkorn, *Woman in a Window*, 1957. Oil on canvas. 59 x 56 in.



Fig. 7
Robert Bechtle, *67 Chrysler*, 1967. Oil on canvas. 36 x 40 in.



Fig. 8
Robert Bechtle, *Kona Kai*, 1967. Oil on canvas. 45 x 52 in.



Fig. 9
Robert Bechtle, *'60 T-Bird*, 1967-68. Oil on canvas. 72 x 98 7/8 in.



Fig. 10
Robert Bechtle, source slide for *'60 T-Bird*.



Fig. 11
Richard McLean, *Pasadena Fancy*, 1967. Oil on canvas. 61 x 61 in.



Fig. 12
Richard McLean, *Lexington Winter*, 1970. Oil on canvas. 60 x 60 in.

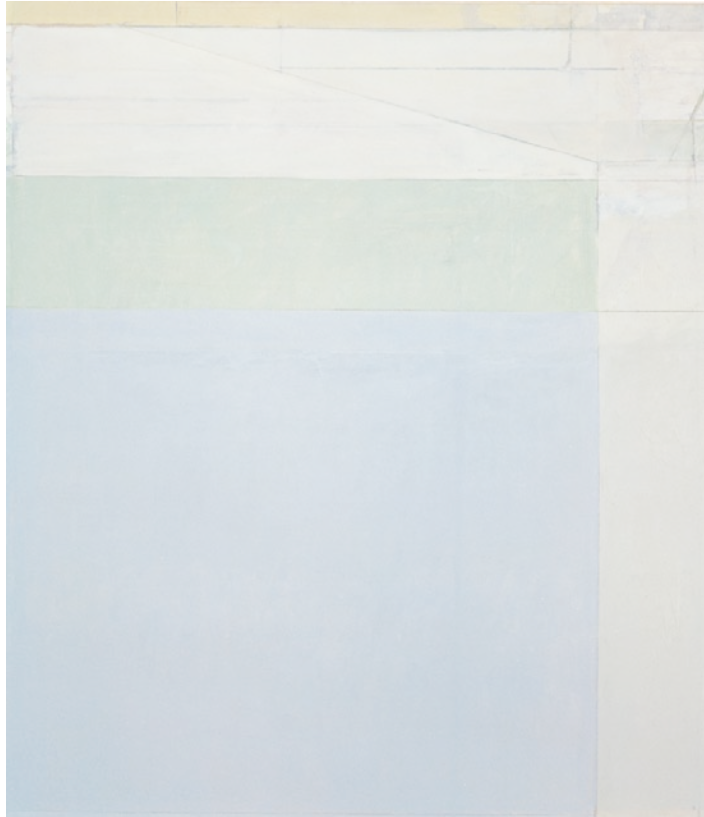


Fig. 13
Richard Diebenkorn, *Ocean Park No. 66*, 1973. Oil on canvas. 93 x 81 in.



Fig. 14
Robert Bechtle, *Berkeley Stucco*, 1977. Oil on canvas. 48 x 69 in.



Fig. 15
Richard Diebenkorn, *Cityscape I*, 1963. Oil on canvas. 60 1/4 x 50 1/2 in.

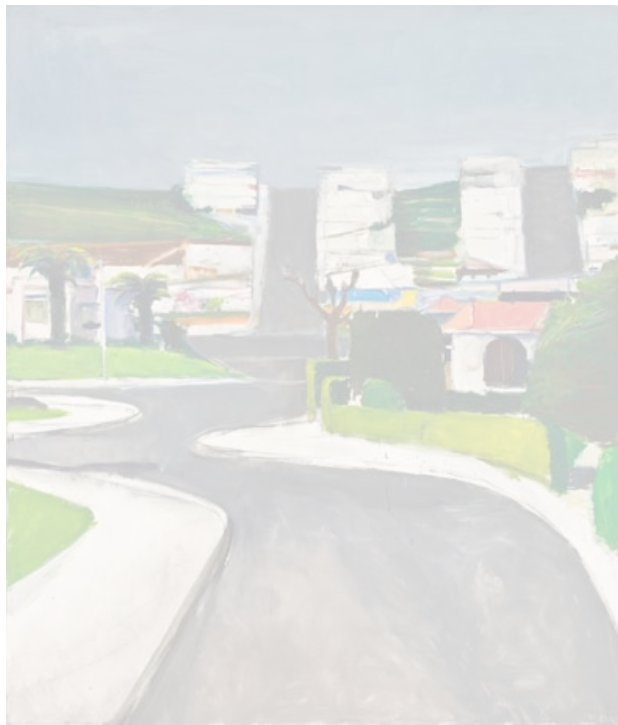


Fig. 16
Richard Diebenkorn, *Ingleside*, 1963. Oil on canvas. 81 13/16 in. x 69 1/2 in.



Fig. 17
Robert Bechtle, *Inglesipe Street*, 1986. Oil on canvas. 48 x 69 in.



Fig. 18
Robert Bechtle, *Sunset Intersection—40th and Vicente*, 1989. Oil on canvas. 48 x 69 in.



Fig. 19
Robert Bechtle, source photograph for *Sunset Intersection—40th and Vicente* (with taped cropping).



Fig. 20
Wayne Thiebaud, *Confections*, 1962. Oil on linen. 16 x 20 in.



Fig. 21
Wayne Thiebaud, *Girl in White Boots*, 1966. Oil on canvas. 72 x 60 in.



Fig. 22
Wayne Thiebaud, *Girl with an Ice Cream Cone*, 1963. Oil on canvas. 48 1/8 x 36 1/4 in.



Fig. 23
Ralph Goings, *Girl on the Wall*, 1968. Oil on canvas.



Fig. 24
Ralph Goings, *Linda*, 1967. Oil on canvas. 48 x 32 in.

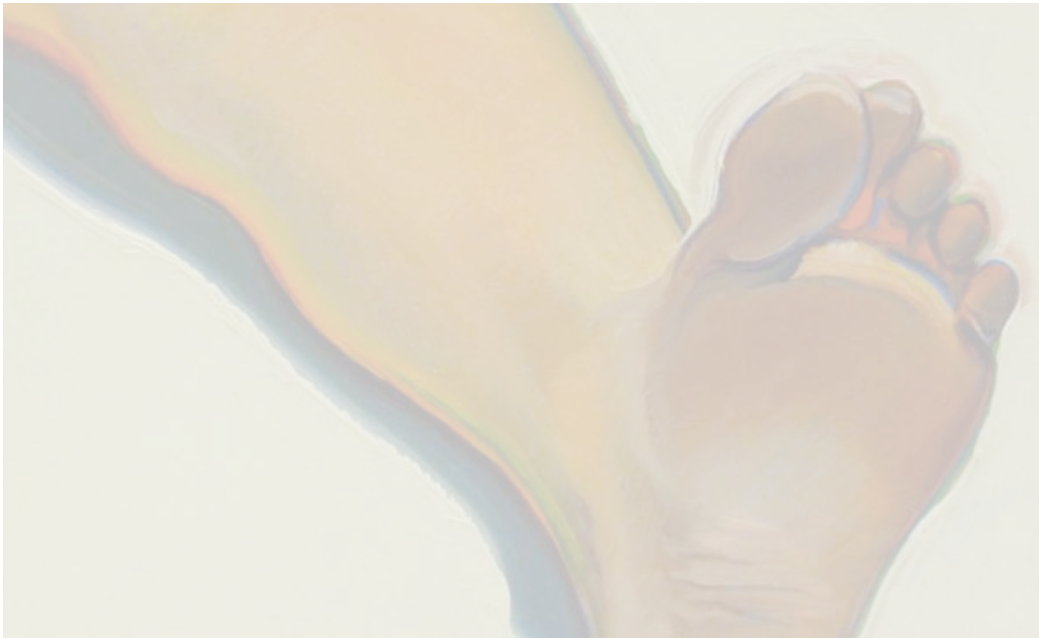


Fig. 25
Details of Wayne Thiebaud, *Girl with an Ice Cream Cone*, 1973 and Ralph Goings, *Linda*, 1967.

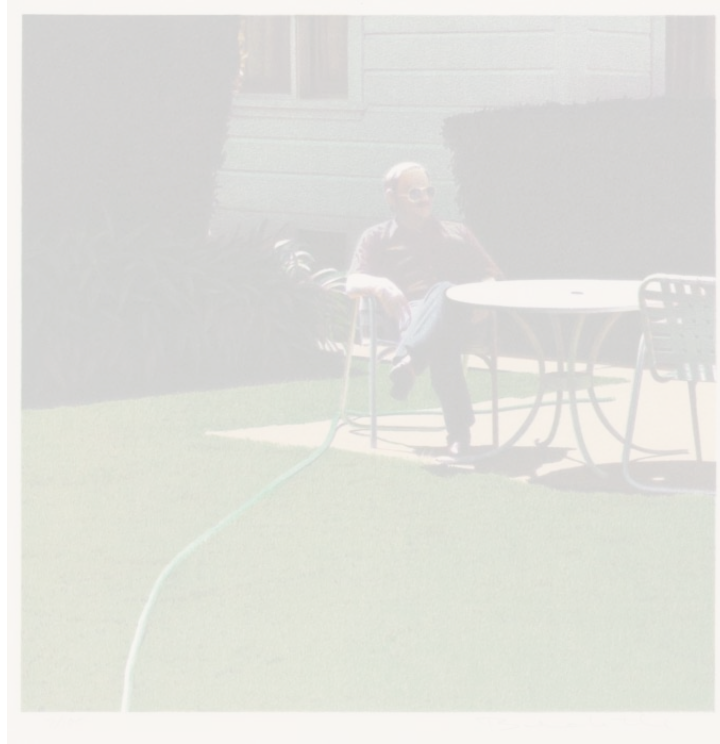


Fig. 26
Robert Bechtle, *Santa Barbara Patio*, 1983. Color lithograph. 14 x 14 in.



Fig. 27
Robert Bechtle, *Santa Barbara Patio*, 1983. Oil on canvas. 48 x 60 in.



Fig. 28
Robert Bechtle, *Santa Barbara Chairs*, 1983. Oil on canvas. 47 3/4 x 68 1/2 in.



Fig. 29
Robert Bechtle, *Sacramento Montego*, 1980. Oil on canvas. 40 x 57 in.



Fig. 30
Robert Bechtle, *Watsonville Chairs*, 1976. Oil on canvas. 48 x 69 in.



Fig. 31
Robert Bechtle, *A Painter in His Studio (Richard McLean)*, 1995.
Watercolor on paper. 10 x 11 3/4 in.



Fig. 32

Johannes Vermeer, *A Painter in His Studio* or *The Allegory of Painting*, c. 1666.

Oil on canvas. 51 x 43 in.



Fig. 33
Richard McLean, *Sacramento Glider*, 1973. Oil on canvas. 54 x 66 in.



Fig. 34
Ralph Goings, *Bank of America*, 1971. Oil on canvas. 40 x 40 in.



Fig. 35
Robert Bechtle, *B. of A. T-Bird*, 1974. Watercolor on paper. 10 x 14 in.



Fig. 36
Robert Bechtle, *Fosters Freeze, Escalon*, 1975. Oil on canvas. 40 x 58 in.

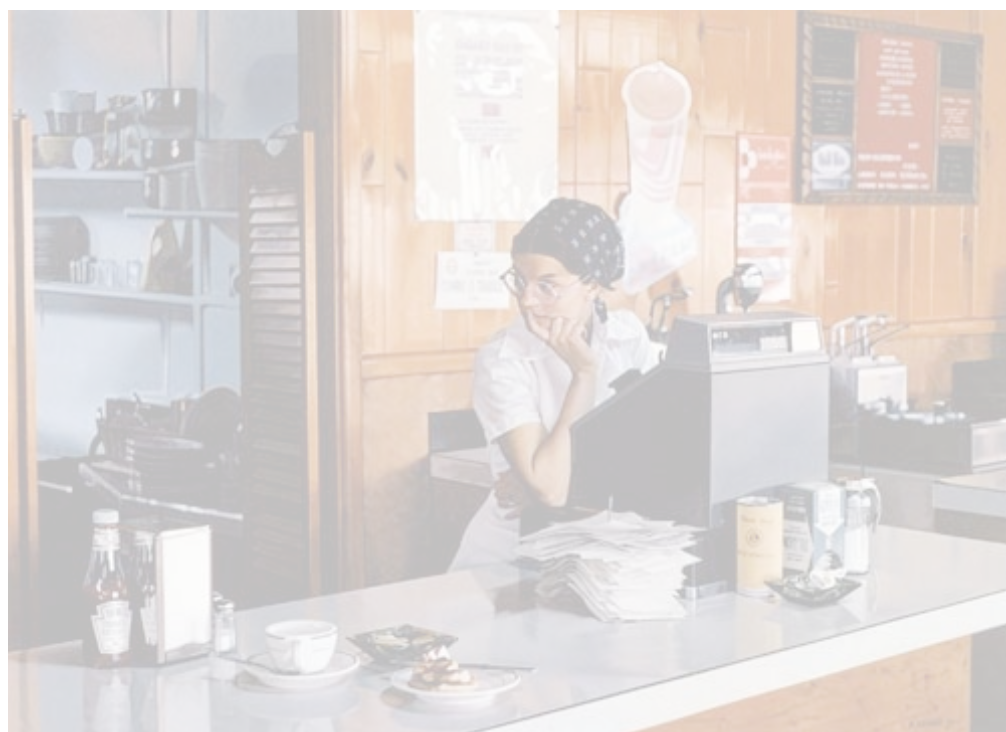


Fig. 37
Ralph Goings, *One-Eleven Diner—Cobleskill, N.Y.*, 1977. Oil on canvas. 38 x 52 in.



Fig. 38
Robert Bechtle, *Fosters Freeze, Alameda*, 1970. Oil on canvas. 48 x 60 in.



Fig. 39
Ralph Goings, *Pee Wee's Diner—Warnerville, N.Y.*, 1977. Oil on canvas. 48 x 48 in.



Fig. 40
Robert Bechtle, source slide for *Fosters Freeze, Alameda*.



Fig. 41
Richard McLean, *Mr. Fairsocks*, 1973. Oil on canvas. 63 x 63 in.

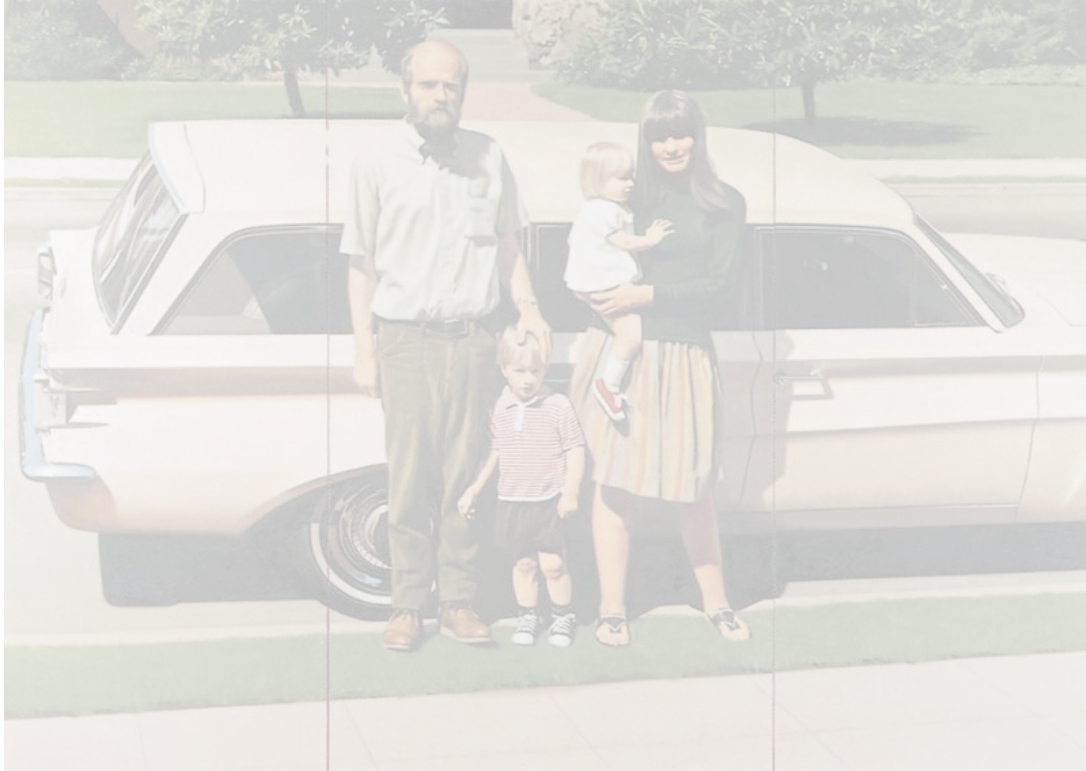


Fig. 42
Robert Bechtle, *'61 Pontiac*, 1968-69. Oil on canvas. 59 3/4 x 84 1/4 in.



Fig. 43
Richard McLean, *Western Tableau with Rhodesian Ridgeback (Trails West)*, 1993.
Oil on canvas. 48 x 70 in.



Figure 44.
Richard McLean, source photographs for
Western Tableau with Rhodesian Ridgeback (Trails West).



Fig. 45
Christo, *L'empaquetage (Package)*, 1961. Fabric, polyethylene, ropes, on wooden support.
18 3/4 x 16 3/4 x 9 in.



Fig. 46
Wayne Thiebaud, *Salads, Sandwiches, and Desserts*, 1962. Oil on canvas. 55 x 72 in.



Fig. 47
Philip Pearlstein, *Male and Female Nudes with Red and Purple Drape*, 1968.
Oil on canvas. 75 1/4 x 75 1/2 in.



Fig. 48
Sylvia Plimack Mangold, *Floor with Laundry No. 2*, 1970. Acrylic on canvas. 36 x 46 in.



Fig. 49
Gustave Caillebotte, *Les Raboteurs de Parquet* (*The Floor Planers*), 1875.
Oil on canvas. 40 x 57 3/4 in.



Fig. 50
Ralph Goings, *Airstream*, 1970. Oil on canvas. 60 x 84 in.



Fig. 51
Richard Estes, *Downtown*, 1978. Oil on canvas. 48 x 60 in.



Fig. 52
Richard Estes, detail of *Downtown*, 1978.



Fig. 53
John Salt, paintings in process. From Linda Chase, *John Salt: The Complete Works, Plus One* in association with Philip Wilson, 2007.



Fig. 54
Albrecht Dürer, *Draftsman Drawing a Reclining Nude*, 1525. Woodcut.



Fig. 55
Dorothea Lange, *Auction*, from the series “Death of a Valley,” 1956.
Gelatin silver print. 9 3/8 x 13 11/16 in.



Fig. 56
Thomas Hawk, *Little Box Homes of Westlake, California*, 2005. Digital photograph.



Fig. 57
William Garnett, *Foundations and Slabs, Lakewood, CA*, 1950. Silver print. 7 7/16 x 9 3/8 in.

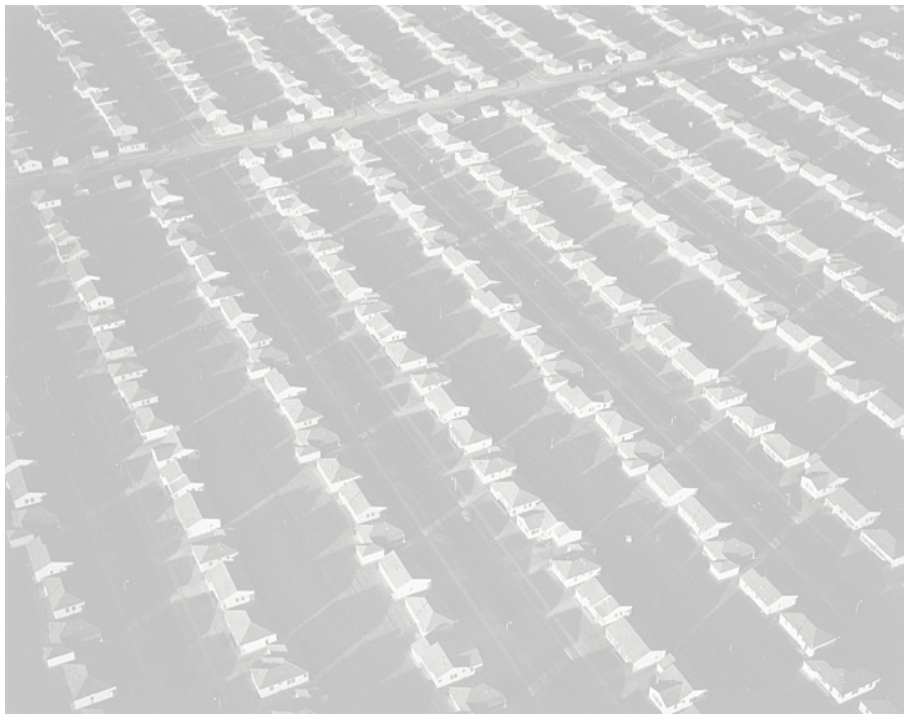


Fig. 58
William Garnett, *Finished Housing, Lakewood, CA*, 1950. Gelatin silver print. 7 3/8 x 9 7/16 in.



Fig. 59
Robert Bechtle, *'60 T-Bird*, 1966. Graphite on paper. 14 x 22 in.



Fig. 60
Robert Bechtle, *'60 T-Bird*, 1973. Watercolor on paper. 11 1/2 x 16 in.

Homes for America

Early 20th-Century Possessable House to the Quasi-Discrete Cell of '66

D. GRAHAM

- Belgium
- Brussels
- Colonia
- Colonia Marini
- Fort Worth
- Fullerton
- Greenwich Village
- Green Village
- Hampshire
- Massachusetts
- Pleasant Plains
- Sumner Hill Garden



Two house houses

The large relating each unitized part to the site plan follows a systematic plan. A development contains a limited, no. number of house models. For instance, Cape Cod, a Florida project, achieves eight different models.

- A The house
- B The Concrete
- C The house
- D The house
- E The house
- F The house
- G The house
- H The house

The 8 color models were equally distributed among the house systems. The first houses were more likely to have obtained their first choice in color. Family units had to make a choice based on the available colors which also took account of both husband and wife's likes and dislikes. Adult male and female color likes and dislikes were compared in a survey of the houseowners.



four house houses

As the color series usually varies independently of the model series, a block of eight houses including four models and four colors might have four right lines four right or L-shaped possible arrangements.



split level and ground level two house houses

In addition, there is a choice of eight entrance colors.

- 1 White
- 2 Maximum Grey
- 3 Nickel
- 4 Neutral Green
- 5 Lawn Green
- 6 Redwood
- 7 Coral Pink
- 8 Colonial Red

Each block of houses is a self-contained complex in itself in development or selected from the possible acceptable arrangements. As an example of a series you may combine eight houses of which four models might be used, any of these geometrical possibilities could be used.

- A B B C D D D
- A B B C D D C
- A B B C D D C
- A B B C D D C
- A B B C D D C
- A B B C D D C
- A B B C D D C
- A B B C D D C

- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D

Although there is perhaps some aesthetic preference in the two houses which are independent to some extent along the east-west and built with uniform facades and setbacks early in the century, housing developments as an architectural phenomenon were probably gratifying. They could represent some standard of good architecture. They were not built to satisfy individual needs or tastes. The owner is completely responsible for the product's completion. The house isn't really possessable in the old sense, it wasn't designed to last for generations, and outside of its immediate base and new context it is useless, designed to be thrown away. Both architecture and engineering as values are subjected to the dependence on simplified and easily duplicated techniques of fabrication and standardized modular plans. Contractors work as mass production technology and lead one movement after the final decision, leaving the architect his former "major role". Developments stand in an altered relationship to their environment. Designed to fit in itself, land areas, the houses weren't adapted to or attempt to withstand Nature. There is an ongoing war between the land site and the house. Both are without merit or separate parts in a large, predetermined, aesthetic order.

- Male
- Female
- Silver Blue
- Lawn Green
- Nickel
- Colonial Red
- Yellow Chlorine
- Yellow Chlorine
- Maximum Grey
- White



two house houses

Each block of houses is a self-contained complex in itself in development or selected from the possible acceptable arrangements. As an example of a series you may combine eight houses of which four models might be used, any of these geometrical possibilities could be used.

- Male
- Female
- Lawn Green
- Colonial Red
- White
- Maximum Grey
- White
- Yellow Chlorine
- Nickel
- Silver Blue

A green development might use, perhaps, four of these possibilities as an addition or better for different sections, then select four from another scheme which includes the remaining four needed models and colors, then select four from another scheme which utilizes all eight models and eight colors, then four from another scheme which utilizes a single model and all eight colors (or four or two colors), and finally utilize that single house for one model and one color. This would help single follow consistently well, as the origin, it is already represented by pre-existing highways, building plans, shopping places, etc. long, distant houses, houses, yards or factories.

- A B B C D D
- A B B C D D C
- A B B C D D C
- A B B C D D C
- A B B C D D C
- A B B C D D C
- A B B C D D C
- A B B C D D C

- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D



Two house houses

Although there is perhaps some aesthetic preference in the two houses which are independent to some extent along the east-west and built with uniform facades and setbacks early in the century, housing developments as an architectural phenomenon were probably gratifying. They could represent some standard of good architecture. They were not built to satisfy individual needs or tastes. The owner is completely responsible for the product's completion. The house isn't really possessable in the old sense, it wasn't designed to last for generations, and outside of its immediate base and new context it is useless, designed to be thrown away. Both architecture and engineering as values are subjected to the dependence on simplified and easily duplicated techniques of fabrication and standardized modular plans. Contractors work as mass production technology and lead one movement after the final decision, leaving the architect his former "major role". Developments stand in an altered relationship to their environment. Designed to fit in itself, land areas, the houses weren't adapted to or attempt to withstand Nature. There is an ongoing war between the land site and the house. Both are without merit or separate parts in a large, predetermined, aesthetic order.



Two house houses

Each block of houses is a self-contained complex in itself in development or selected from the possible acceptable arrangements. As an example of a series you may combine eight houses of which four models might be used, any of these geometrical possibilities could be used.

- Male
- Female
- Silver Blue
- Lawn Green
- Nickel
- Colonial Red
- Yellow Chlorine
- Yellow Chlorine
- Maximum Grey
- White



Two house houses

Each block of houses is a self-contained complex in itself in development or selected from the possible acceptable arrangements. As an example of a series you may combine eight houses of which four models might be used, any of these geometrical possibilities could be used.

- Male
- Female
- Lawn Green
- Colonial Red
- White
- Maximum Grey
- White
- Yellow Chlorine
- Nickel
- Silver Blue

- A B B C D D
- A B B C D D C
- A B B C D D C
- A B B C D D C
- A B B C D D C
- A B B C D D C
- A B B C D D C
- A B B C D D C

- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D
- B B A C C D D



THE BERENADE

Two house houses

Two house houses

Two house houses

Two house houses

Two house houses

Two house houses

Two house houses

Two house houses

Two house houses

Two house houses

Two house houses

Two house houses

Two house houses

Fig. 61 Dan Graham, "Homes for America," Arts Magazine, 1966.

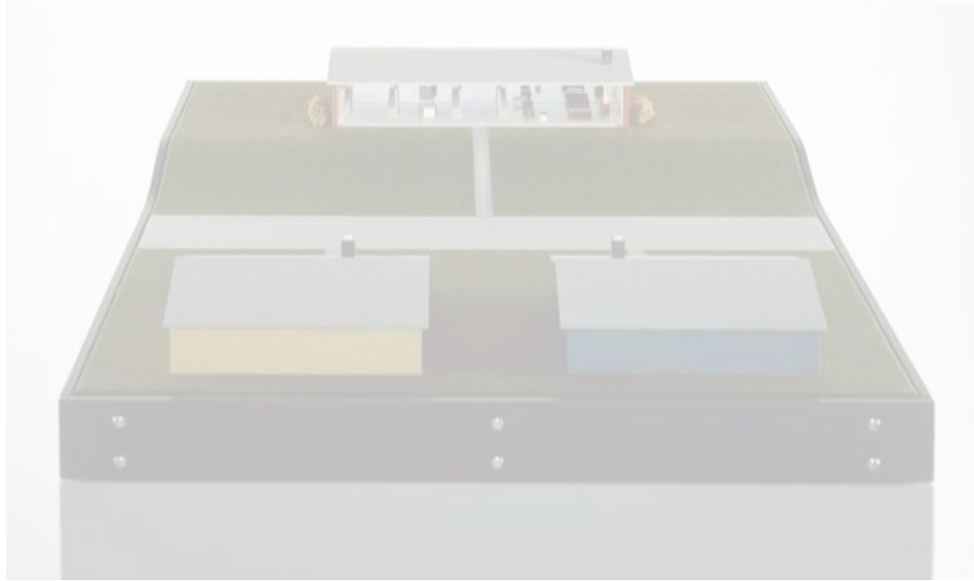
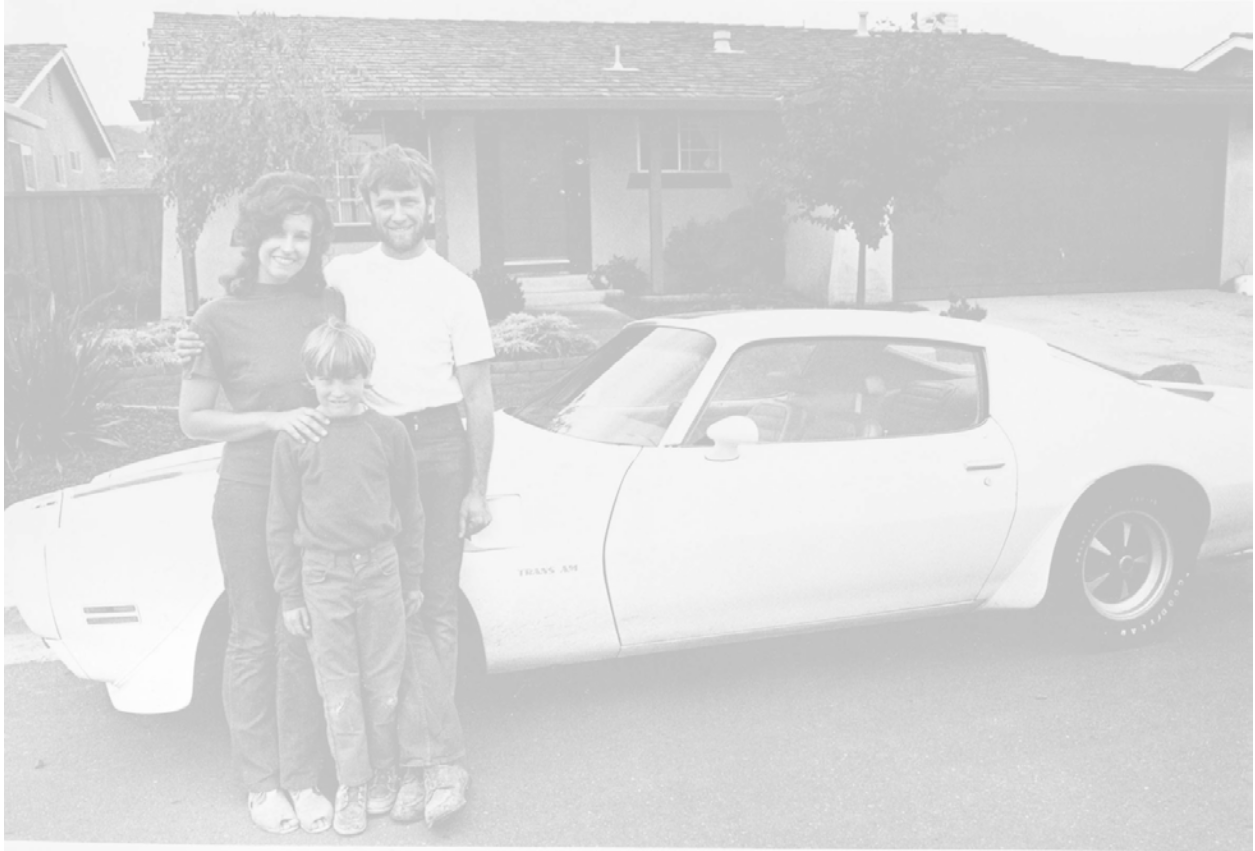


Fig. 62
Dan Graham, *Alteration to a Suburban House*, 1978. Plywood, carpet, cardboard, balsa wood, glass, cardboard, and methacrylate. 11 x 43 x 48 in.



I believe in women's liberation. I'm tired of the image of the woman who has the most sanitary toilet bowl, the cleanest floor and the brattiest kids as the supermother. I want to be able to change with my children and to change with my life as I grow older. Staying at home and taking care of the kids doesn't help.

Fig. 63
Bill Owens, *Suburbia*, 1973. Photobook published by Straight Arrow Books.



This isn't what we really want—the tract house, the super car, etc. . . . But as long as we are wound up in this high speed environment, we will probably never get out of

it! We don't need the super car to be happy; we really want a small place in the country where you can breathe the air.

Fig. 64
Bill Owens, *Suburbia*, 1973. Photobook published by Straight Arrow Books.

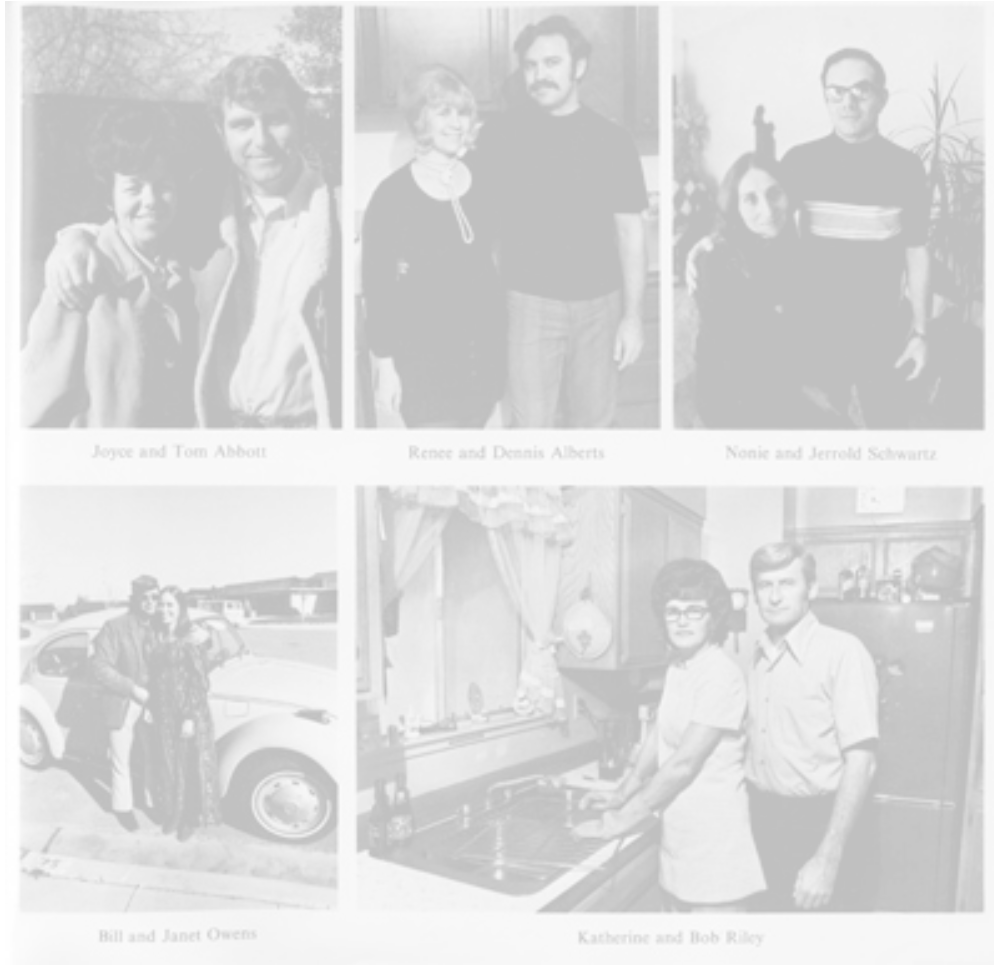


Fig. 65
Bill Owens, *Suburbia*, 1973. Photobook published by Straight Arrow Books.



Fig. 66
Robert Bechtle, *Alameda Gran Torino*, 1974. Oil on canvas. 48 x 69 in.



Fig. 67
Robert Bechtle, *Alameda Chrysler*, 1981. Oil on canvas. 48 x 69 in.



Fig. 68
Robert Bechtle, *California Gardens—Oakland Houses*, 1975. Watercolor on paper. 10 x 16 in.



Fig. 69
Robert Bechtle, *San Francisco Cadillac*, 1975. Oil on canvas. 40 x 58 in.



Fig. 70
Robert Bechtle, *Date Palms*, 1971. Oil on canvas. 60 x 84 in.



Fig. 71
Robert Bechtle, *'56 Chrysler*, 1965. Oil on canvas. 36 x 40 in.



Fig. 72
Robert Bechtle, *'57 Ford*, 1966. Oil on canvas. 30 x 32 in.



Fig. 73
William Garnett, *Smog, Los Angeles*, 1949. Gelatin silver print. 9 15/16 x 13 3/8 in.



Fig. 74
Ralph Goings, *Moby Dick*, 1971. Oil on canvas. 48 x 68 in.



Fig. 75
Las Vegas News Bureau, *Nuclear tests as seen from Fremont Street, Las Vegas*, April 18, 1953.



Fig. 76

Las Vegas News Bureau, *Photographers and reporters gather near Frenchman Flat to observe the Priscilla nuclear test, June 24, 1957.*



Fig. 77

Google Maps Images, Tonopah Highway, Nevada, 2012.
Site of Ralph Goings's *Airstream* (1970).



Fig. 78
Robert Bechtle, *Agua Caliente Nova*, 1975. Oil on canvas. 48 x 69 in.



Fig. 79
Ralph Goings, *Plumbing Heating Truck*, 1969. 45 x 63 in.



Fig. 80
Ralph Goings, *Dairy Queen Interior*, 1972. Oil on canvas. 36 x 50 in.

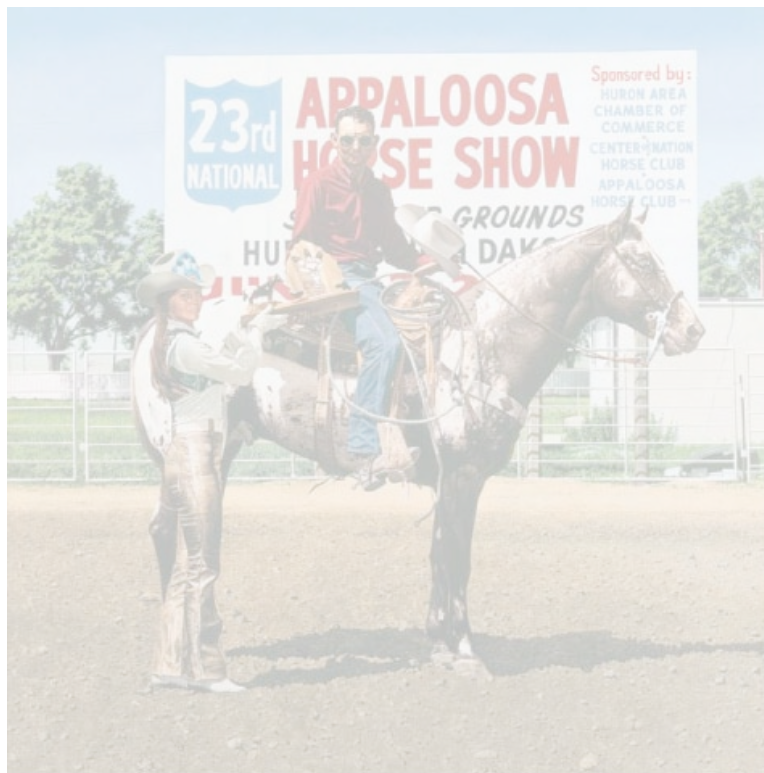


Fig. 81
Richard McLean, *Rustler Charger*, 1971. Oil on canvas. 66 3/4 x 66 3/4 in.



Fig. 82
Richard McLean, *Wishing Well Bridge*, 1972. Oil on canvas. 60 x 63 in.

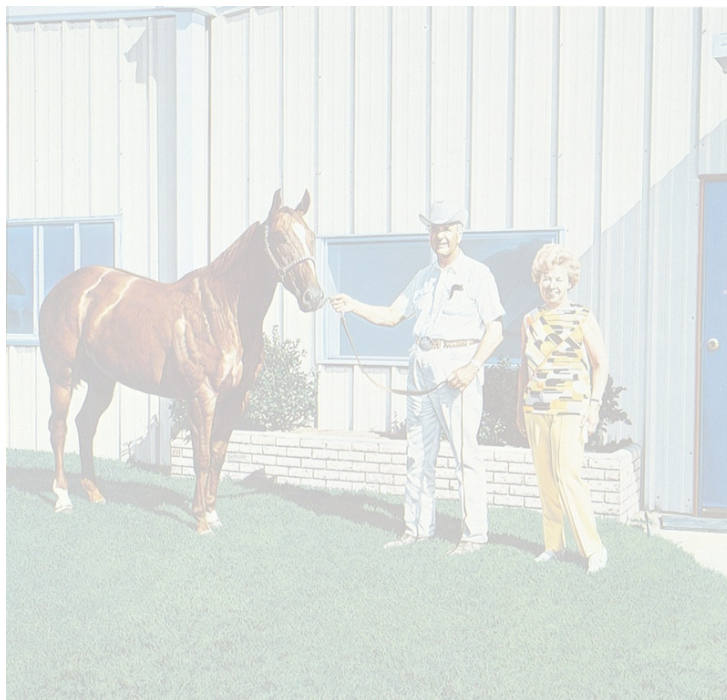


Fig. 83
Richard McLean, *Dializ*, 1971. Oil on canvas. 60 x 60 in.



Fig. 84
Richard McLean, *Diamond Tinker and Jet Chex*, 1976-77. Oil on canvas. 56 x 63 in.

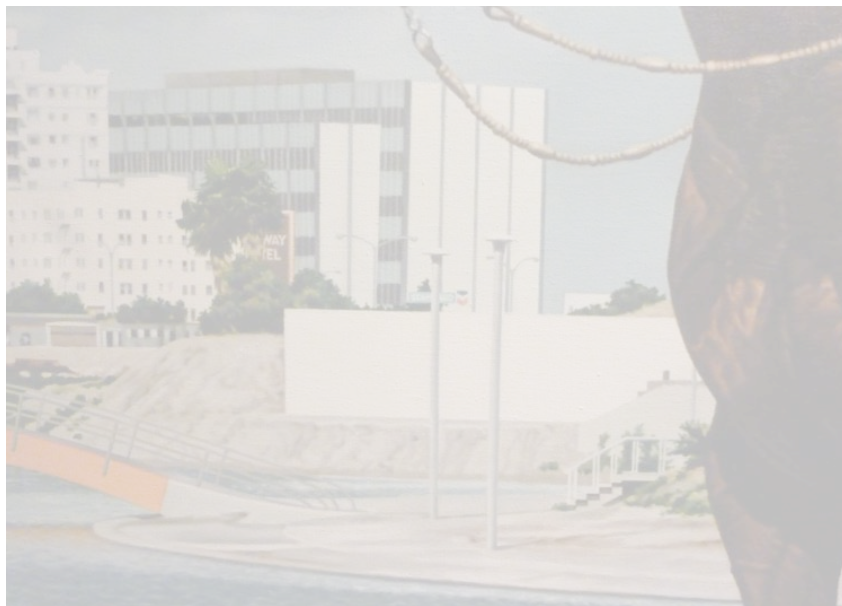


Fig. 85
Richard McLean, detail of *Diamond Tinker and Jet Chex*, 1976-77.



Fig. 86
Richard McLean, *Untitled #2*, 2008. 28 x 58 in.



Fig. 87.
Richard McLean, *Toward Delano*, 2008. Oil on canvas. 25 x 28 in.



Fig. 88
Richard McLean, details of *Untitled #2*, 2008 and *Toward Delano*, 2008.



Fig. 89

Robert Bechtle, *Potrero Stroller—Crossing Arkansas Street*, 1988. Oil on linen. 40 x 48 in.



Fig. 90

Robert Bechtle, *Potrero Stroller—Crossing Arkansas Street*, 1989. Watercolor on paper. 22 x 33 in.



Fig. 91
Robert Bechtle, *Potrero Stroller—Crossing Arkansas Street*, 1989.
Charcoal on paper. 10 3/4 x 14 1/4 in.



Fig. 92
Robert Bechtle, *Potrero Intersection—20th and Arkansas*, 1990. Oil on canvas. 40 x 58 in.

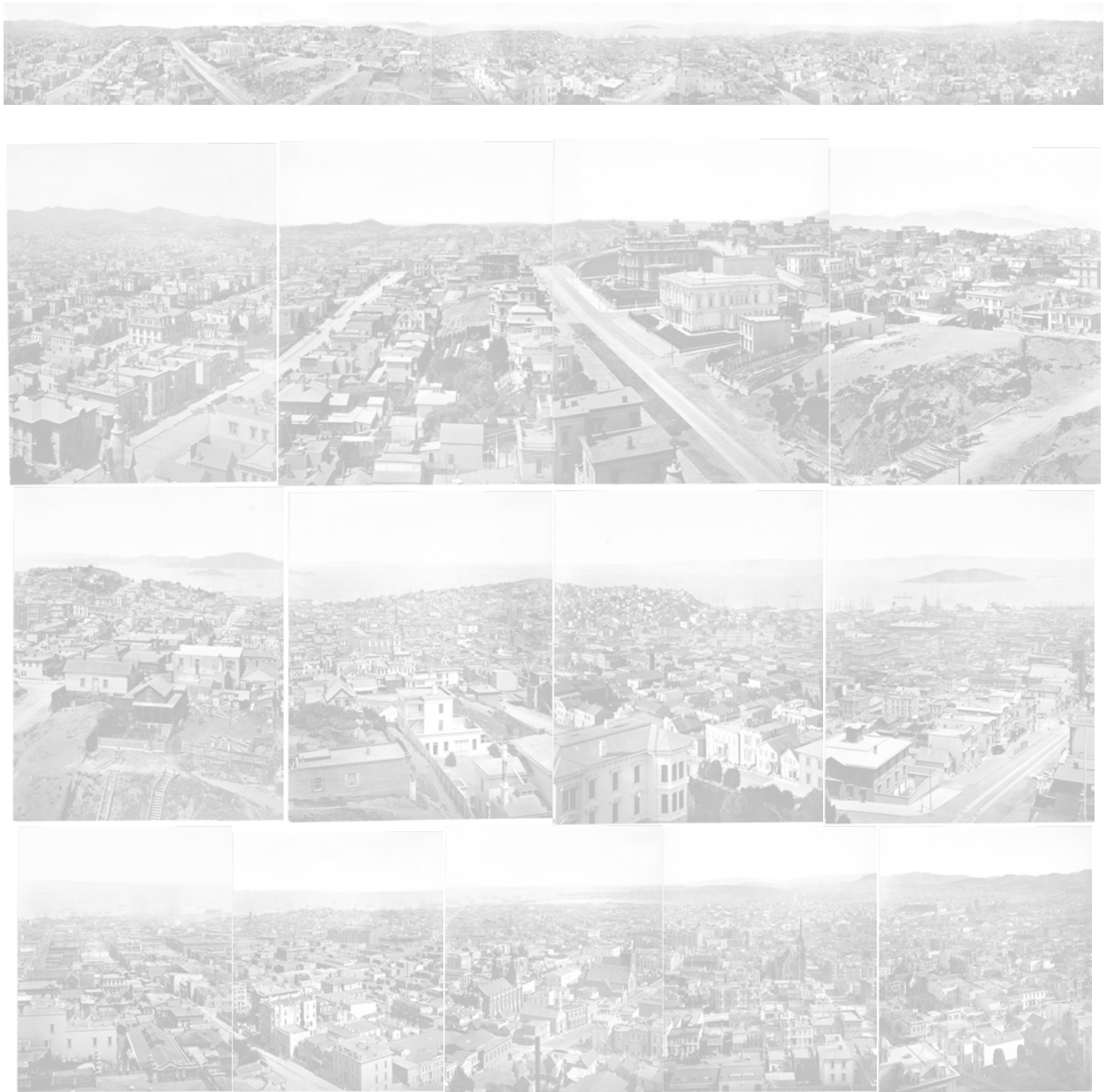


Fig. 93
Eadweard Muybridge, *San Francisco Panorama*, 1878.
Thirteen albumen prints, 20 5/8 in x 15 ft.



Fig. 94
Alfred Hitchcock, *Vertigo*, 1958. DVD. Collector's edition.
Universal City: Universal Home Video, 1998.

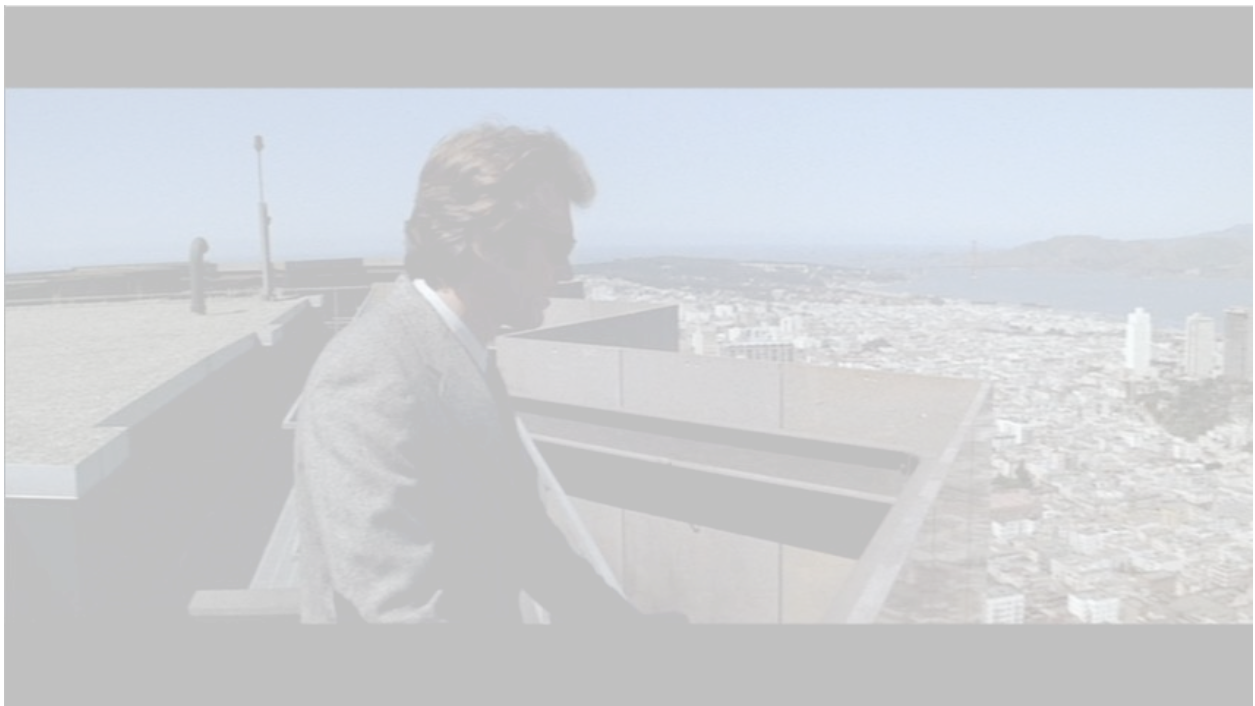


Fig. 95
Don Siegel, *Dirty Harry*, 1971. DVD. Two-disc special edition.
Burbank: Warner Home Video, 1998.



Fig. 96
Peter Yates, *Bullitt*, 1968. DVD. Burbank: Warner Home Video, 1997.



Fig. 97
Robert Bechtle, *Twentieth and Mississippi II*, 1994. Watercolor on paper. 10 x 14 in.



Fig. 98
Peter Yates, *Bullitt*, 1968. DVD. Burbank: Warner Home Video, 1997.



Fig. 99
View from Twentieth and Arkansas Streets, Potrero Hill, San Francisco, May 27, 2008.
Photograph by author.



Fig. 100
Robert Bechtle, *Twentieth Street VW*, 1990. Charcoal on paper. 10 x 14 3/8 in.



Fig. 101
Wayne Thiebaud, *Twenty-Fourth Street Intersection (Twenty-Fourth Street Ridge)*, 1977.
Oil on canvas. 35 1/2 x 48 in.



Fig. 102
Richard Estes, *View from Twin Peaks*, 1990. Oil on canvas. 36 x 72 in.



Fig. 103
“Carville,” San Francisco, c. 1890s. Greg Garr Collection.



Fig. 104
“Earthquake Shacks” at Camp Richmond, San Francisco, c. 1906. Charles Stern Collection.



Fig. 105
Rob Keil, Henry Doelger Homes, Sunset District, San Francisco.
From *Little Boxes: The Architecture of a Classic Midcentury Suburb*, Advection, 2006.

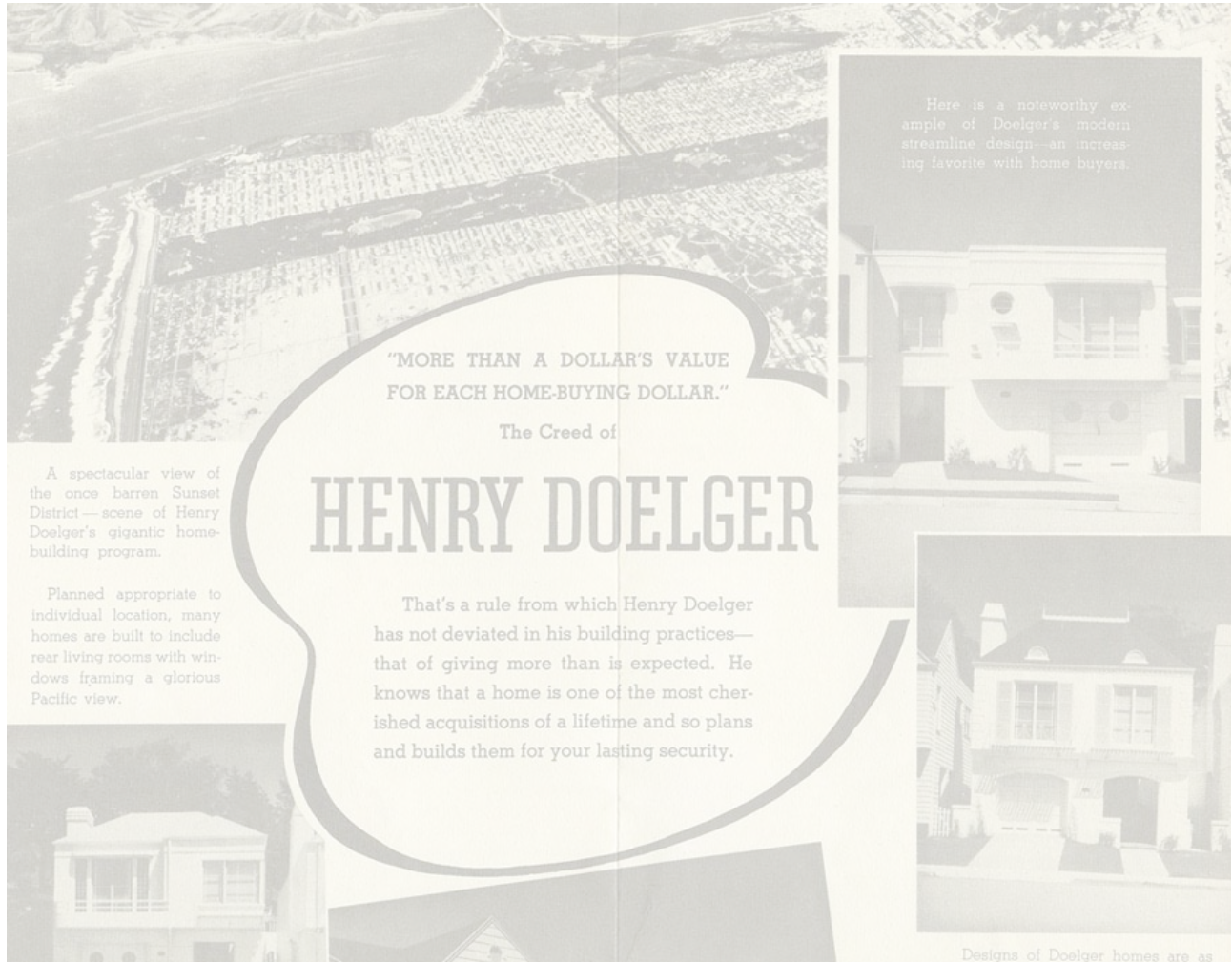


Fig. 106
Excerpt from promotional brochure for Henry Doelger homes, Sunset District,
San Francisco, c. 1940. Prelinger Library collection.



Fig. 107

Rob Keil, "Fish n' Chips," Westlake Doelger home design, Daly City. Architect Ed Hageman. From *Little Boxes: The Architecture of a Classic Midcentury Suburb*, Advection, 2006.



Fig. 108

Fred Lyon, View of Vista Mar School, Westlake, Daly City with Sunset District, San Francisco in the distance (upper right), 1959. From Rob Keil, *Little Boxes: The Architecture of a Classic Midcentury Suburb*, Advection, 2006.



Fig. 109

William Garnett, clockwise from top left: Santa Monica, California;
Lakewood, California; San Francisco, California; Long Beach, California;
Palo Alto, California; and Sunset District, San Francisco, California.
From Nathaniel Alexander Owings, *The American Aesthetic*, Harper and Row, 1969.



Fig. 110
Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Allegories of Good and Bad Government*, 1338-40.
Fresco, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, Italy.



Fig. 111
Robert Bechtle, *SFO Malibu*, 1973. Oil on canvas. 36 x 52 in.



Fig. 112
Richard Estes, *Alitalia*, 1973. Oil on canvas. 30 x 40 in.



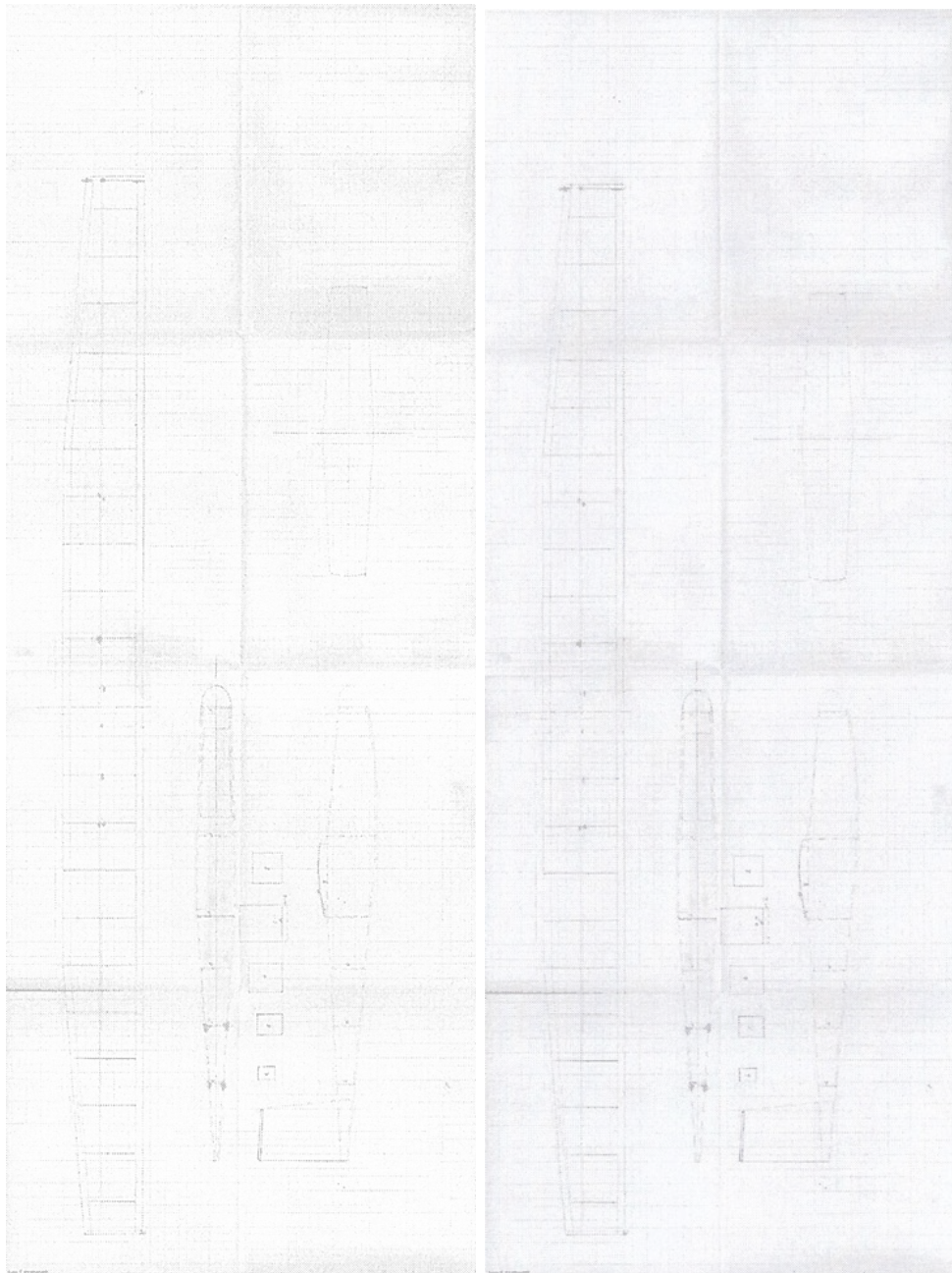
Fig. 113
Mel Ramos, *Fraulein Mit Flugel*, 1973. Oil on canvas. 45 x 60 in.



Fig. 114
Audrey Flack, *Spitfire*, 1973. Oil over acrylic on canvas. 70 x 96 in.



Fig. 115
Charles Bell, *Seaplane in Bathtub*, 1973. Oil on canvas. 68 x 48 in.



Using the scaling factor

$$k_{\text{model}} = 17.14 \cdot k_{\text{measured}}$$

we obtain,

$$\text{Wingspan} = 36''$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Wing root chord} &= 17.1428(.145) \\ &= 2.4'' \\ &\approx 2.5'' \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Wing tip chord} &= 17.1428(.12) \\ &= 2.057'' \\ &\approx 2.05'' \end{aligned}$$

Using trailing edge is straight

Wing leading edge is straight out to the 6th rib from the fuselage, and all rib lengths out to this point are the same.

The right half of the wing, ^{leading edge} looks straight from wing root to the tip.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Fuselage width at wing leading edge} &= 17.1428(.08) \\ &= 1.371'' \\ &\approx 1.375'' \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Leading edge of wing to front of fuselage} &= 3(.13428) \\ &= 0.4028'' \\ &\approx 0.4'' \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Fuselage length} &= 17.1428(.95) \\ &= 16.28'' \\ &\approx 16.25'' \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Stub span} &= 17.1428(.57) \\ &= 9.77'' \\ &\approx 9.75'' \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Stub center chord} &= 17.1428(.1) \\ &= 1.714'' \\ &\approx 1.75'' \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Stub tip chord} &= 17.1428(.07) \\ &= 1.2'' \end{aligned}$$

boy measures 0.2", so,

$$\begin{aligned} \text{pocket width} &= 17.14 \times (.2) \\ &= 3.43'' \end{aligned}$$

which is in agreement with some of my son's old shirts.

SCALE DETERMINATION

Wing rib spacing on model appears to be evenly spaced except center section and tips. If $x =$ rib spacing, then

$$\text{spacing} + \text{center} + 2(\text{tip}) = \text{span}$$

$$20x + .75x + 1.5x = \text{span}$$

$$\text{If span} = 36''$$

$$20x + 2.25x = 36$$

$$22.25x = 36$$

$$x = 1.61$$

$$x \approx 1.625 = 1\frac{5}{8}''$$

To confirm that the ^{actual model} span is close to 36'', consider the following:

$$\text{Span in picture} = 2.1''$$

So the scale is

$$\text{picture dimension} = \frac{2.1}{36} \text{ model dimension}$$

$$\text{model dimension} = 17.14 \times \text{picture dimension}$$

The boy holding the plane measures 3.5 inches, so his full size is

$$\begin{aligned} \text{height of boy} &= 17.14 \times 3.5 \\ &= 60'' \\ &= 5' \end{aligned}$$

which is reasonable. Also, the height of a horse is measured at the withers, and the top of the boy's head is exactly at the withers. So the height of the horse is 60'', or 15 hands (4'' = 1 hand). This is also a reasonable estimate for the horse. Finally, the pocket ^{width} on the shirt of the smaller

Fig. 116

Alan F. Schwartz, plans for model plane based on Richard McLean's *Sacramento Glider*.
Aeronautics Division Collection, Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum,
Washington, D.C.



Fig. 117
Arnie Besser, *Betty*, 1973. Oil on canvas. 72 x 52 in.



Fig. 118
Jerry Ott, *Messerschmitts*, 1973. Acrylic on canvas. 78 x 96.



Fig. 119
Tom Palmore, *P-40 in Fish Tank*, 1973. Oil on canvas. 66 x 72 in.

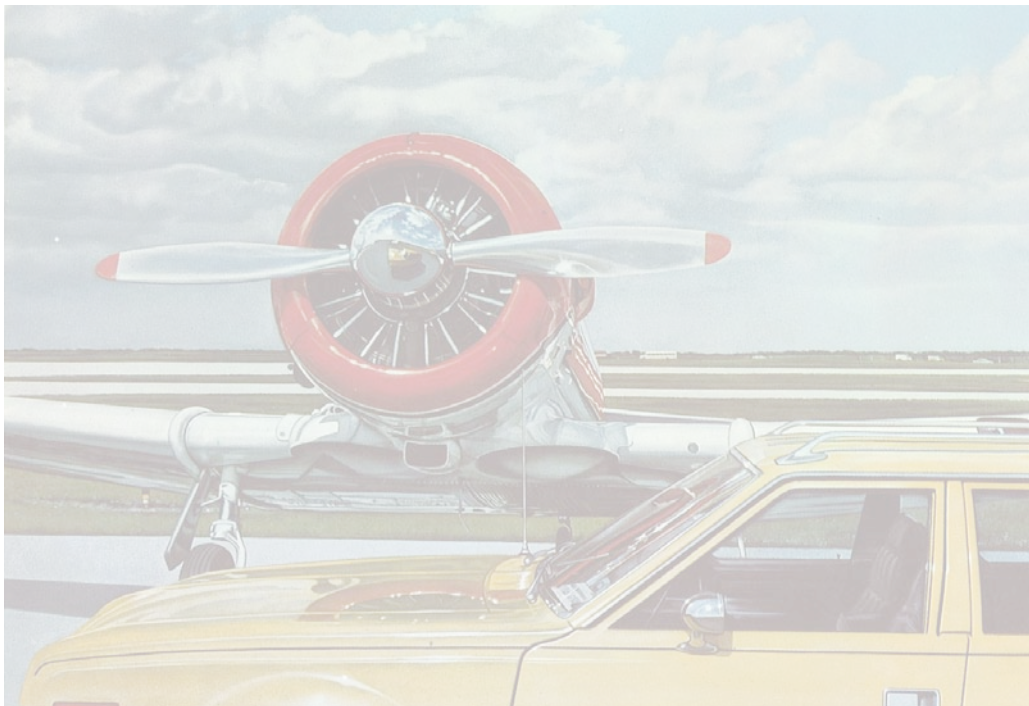


Fig. 120
Tom Blackwell, *White Lightning*, 1973. Oil on canvas. 48 1/4 x 72 1/4 in.



Fig. 121
Ron Kleeman, *Mustang Sally Forth*, 1973. Acrylic on canvas. 50 x 72 in.



Fig. 122
Martin Hoffman, *Jet Fighter*, 1973. Acrylic on canvas. 50 x 61 in.



Fig. 123
Paul Staiger, *F-101*, 1973. Acrylic on canvas. 64 x 96 in.



Fig. 124
Ralph Goings, *Walt's Restaurant*, 1978-79. Oil on canvas. 44 x 60 in.



Fig. 125
Martin Hoffman, *CAB (Westford Series)*, 1979. Acrylic on canvas. 60 x 80 in.



Fig. 126
John Salt, *Silver Plymouth in the Woods*, 1979. Oil on canvas. 42 x 63 1/2 in. (Original is color.)

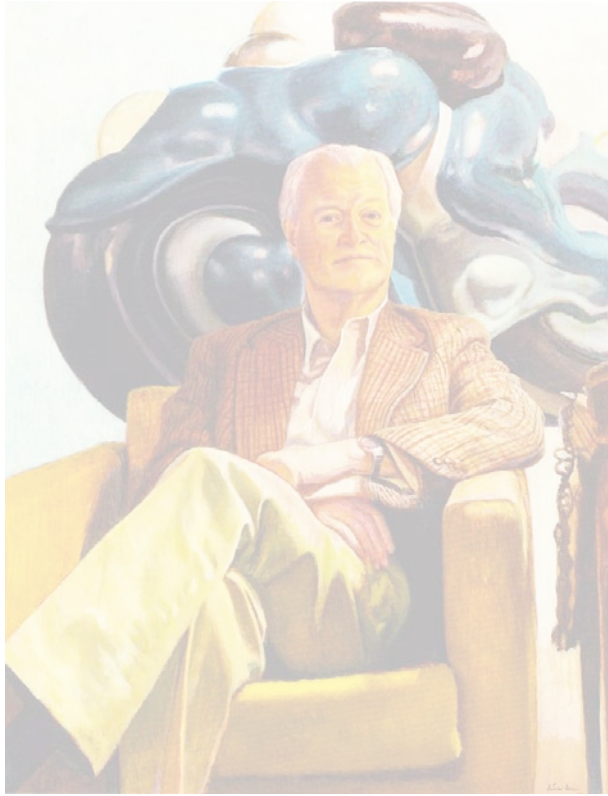


Fig. 127
Kiichi Usui, *The RBB I Know*, 1991. Oil on canvas. 42 x 33 in.



Fig. 128
Tom Wesselman, *Landscape No. 2*, 1964. Oil on mastic on canvas. 76 x 94.5 in.



Fig. 129

Ludwig Museum, Budapest, Hungary, *Édentől keletre - Fotórealizmus: Valóságváltozatok [East of Eden - Photorealism: Versions of Reality]*, September 14, 2011 – January 15, 2012.
Brochure image: Don Eddy, *Untitled (Volkswagen)*, 1971. Acrylic on canvas. 48 x 66 in.

Tableau IV Realismus



1 Edward Kienholz



2 Franz Gertsch



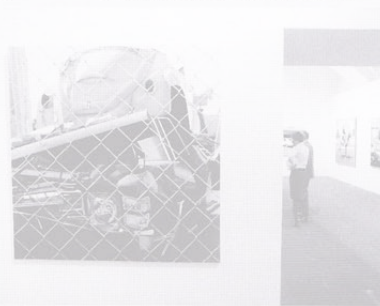
3 Chuck Close



4 Robert Bechtle, Richard McLean



5 Richard Estes



6 Don Eddy



7+8 Duane Hanson



8



9 John De Andrea

Fig. 130

documenta V installation photographs, "Realism" section, 1972.

From Michael Glasmeier and Karin Stengel, eds., *50 Jahre documenta, 1955-2005*, Steidl, 2005.



Fig. 131
documenta 5 installation photograph, “Trivial Realism—Trivial Emblematics” section, 1972.
 Documenta Archives, Kassel, Germany.

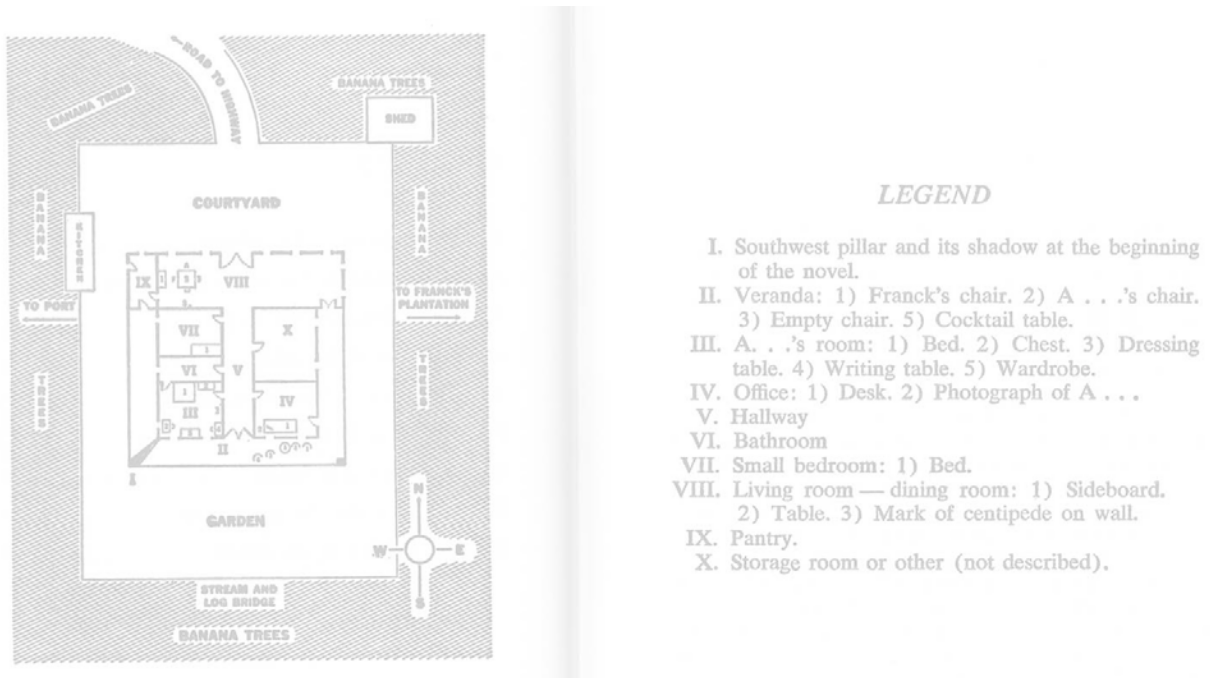


Fig. 132
 Alain Robbe-Grillet, floor plan and legend from *Jealousy*.
 Originally published in Grove Press English language edition, 1959.



Fig. 133
Gérard Fromanger, *Au Printemps*, 1972. Oil on canvas. 58 5/16 x 78 7/8 in.



Fig. 134
Gérard Fromanger, *La Révolte de la Prison de Toul*, 1974. Oil on canvas. 39 3/8 x 39 3/8 in.



Fig. 135
Xavier Veilhan, *Le Projet Hyperréaliste*, 2003.
Interior view of installation with Robert Bechtle's *Roses* (1973).



Fig. 136

Xavier Veilhan, *Le Projet Hyperréaliste*, 2003.
Interior view of installation with Robert Cottingham's *Suzanne's* (1974).



Fig. 137

Xavier Veilhan, *Le Projet Hyperréaliste*, 2003.
Interior view of installation with Richard McLean's *Dializ* (1971).



Fig. 138
Xavier Veilhan, *Le Projet Hyperréaliste*, 2003. Exterior view of installation.



Fig. 139
Xavier Veilhan, *Le Projet Hyperréaliste*, 2003.
Interior view of installation with Richard McLean's *Dializ* (1971)
and Ralph Goings's *Blue GMC* (1969).



Fig. 140
Robert Bechtle, *Six Houses on Mound Street*, 2006. Oil on canvas. 37 1/4 x 67 1/4 in.

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